

**The Development of Calvin's Understanding of the Imago Dei
in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* from 1536 to 1559**

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I hereby declare that this dissertation was completed independently. All sources have been thoroughly and individually referenced. This dissertation has neither been presented to another faculty nor been used in part or in whole for the attainment of any other academic qualification.

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PREFACE

The tension that exists in Calvin's theology between the *imago dei* and its state of deformity has been an issue of particular importance since the beginning of the twentieth century. The problem was raised dramatically in the 1930s in the debates on Calvin's 'natural theology' between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth.¹ Since that time, Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* has been investigated within the fields of natural theology and anthropology.²

This thesis aims at defining and examining the significance and legitimacy of the term "imago dei" in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.³ Part I presents a

¹For background information on the increased interest in natural theology in the first half of the twentieth century, see the introduction to Günter Gloede, *Theologia Naturalis bei Calvin* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1935). Brunner refers to this work in his debates with Karl Barth, stating that: "In the following paragraphs I owe many references and some new pieces of insight into the ramification of Calvin's *Theologia Naturalis* to the (as yet unprinted) work of my pupil, G. Gloede," Gloede, *Theologia Naturalis bei Calvin*, 62.

² Schneider offers a good overview of the Brunner – Barth debate. Susan Schreiner, *The theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (North Carolina, Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1991), 55-56; 70; 122.

³ In referring to the various editions of the *Institutes* from 1536 to 1559, the following Latin texts will be used: "Institutionis Christianae Religionis 1536," in *Joannis Calvinii Opera Selecta*, vol. 1. ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1928); "Ioannis Calvinii Institutio Religionis Christianae 1539-1550," in *Calvini Opera*, vol. 1. ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss (Brunswick, 1863-1900); "Institutio Christianae religionis 1559," in *Ioannis Calvinii Opera Selecta*, vol. 3-5. ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1928). In the following footnotes, *Joannis Calvinii Opera Selecta* will be referred to as O. S. and *Calvini Opera* as C. O. English quotations are drawn respectively from *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975) as well as from *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960). With regard to the *Institutes* of 1539, which has no English translation available, I will present my own translations and list the

detailed chronological examination of all five editions of the *Institutes*—i.e. from 1536, 1539, 1543, 1550 and 1559—focusing in particular on Calvin’s understanding of the *imago dei* and its deformed state.⁴ Part II will then present a thematic investigation, picking up the major aspects of Calvin’s work on the *imago dei* and following their development in the *Institutes*. A systematic analysis will then be provided in Part III.

In brief, Calvin describes the *imago dei* as a created, divine gift. With this gift human beings can ascend to God and attain eternal life. We have here both a horizontal dimension and a vertical dimension. We can call the first dimension ‘horizontal’ because it involves a relation among created beings. Calvin highlights the excellence of the human creature above other animal life.⁵ This status is retained even in fallen human beings, who bear the *imago dei* in its deformity. For this reason, the fallen can still achieve the heights represented by the arts and sciences.⁶ Calvin also compares human beings to angels, who are equally part of God’s creation. Calvin stresses that the *imago dei* was created and is not a part of the divine essence, as was held by the Manichees.⁷ In this way, the place of human beings within God’s creation is set. God’s glory is manifested in diverse degrees in his various works in creation, each in accordance with God’s design.⁸ This is the horizontal dimension of the *imago dei* in humanity.

original Latin texts within the footnotes. Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV with the exception of apocryphal texts, which are cited from the New English Bible.

⁴ Calvin’s commentaries are the best complement to the *Institutes* themselves for detailed information on and insights into Calvin’s understanding of the *imago dei*. See Alasdair I. Heron, “Calvin: Homo Peccator and the *Imago Dei*,” in *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society and Family*, eds. Christian D. Kettler and Todd D. Speidell (Colorado: Helmers & Howard, 1990), 33.

⁵ The 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15, 2-5.

⁶ The 1559 *Institutes*, II, 2, 12; II, 2, 16-17.

⁷ The 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15, 5.

⁸ The argumentum of the commentaries on Genesis. *Comm Gen 1-2; 1 Cor 15: 35-45*; I, 15, 2-3.

In the vertical dimension, Calvin highlights the reciprocal participation that occurs between God and human beings. For Calvin, God first participates in human existence through his grace. It is because of the grace of God, by which God endows human beings with the *imago dei*, that human beings can participate in God. This focus on the primacy of God's grace thus points to God's preparation of the world as a house for human beings and God's freely-given endowment of the *imago dei* upon the human soul. Yet God's active involvement is not limited to the time of creation. He continually sustains and governs his creation and human beings. In turn, humankind as God's creatures participate in God with the wholeness of their being. Calvin stresses that the pre-lapsarian Adam with the *imago dei* was created to contemplate eternal life, to recognize God and to respond appropriately to his word. Thus the pre-lapsarian human creature was able to know God and to choose either to obey God or to go astray. Adam failed to follow God's word. Humankind became corrupted and lived against God. It may seem that human beings therefore have an excuse for their ignorance of God. Hence it is necessary for Calvin to differentiate the state of the pre-lapsarian Adam from that state after the fall in order to assert that God does not give human creatures a defective nature. The cause of human corruption is the perverse human being itself, who stands against God and is thus totally responsible for the fall.

To summarize, the difference between God's participation in grace and human participation with their whole being suggests two existential autonomies: God's supreme, sovereign autonomy, and humanity's more limited autonomy, given in order that they may partake in God—achieved by responding to the creator and reflecting

his characteristics. In this way, their maker is glorified.⁹ God's autonomy in his divine sovereignty covers and governs over human autonomy within this movement of reciprocal participation. God's superior autonomy can be found both in the created essence of the imago dei and in God's providence, which governs the human will and even uses evil as an instrument for its purposes.¹⁰ It is because of human autonomy that human beings are responsible for the deformity of the imago dei. Yet it is the grace of God expressed through God's autonomy which reforms and restores the imago dei in God's elect through the redemption of Christ.

Our corrupted nature makes necessary Calvin's interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the self in the restoration of the imago dei. This is because the imago dei as the integrity of human nature must be expressed through human nature as a whole. God's glory is reflected once again through the renewal of our human nature, that is by displaying not only the workmanship of God, but also the inner and outward expression of the restored imago dei, i.e. by displaying the grace of Christ. It is through the renewal of human nature under the sustenance of God's grace that believers learn to live out a God-oriented life. Yet this life is not without struggle. As we shall see, the struggle of the believer's life corresponds to the interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the self.

⁹ I, 15, 8.

¹⁰ II, 4; I, 18.

Introduction

Calvin's first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was published in 1536. He worked constantly on it until 1559, expanding the various editions which would be published in Latin as well as in French.¹¹ In all, five editions were published: in 1536, 1539, 1543, 1550 and 1559. Throughout the development of the *Institutes*, Calvin's understanding of the image of God also matured. This presents certain challenges to Calvin's readers. One of the difficulties in a survey of Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* in the *Institutes* from 1536 to 1559 arises from his tendency to present this concept through a double parallel: i.e. **the imago dei and the remnant of the imago dei**, as well as its **eschatological and temporal orientations**. These two parallels are present right up to the 1559 *Institutes*. Yet this is not to say that Calvin is being inconsistent. Rather his consistency lies in focusing on the description of the **eschatological orientation of the imago dei, i.e. on the order of redemption**. Yet, as will be seen, this leaves him with the difficulty of explaining the significance of the remnant of the *imago dei* and what the correlation is between this

¹¹The *Institutes* of 1559 was the last edition, written in Latin, translated into French and published in 1560. For detailed information on the development of Calvin's *Institutes* see Francis Wendel, *Calvin: the origin and development of his religious thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Collins, 1963), 112-122; Brian A. Gerrish, "Calvin," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG 4), eds. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 16-36; Ford Lewis Battles, "Introduction," in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), trans. Ford L. Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 29-71.

remnant's eschatological and temporal orientations.¹²

This thesis will examine Calvin's understanding (1) of the *imago dei*, (2) the remnant of the *imago dei* and (3) the correlation and relationship between them in the various contexts of the various editions of the *Institutes*. Not only will Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* be examined as a whole for each edition of the *Institutes*. Attention will also be paid to the process of development from 1536 to 1559. As Calvin's biblical commentaries were published during the same stretch of years as the *Institutes*, a chorological examination of these commentaries will also help trace the evolution of Calvin's thought. In this way Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei*—be it in its eschatological or temporal orientations, as the created *imago dei* or as its remnant, in its diversity or unity—will be explored through the development of the *Institutes* from 1536 to 1559.

While the *Institutes of Christian Religion* are particularly relevant for understanding Calvin's work on the *imago dei*, achieving such an understanding will require a survey of all five editions of the *Institutes*—from 1536, 1539, 1543, 1550 and 1559—and a detailed examination of the evolution of his thought on this topic. His work on the *imago dei* in 1536 was enlarged and elaborated for the 1539 and 1559 *Institutes*. Even though the 1543 edition generally follows the 1539 edition, it is these small changes—particularly Calvin's insertion of a reference to 2 Cor 3: 18—which will require detailed examination. Furthermore, Calvin's views on human conscience as the remnant of the *imago dei* mature in the 1550 *Institutes*, assisting us to comprehend the way he perceives of conscience as a whole.

¹² As we shall see, these concepts were also touched upon in Calvin's commentaries, particularly on

0.1. The 1536 *Institutes*

0.1.1. Background

The situation in Paris had grown precarious for the new group of Reformers, with the unrest reaching a height between October 1534 and the early months of 1535. In the autumn of 1534, a placard against the mass had been nailed up around Paris and Francis I quickly took up the role of persecutor of the Protestants. The Lutherans in France were charged with revolting against the social order and against religion itself.¹³ In the period between November 13, 1534, and March 13, 1535, twenty Lutherans were burned in Paris.¹⁴ Despite his efforts to distance himself from the radicals,¹⁵ Calvin was identified as an active member of the Protestants and, after the events related to the placard of October 1534, was forced to withdraw from Paris to Basel where he would complete the first edition of his *Institutes* for the new faith. It was not published, however, until 1536.

At the age of 27, and having not majored in theology,¹⁶ Calvin nonetheless worked

Gen 1: 26.

¹³ Wendel, *Calvin*, 43.

¹⁴ For a classical examination of the role of Francis I in the French Reformation, see Richard Heath, *The Reformation in France* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1886-1888) esp. vol. 1, chps. 2-3.

¹⁵ See for example John Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, trans. Henry Beveridge, in *Treatises and Tracts*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 413-521. The original Latin text can be found in C. O. 5, 173-232. The *Psychopannychia* is in essence an argument against the Anabaptists. Politically, Calvin was against the radical factions within the Reformation.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that a few years later in the edict of 1550 issued by Charles V—which condemns Calvin by name along with Luther, Ecolampadius, Zwingli and Bucer—express condemnation was pronounced on those who “converse or dispute concerning the Holy Scriptures, openly or secretly, especially on any doubtful or difficult matters, or ... read, teach and expound the Scriptures, unless they have duly studied theology and been approved by some renowned university.” Of course, the Sorbonne at Paris was closely aligned with the French court in its stance against the Reformation and tightly controlled this point of access to ecclesiastical power. For detail on the role of

with great enthusiasm. As Barth noted, “The urge to present and unfold his insight, to intervene in history as an instructor, and to direct the religious movement must have been a deep and original one within himself.”¹⁷ With the martyrs of January 29, 1535 in mind, Calvin dedicated the *Institutes* to Francis I, hoping to justify the Reformation movement. The book was for those people, above all in France, who were zealously pursuing God’s truth and attempting to achieve a pious life before God, with the hope that it may benefit them in their learning.¹⁸ In order to meet that need, Calvin presented a succinct catechism, embracing Christian doctrine as a whole, while simultaneously denying that the Protestant confession—which had been refuted by a great deal of the French public—was a new invention. Rather Calvin saw the new movement as a recovery and restoration of God’s goodness in Jesus Christ. By defending the teaching of the Reformation and arguing against opponents in France, one could assume that the book reached its apologetic purpose.¹⁹

0.1.2. The structure of the 1536 *Institutes*

As he himself notes in this edition, Calvin follows the path laid down by tradition. The book’s contents cover (1) the law, (2) faith, (3) prayer, (4) the sacraments, (5) the false sacraments, and (6) Christian freedom, ecclesiastical power, and political administration—an arrangement which reflects Luther’s small catechism.²⁰ It is clear that Calvin’s theological work achieved its maturity in his systematic theology, yet it

Charles V in the Reformation period see, J. H. Merle d’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1863), bk. 13, chps. 9-11.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 158.

¹⁸ Dedicatory to the *Institutes* of 1536.

¹⁹ Ibid. See also Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 157-163.

²⁰ Luther’s small catechism consists of five chief parts. They are the Decalogue, the Creed, the Lord’s prayer, the Sacrament of Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. WA 30/I, 264-345.

is also clear that such maturity required time. The last edition of the *Institutes* in 1559 would frame the work between the dual concepts of the knowledge of God and knowledge of the self, twenty-four years after the appearance of the first edition.

In Calvin's first edition of the *Institutes*, the concept of the image of God arises five times and within the following contexts: (1) human beings are created as the image of God; (2) the law reflects the image of God; (3) Jesus Christ reflects the image of God; (4) the sacraments resemble the image of God and (5) state governors represent the image of God.

0.1.3. Survey of Calvin's use of the imago dei

0.1.3.1. Human beings²¹ created as the image of God

Citing Gen 1, Calvin tells us that Adam, the parent of the whole human race, was endowed with the image of God at the time of his creation. Calvin understands the imago dei as that alone which establishes **the character of humankind** at their creation. He means by this that in receiving the imago dei, Adam receives wisdom, righteousness, and holiness. According to Calvin, these characteristics are expressed

²¹ In this paper, I will use the term "human beings" where in older English translations one would have found "man." Calvin, as a sixteenth century scholar, used this masculine noun to embrace both genders and signify human beings or humanity in general. In the Latin texts we find that he uses both "homo" and "vir" in describing Adam, and ignores Eve, presenting Adam as the parent of the whole human race. In the commentaries on Gen 5:1, Calvin writes: "For when Moses has mentioned only one [Adam], he immediately afterwards includes *both* under *one* name. And he assigns a common name indiscriminately to both, in order that posterity might learn more sacredly to cherish this connection between each other, when they saw that their first parents were denominated as one person." Jane Douglass investigated Calvin's usage of the term and concluded that "in the case of language about people, Calvin's French poses the same problem as traditional English: Calvin speaks of "men" (*les homes*) when he means "people." In the Latin texts a distinction can be made between a male person (*vir*) and a human being (*homo*)... But as the text will show, that distinction is not absolute", Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Woman, Freedom and Calvin* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 8-9.

through **the integrity of human nature**.²² In this sense the *imago dei* signifies those characteristics of God. Adam's life is oriented toward God. But Adam failed to keep these gifts and slipped into sin. Citing Gen 3, Calvin argues that through Adam the *imago dei* in all human beings has been destroyed.²³ Calvin's aim is to highlight the degree to which human beings represent God in creation.²⁴

0.1.3.2. The law reflects the image of God

In his section on God's judgment through the law, Calvin argues that the written law was given by God due to human corruption, and that it consists of "what perfect righteousness is and how it is to be kept: that is firmly fixed in God, we turn our gaze to him alone, and to him aim our thought, yearning, act, or word."²⁵ In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin identifies the written law with the Decalogue. This set of laws aims at *displaying* God's will and righteousness. Yet we must keep in mind an important point: for Calvin, it is Christ alone who *fulfills* the righteousness of God.²⁶ From this perspective, Calvin sees the law simply as a mirror in which fallen souls can contemplate their sins.²⁷ The law displays the divine design in terms of the righteousness of God and God's will.

Calvin aims at connecting the written law with the natural law which, in this context,

²² O.S. I, 38. While Calvin is happy to make this assertion, what he means by the "integrity of human nature" (*hae integritate naturae*) is unclear. This uncertainty is clarified within the development of his work on human nature and will be discussed below.

²³ O. S. I, 37-38. In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin's biblical citations are given merely with reference to the chapter numbers, without referring to particular verses.

²⁴ O. S. I, 38.

²⁵ O. S. I, 39.

²⁶ O. S. I, 54 and 61.

²⁷ O. S. I, 39. *Plane est nobis speculum, in quo peccatum et maledictionem nostram cernere ac contemplari liceat, quemadmodum in speculo sordes et maculas oris nostri vulgo intuemur.*

is expressed through human conscience.²⁸ As we shall see, primarily on the strength of this connection Calvin can argue that the written law reflects the image of God.

0.1.3.3. Jesus Christ reflects the image of God

In his chapter on ecclesiastical power, Calvin argues that a believer's conscience must be set free from those matters from which "they have been freed by Christ; and unless freed, they cannot rest with God."²⁹ For Calvin, ecclesiastical power signifies both the authority of the ministry of God and an appointment by God. "Whatever authority and dignity Scripture accords to either prophets or priests, or apostles, or successors of apostles, is wholly given not to the men themselves, but to the ministry to which they have been appointed; or (to speak more briefly) to the Word, whose ministry is entrusted to them."³⁰ In his discussion of ecclesiastical power, Calvin uses the examples of prophets and priests, and apostles and disciples, all of whom are appointed to the ministry of the Word of the Lord. He places in parallel Christ's sending of the apostles with God's sending of Christ in order to support the authority of the ministry of God.³¹

In this context, Jesus Christ is introduced as the image of God because he is God's only-begotten Son. Jesus is not a mere copy of God, rather he is God: although he exists in human form, he possesses the divine essence. "Therefore, holy men knew God only by beholding him in his son as in a mirror. Nor have the prophets prophesied concerning God in any other way than by the Spirit of the same Son. But

²⁸ O. S. I, 39.

²⁹ O. S. I, 233.

³⁰ O. S. I, 234.

if someone prefers it to be stated thus: God has never manifested himself to men in any other way than through the Son, that is, his sole wisdom, light, and truth. But this wisdom, even though it had manifested itself formerly in various ways, was not as yet shining forth fully.”³² Hence Jesus Christ presents the perfect image of God. The metaphorical use of ‘mirror’ in this context signifies Christ’s being which expresses, not merely reflects, God’s wisdom, light and truth in all its aspects.

0.1.3.4. The sacraments reflect the image of God

In his chapter on the sacraments, Calvin argues that sacraments are not everlasting elements in themselves, but rather that God invests these worldly elements with divine meaning. Sacraments therefore assist us to behold the divine aspects of this life. “It is not because the gifts have been endowed with the natures of things set forth to us in the sacraments, but because sealed by God to this signification.”³³ Calvin defines a sacrament in two ways: as “an outward sign by which the Lord represents and attests to us his good will toward us to sustain the weakness of our faith,” and as “a testimony of God’s grace, declared to us by an outward sign.”³⁴ Citing Gen 6 Calvin relates sacraments, including baptism and the Lord’s Supper, to God’s covenant which bears his promise. In this way, sacraments are seen as the seals of God’s covenant.³⁵

Furthermore, sacraments cannot be separated from the word of God because the

³¹ O. S. I, 234-235.

³² O. S. I, 236. *Deum itaque non aliter cognoverunt sancti illi homines, quam ipsum in filio, velut in speculo intuiti, nec aliter de Deo vaticinati sunt prophetae, quam eiusdem filii spiritu; seu quis ita dici malit.*

³³ O. S. I, 118.

³⁴ O. S. I, 118.

strength and energy of sacraments depend on this very word³⁶: “the sacraments, therefore, are exercises which make us more certain of the trustworthiness of God’s word.”³⁷ The outward tokens of God’s promise are given to assist our faith. “Or we might call them mirrors in which we may contemplate the riches of God’s grace, which he lavishes upon us. For by them he manifests himself to us as far as it is given to our dullness to perceive, and attests his good will toward us.”³⁸ This would suggest that the sacraments reflect the promise of God, which represent God’s goodness and grace toward human beings. By joining in the sacraments, believers enter into the presence of God.

0.1.3.5. Governors resemble the image of God

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin places his discussion of secular authority within the chapter on Christian freedom. While discussing the power of the world, Calvin maintains that those who lead society also resemble the *imago dei* and must be obeyed. “For in such great disgrace, and among such crimes, so alien to the office not only of a magistrate but also of a man, they discern no appearance of the image of God which ought to have shone in the magistrate.”³⁹ For Calvin, they too are ministers of God who have been given the task of punishing evil and protecting the good. In other words, they exist to maintain proper order in the community. This argument is directed particularly at government officers.⁴⁰ To rule for the public good is to preserve the security of living citizens. Calvin asserts that God has chosen and

³⁵ O. S. I, 119.

³⁶ O. S. I, 118.

³⁷ O. S. I, 119.

³⁸ O. S. I, 119. *Aut si dicamus specula, in quibus gratiae Dei divitias, quas nobis elargitur, contemplari liceat.*

³⁹ O. S. I, 275.

authorized the magistrates according to Scripture and cites Rom 13, I Pet 2 and I Tim 2 in support.⁴¹ This **social ordinance, i.e. the social systems of the cultural world**, is constituted by God and is recognized by Calvin as part of the order of creation. This not only preserves humanity from social chaos but maintains religious freedom and the good of the entire community. The basics of human life are provided for in this way and God's Word can be proclaimed.⁴²

This illustration of the imago dei highlights the social status of government officers, who reflect the wisdom and power of the divine design. Calvin sees the imago dei as providing the ground for preserving and respecting secular authority, in spite of the deformity which occurs in practice. Government officers are ordained by God and are represented by Calvin as the ministers of God in this world.

0.1.3.6. Conclusion

(1) Despite these five variations of the imago dei, Calvin maintains that they are not different images. Rather they all present the same imago dei which in turn signifies the characteristics of God. Yet one may well ask at this point: who is the God being reflected in this image?

(2) Calvin uses the word 'mirror' to describe the imago dei only in those instances where human beings can contemplate it by reflection upon objects: i. e. the law, Jesus Christ and the sacraments. This tendency is found throughout all the editions of the

⁴⁰ O. S. I, 275.

⁴¹ O. S. I, 273-275.

⁴² O. S. I, 260.

Institutes and necessitates a closer examination of the word ‘mirror’.

(3) Calvin seems inconsistent in his understanding of the imago dei in this early edition. While he argues that the imago dei is effaced after Adam’s fall government officers still represent the imago dei, albeit as deformed examples. Surely this must point to some remnant of the imago dei.

Finally, (4) Calvin’s focus on the imago dei only appears under the topic of human life. This approach is defended by his belief that the imago dei is a characteristic of humankind alone, and constitutes the human being.⁴³ This conviction can be seen across the development of his work on the imago dei in all editions of the *Institutes*. As a consequence, the imago dei slowly loses its central position in the discussions on the law, Jesus Christ and the sacraments. Accordingly, I will focus my investigation in this thesis primarily on Calvin’s understanding of the imago dei as it appears in human beings.

0.1.3.7. Constitutive elements of the imago dei in human beings

In the space of five pages at the beginning of the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin sets the knowledge of God and the knowledge of human beings side by side. In effect, this move also sets the imago dei in human beings and God’s character and work in the world side by side. In these short pages, Calvin highlights the imago dei’s **eschatological orientation**, which he expresses within the themes of a way toward eternal life, the relation to God, the characteristics of God, the integrity of human

⁴³ O. S. I, 38; *Comm Gen 1*: 26-27; *Comm Gen 2*: 7; the 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15, 3-4.

nature and the sustenance of God's grace. Furthermore, he covers the **temporal orientation** of the imago dei in the section on civil government, holding up government officers as divinely ordained yet fallen representations of the imago dei. Finally, in order to better understand Calvin's work on the imago dei as a reflection of "the glory of God"—defined finally in the 1559 *Institutes*—I will trace his use of this expression throughout the *Institutes*.

0.2. The 1539 *Institutes*

0.2.1. The structure of the 1539 *Institutes*

Calvin's first commission in Geneva was not successful. In 1537, Calvin and Farel were accused of Arianism by Caroli. Although Calvin won the case against Caroli, he and Farel were deprived of their duties in Geneva due to the effects of political inflammation. In 1538, Calvin left for Strasbourg where he would work as a pastor. The second edition of the *Institutes* was completed during these early months of Calvin's time there and published in 1539.

The expansions within the 1539 *Institutes* appear mostly to result from Calvin's encounter with his theological contemporaries and from the debates against Caroli and the Anabaptists. Of further influence were the insights he gained while working on his newly completed commentary on Romans which was published in the same year. Quoted sources in this edition cover the church fathers, e.g. Augustine, and philosophers such as Plato.⁴⁴ This influx of material resulted in a second edition twice

⁴⁴ Wendel, *Calvin*, 46-62 and 114.

the size of the first and extending across a total of seventeen chapters, eleven of which were new and covered: the knowledge of God, the knowledge of man, the Trinity, the Old and the New Testament, sanctification, baptism, penitence, justification in faith, predestination and the providence of God, the church, and Christian life.

0.2.2. Decisive development within and beyond those texts dealing with the imago dei

Important for our discussion are two new chapters which separate the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self. This enlargement of the *cognitio dei et nostri* for the 1539 edition presents us with Calvin's understanding of the subjective and objective dimensions of knowledge as well as the notion of the *duplex cognitio hominis*. This development heightens the intellectual character of the imago dei. The 'God' of Calvin's chapter on the knowledge of God still points mainly to the creator. It appears that for Calvin knowledge of God had not yet embraced knowledge of the redeemer, although he does present knowledge of the creator within a Trinitarian framework.⁴⁵ Further, Calvin highlights the **interrelated relationship** between God and human beings, i.e. that God primarily participates in human existence through his work in creation as well as redemption, and that human beings responsively participate in God through Christ.⁴⁶ While Calvin clearly describes this relationship with God and its expression of the imago dei, his attempt to display the inner relation of human nature as an outworking of the imago dei remains vague. While Calvin

⁴⁵ Calvin teaches on the knowledge of God in chapter one, in which God is mainly addressed as the creator. The knowledge of the redeemer is found in his chapter on faith.

⁴⁶ C. O. 1, 308; 495- 496; 690; 802-803.

provides a contrast to the integrity of human nature within the discussion on human corruption and even cites Eph 4: 23 and Col 3: 9-10, he does not clearly unpack the meaning of the renewal of human nature.⁴⁷

Another important development is seen in Calvin's understanding of the remnant of the *imago dei*. This can be found alongside his discussions on corrupted human nature and the law. Yet Calvin remains quite indefinite on this point, refusing directly to admit that the *imago dei* has not been totally effaced after the fall.⁴⁸ On one hand, he asserts positively that human understanding is able to reach the heights of scientific study and the arts after the fall; the human ability to discern just from unjust also points to a remaining human nobility. In this sense, he continues to highlight human understanding as the excellence of our being which places us above all God's other creatures.⁴⁹ On the other hand, he describes the character of the fallen soul as marred by earthly filth. Moreover, the tension between the eschatological and temporal orientations of the *imago dei* remains throughout his discussions on the *imago dei*, human corruption, the law and Christian life. Finally, while the sustenance of God's grace in regards the *imago dei* is asserted in various sections of the text, it remains unclear how this sustenance relates to the remnant of the *imago dei*.⁵⁰ Insights into this problem will be found in Calvin's commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 45, published in 1546, and on Gen 1: 26-27, which bridge and integrate Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei*.

⁴⁷ C. O. 1, 307-308; 312.

⁴⁸ C. O. 1, 308. *Hic illa coelestis imago inducta et oblitterata fuit; quia per peccatum a Deo alienatus simul a bonorum omnium communione necessario excidit, quae non nisi in ipso haberi possunt.*

0.3. The 1543 *Institutes*

0.3.1. The structure of the 1543 *Institutes*

In the process of Calvin's constant enlargement of the *Institutes*, he expanded the work for the 1543 edition with four new chapters: one on vows, two new chapters dealing with the creed (in addition to the existing two), and one chapter on human tradition in substitution for that on ecclesiastical order. The division of this discussion of the creed across four separate chapters now foreshadows that framework to be found in the 1559 *Institutes*.⁵¹

In regards the *imago dei*, Calvin deepens his understanding of the relationship between human inability—stemming from human corruption—and God's grace which affects human nature toward regeneration.⁵² Regarding the knowledge of God, he adds two paragraphs asserting true knowledge over idolatry and other artificial images which would refer to God.⁵³ An examination of these two paragraphs will provide a better understanding of the knowledge of God, which Calvin closely relates to the doctrine of the *imago dei* via reference to Col 3: 10 and 2 Cor 3: 18.

Calvin also expands his teaching on human conscience with the aim of liberating Christian conscience from rigid social and ecclesiastical ceremonies. This move is highlighted in the new chapter on human tradition. While the breadth of Calvin's discussion on the liberation of Christian conscience extends beyond our interests here,

⁴⁹ C. O. 1, 324-326.

⁵⁰ C. O. 1, 327; 340-342; 536-538.

⁵¹ Wendel, *Calvin*, 117.

its relation to the *imago dei* is asserted in the 1550 *Institutes* and will be picked up there.

0.3.2. The importance of 2 Cor 3: 18 for understanding the *imago dei*

Calvin inserts a reference to 2 Cor 3: 18 and highlights the effect of the Holy Spirit. In this move we see a step toward the integration of Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* in its eschatological orientation. This movement can also be detected in his 1546 commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 18 and is finally completed in the 1559 discussion of the *imago dei*. In this 1543 edition, the glory of God, the knowledge of God, the renewal of human nature and the effect of the Holy Spirit are mutually correlated, but Calvin does not yet elaborate upon this correlation. Clarity slowly emerges in the 1546 commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 18, and in the 1559 *Institutes* the renewal of human nature as the result of achieving knowledge of God becomes the main theme of the *imago dei*'s eschatological orientation.

0.4. The 1550 *Institutes*

0.4.1. The structure of the 1550 *Institutes*

Although Calvin expands his work in various sections, the structure from 1543 is carried over unchanged to the 1550 edition.

⁵² 1559 *Institutes*, II, 2, 20-21; 2, 25; II, 3, 1; 3, 5; 3, 7; 3, 12; II, 5, 8.

0.4.2. The remnant of the imago dei as conscience

Prior to the 1550 *Institutes*, Calvin mainly asserted the existence of a Christian conscience which, in Christ, was liberated from human traditions, namely those church constitutions and ceremonies from Rome. In the 1550 *Institutes*, Calvin inserts three paragraphs dealing with the nature of conscience and its relation to secular authority in this world. Alongside the development of his understanding of Rom 13:1ff,⁵⁴ it was necessary for Calvin to clarify the correlation between natural law and human conscience.⁵⁵ Upon this ground, he argues that human conscience deals primarily with the human encounter with God, which can be independent of encounters with other human beings.⁵⁶ In other words, human conscience primarily displays an eschatological orientation. With the insertion of this discussion of human conscience in 1550, Calvin's understanding of human conscience as the remnant of the imago dei in its eschatological orientation is finally complete.

0.5. The 1559 *Institutes*

0.5.1. The structure of the 1559 *Institutes*

The arrangement of the 1559 *Institutes* is quite unique, in that Calvin sets out the knowledge of God as its framework. It is highly likely that Calvin derived this framework from the creed. The entire work was divided into four books, consisting of (1) The Knowledge of God the Creator, (2) The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in

⁵³ C. O. 1, 286-288.

⁵⁴ Calvin's commentaries on Romans were first published in 1540. The second edition appeared in 1551 and the third in 1560.

Christ, First Disclosed to the Fathers Under the Law, and Then to Us in the Gospel, (3) The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us From it, and What Effects Follow, and (4) The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us Into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein.⁵⁷ The description of the *imago dei*, which we find in chapter fifteen of the first book, is entitled “Discussion of Human Nature as Created, of the Image of God, of the Faculties of the Soul, of Free Will, and of the Original Integrity of Man’s Nature”, and extends across two paragraphs. When compared to the 1536, 1539 und 1543 statements, it is clear that this chapter is built around a different framework. Here it is the knowledge of God which acts as the framework for the *Institutes* and it encompasses God the creator, God the Redeemer and the effects of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸

As we saw above, in the 1543 *Institutes* Calvin enlarged his chapter on faith to such a degree that he had to divide it into four chapters. In this final edition, Calvin divides the entire *Institutes* into four books in accordance with the arrangement of the creed, and knowledge, encompassing both that of God and of ourselves, becomes the leading thread through the arrangement. Thus reason and knowledge, which is expressed by reason, are inevitably and closely related in Calvin’s teaching on the *imago dei*.

0.5.2. Integrating the doctrine of the *imago dei*

Calvin’s plural understanding of the *imago dei* fully matures in the 1559 *Institutes*. Its

⁵⁵ C. O. 1, 841.

⁵⁶ C. O. 1, 841-842.

⁵⁷ Taken from Battles translation of the 1559 *Institutes*.

unity is found in the pre-lapsarian state of human nature as well as in its restoration, because both eschatological and temporal orientations cannot be separated in the first creation nor in its renewal.⁵⁹ In eternal life, the eschatological orientation is fulfilled and the temporal orientation is transformed into spiritual existence.

Yet Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* remains diverse. First, while it is expressed in the integrity of human nature, this is manifested as a reflection of the glory of God, as the excellence of creaturehood above the rest of creation, as a way toward eternal life and as representing the characteristics of God.⁶⁰ Second, the *imago dei* signifies mutual participation between God and human beings. God participates in human existence by creating the world and human beings, and through his providence in creation and recreation.⁶¹ In responding, human beings participate in God by recognizing his goodness in Christ, which is sustained by the grace of God in the Holy Spirit.⁶² Third, the diversity of the *imago dei* is found in its temporal orientation, in remnant form, where the *imago dei* functions as the order of creation. In this way, the fallen still possess dignity because of this remnant. This also highlights God's particular efforts in his creation of human beings.⁶³ Therefore, the fallen also deserve protection from harm on account of reverence to God's authority as creator.

This thesis will examine Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* in the *Institutes of Christian Religion* in three parts: (1) Part I will present a chronological examination

⁵⁸ Before 1559, the frameworks of the various *Institutes* had followed the style of the catechism.

⁵⁹ 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15, 4. See also *Comm I Cor 11*: 7.

⁶⁰ 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15, 3-5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* I, 5; 15-17.

⁶² *Ibid.* III, 1, 1-2; III, 3, 8-9.

⁶³ *Comm Gen 9*: 6; 1559 *Institutes*, II, 8, 39.

of this topic within each of the five editions of the *Institutes*; (2) Part II will present a thematic investigation of the main issues discovered in Part I, and will provide an overview and analysis of the way these themes have developed in Calvin's work; and (3) Part III will present a systematic evaluation of Calvin's understanding of the reality of the *imago dei*.

PART I

Chronological Examination of Calvin's Work on the Imago Dei In the Various Editions of *The Institutes of Christian Religion*

CHAPTER ONE

The Imago Dei in the *Institutes* of 1536

Calvin discusses the doctrine of the imago dei mainly in those passages which deal with the creation of human beings; he understands the imago dei as a characteristic which can be attributed to humankind alone. Yet because the imago dei characterizes humankind in its relation to God, Calvin's understanding of it reflects those stages in the history of that relationship, thus presenting us with discussions on the imago dei in (1) its original state, (2) its loss and (3) its renewal. These three states correspond to God's work (1) first in creation, (2) then through the law and (3) finally in redemption, as revealed to human beings.

1.1. Knowledge of God and knowledge of the self

Calvin's teaching on the imago dei is first encountered within the context of the *cognitio hominis* in the first edition of the *Institutes*. At the opening of the first chapter, Calvin writes: "Nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves."⁶⁴ His use of the concept of the *cognitio dei ac nostri* reflects a broad acceptance of this approach within the circle of the

⁶⁴ O. S. I, 37.

Reformation in general. Luther and Zwingli had already made this move.⁶⁵ Zwingli starts with the discernment of true religion from false religion, then establishes God as the subject of religion and humankind as its corresponding object. This is based on the conviction that God is the aim of true religion and humankind—armed with true religion—is directed toward God. Thus Zwingli sees the knowledge of God and the knowledge of human beings as an intertwined interaction within religion.⁶⁶ Luther's emphasis in the *cognitio dei ac nostri* falls on an awareness of human existence as sinful, and the need for sinners to acknowledge the necessity of justification by God.⁶⁷

Calvin is able to make use of the sources at his disposal yet knows how to keep an appropriate distance from his forerunners. In this way, his understanding of the *cognitio dei ac nostri* is unique within the Reformation.⁶⁸ In the first edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin already deviates from Luther's work by developing a threefold understanding of the knowledge of God and the self. Calvin positions the *imago dei*, its loss and renewal⁶⁹ in such a way as to reflect the three faces of God: (1) God as sovereign Lord creating all things in heaven and on earth, governing the creation and endowing human creatures with the *imago dei*, (2) God as judge penalizing the fallen, and (3) God the Lord and king, forgiving those who are willing to receive salvation in Christ.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Gerhard Ebeling, "Cognitio Dei et hominis," in *Lutherstudien 1* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1971), 231-254.

⁶⁶ Huldrych Zwingli, *Zwingli Hauptschriften: der Theologie 3* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1941), 17-24.

⁶⁷ WA 40/2, 237.

⁶⁸ For a discussion on the degree to which Calvin was influenced by and extended the grounding provided by his forerunners see Alexandre Ganoczy and Stefan Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983).

⁶⁹ O. S. I, 40-41.

1.1.1. Knowledge of God

Citing Bar 3 and Jas 1, Calvin tells us that God is infinite wisdom, righteousness, goodness, mercy, truth, power and life.⁷¹ Here, God is introduced as the creator and fountain of all life; the entire creation is initiated by him. “Listen, Israel, to the commandments of life; hear, and learn wisdom. Why is it, Israel, that you are in your enemies’ country, that you have grown old in an alien land? Why have you shared the defilement of the dead and been numbered with those that lie in the grave? It is because you have forsaken the fountain of wisdom. If you had walked in the way of God, you would have lived in peace forever. Where is wisdom, where is strength, where is intelligence? Learn that, and then you will know where to find life and light to walk by, long life and peace” (Bar 3: 9-14). “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Jas 1: 17).

Calvin argues that God’s purpose in creating the world and all its creatures is that they should be directed toward God’s glory. To support this claim, he appeals to Ps 148 and Dan 3. “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! ... Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever. He fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. ... Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, ... Wild animals and all cattle, ... Kings of the earth and all peoples, ... Young men and

⁷⁰ O. S. I, 37.

women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 148: 1-14). One may well ask how Calvin understands God in fact to be glorified by his creatures. Calvin states that to glorify God is to understand the relation between God and human beings and to obey God’s precepts.⁷² Calvin specifically adopts titles such as “king” and “Lord” in order particularly to show God’s authority over creation.

Calvin goes on to cite Ps 7 and Rom 2 and tells us that the creator adopts the role of judge when humankind disobeys his righteous rule. “Rise up, O Lord, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies; awake, O my God; you have appointed a judgment. Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered around you, and over it take your seat on high. The Lord judges the peoples; judge me, O, Lord, according to the integrity that is in me. O let the evil of the wicked come to the end, but establish the righteous, you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God.” (Ps 7: 6-9) “But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one’s deeds: ... for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2: 5-8). Humankind pays the penalty for their disobedience because what they do dishonors the creator.

Yet in the end, the creator has mercy on the human creature who has strayed from

⁷¹ It should be noted that the biblical citations from Baruch, James, Daniel and Psalms are given only in the 1536 *Institutes* and were omitted already from Calvin’s *Instruction in Faith* in 1537; *Instruction in Faith* (1537), trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Kentucky: John Knox, 1992), 23-24.

him. God is by nature kind and willing to pardon. But Calvin asserts that the king's pardon is subject to a condition: the confused human creature must turn, must trust in God and stay with him (Ps. 103, Is 55, Ps 25; 85).⁷³ "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him" (Ps 103: 2-13). "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Is 55: 6-8).

The God which Calvin sees before him in this section is God the creator, king over the world. Calvin does not refer to the second person of the Trinity in this passage on the knowledge of God, even when describing God's forgiveness of human beings. Calvin's understanding of the second person of the Trinity is limited to Christ's mediatory function.⁷⁴ It is important that we constantly keep before us this curious question of "who God is" when discussing the knowledge of God and the *imago dei*. Also to note at this stage are two paragraphs which Calvin presents—dealing with God's judgment through the law and God's love in Christ, which immediately follow the knowledge of the self—before he goes on to deal with the Decalogue, the theme of his chapter on the law. This framework accentuates the feeling that the knowledge of ourselves is encompassed by the knowledge of God. The variations of the *imago*

⁷² O. S. I, 37.

⁷³ O. S. I, 37.

⁷⁴ O. S. I, 40.

dei—i.e. in its original state, its loss and its renewal—correspond to the differentiation in God’s characters, i.e. as creator, judge and savior.

1.1.2. Knowledge of the self

1.1.2.1. The creation of human beings

Immediately after the description of the knowledge of God, Calvin examines the knowledge of the self. Here he presents the *imago dei* as the characteristic of humankind. Calvin tells us that Adam, the parent of all human beings, was created in the image and likeness of God. Calvin cites here Gen 1 and does not mention Eve in this context. It would seem that the *imago dei* does not involve an issue of gender for Calvin. Nor does he differentiate the image from the likeness. In general, we can identify five elements in Calvin’s work on the *imago dei*: (1) Calvin understands the image and likeness as the endowment of human beings with the characteristics of God, i.e. with wisdom, righteousness, and holiness. These characteristics, reinforced by the contrast between the first and second Adam,⁷⁵ coincide with those characteristics of God spoken of in the section dealing with the knowledge of God. In this respect and in this context, the image of God signifies the image of the creator, who represents the oneness of God in the Trinity. “Moreover, the Father is particularly called Creator of heaven and earth because (as we previously said) of the distinction of properties, whereby the beginning of acting is referred to the Father that he may be said indeed to act by himself, but through the Word and his Wisdom, yet in his Power. That nevertheless there was a common action of the three persons in

⁷⁵ O. S. I, 38.

creating the world is made plain by that statement of the Father: ‘Let us make man in our image and likeness’ (Gen 1: 26).”⁷⁶

(2) Calvin identifies the *imago dei* as a way toward eternal. Calvin goes further (3) to focus on the human relationship with God, pointing out that Adam lived in God. (4) It is due to this relationship with God, that the *imago dei* can be sustained by his grace. (5) The state of the pre-lapsarian Adam thus points to the original integrity of human nature.

1.1.2.2. Adam and the loss of the *imago dei*

In order to accentuate the created beauty of the human creature, Calvin contrasts it to human corruption caused by sin, and in so doing appeals to Gen 3. It should be noted that Calvin does not define here what sin is. Yet he stresses both Adam’s fall, and our involvement in it as his descendents. Calvin tells us that the image of God was lost because of sin. As a consequence, the gifts of divine grace are effaced (see in relation to points 1 and 4 immediately above). Calvin stresses the eternal dimension of the *imago dei* and hence argues that to lose the *imago dei* is to be deprived of the way toward eternal life (point 2). In their state of corruption, human beings are alienated from God (point 3).⁷⁷ Calvin follows a Pauline understanding, in which the first Adam and the second Adam represent two kinds of human existence, namely as either living in God or as being divided from God. “All of us born of Adam are ignorant and bereft of God.”⁷⁸ “Through [Christ] we are reborn, wrested from the power and

⁷⁶ O. S. I, 78.

⁷⁷ O. S. I, 38.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

chains of the devil, freely adopted as the children of God.”⁷⁹

In this way, “Adam” also signifies the entirety of humanity. Within the contrast between the first Adam and second Adam Calvin seems to suggest that the humanity of Jesus Christ was equal to that of the pre-lapsarian Adam, though he does not here illustrate distinctly the relation of the humanity of Jesus Christ to human beings. Calvin concludes this contrast of the pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian states by concentrating on these figures of the first and second Adam (citing from Rom 5) (point 1). “From this it follows that man was stripped and deprived of all wisdom, righteousness, power, life, which—as has already been said—could be held only in God. As a consequence, nothing was left to him save ignorance, iniquity, impotence, death, and judgment (Rom 5).”⁸⁰ One notes that the characteristics of the *imago dei* correspond closely to those of the creator which were outlined above in the section on the knowledge of God. In this context, the *imago dei*—which signifies the characteristics of God—is sustained by God’s grace which is given to human beings. In this sense, the *imago dei* is clearly a non-corporeal entity.

1.1.3. The total corruption of human nature

Calvin immediately moves on to describe the deformed state of human nature. Again, Calvin does not define what human nature embodies. But he does mention two concepts, mind and heart, in order to illustrate the deformed state of human nature which will confront the judgment of God. Citing 1 Sam 16 and Jer 17, Calvin distinguishes inward purity from its outward expressions. “But the Lord said to

⁷⁹ O. S. I, 40.

Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’” (1 Sam 16: 8). “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings” (Jer 17: 9-10). Although some fine outward expressions can be seen among the fallen, Calvin views the human mind as filthy, perverse and wicked after the fall. For Calvin, the estimation of human existence must be in accordance with the rule of the kingdom of God. In other words, God’s judgment must be the standard of human existence. Calvin tells us that God judges a person according to whatever is in the heart. Therefore, whatever outward expressions may suggest, fallen human beings are in heart and mind infected by sin and wicked after the fall. With a perverse heart, all outward expressions become mere hypocrisy once seen in relation to God’s standard.⁸¹ At this point, Calvin thinks of the heart and mind as representing human nature as a whole which, of course, is totally corrupted after Adam’s fall.

1.1.4. Human beings are responsible for the loss of the imago dei

Calvin uses human conscience as a bridge between human corruption and the judgment of God. God is introduced here in the figure of judge and Calvin tells us that fallen human beings share responsibility for Adam’s perversity; they are still the creator’s creatures. In the relationship between creator and creature, both sides must act according to the established order. For the creature, this means that it must glorify God and obey his commandments. Calvin argues that human inability to achieve

⁸⁰ O. S. I, 38.

God's precepts is caused by human beings themselves, although we find no further explanation of this idea within the text.⁸²

Before investigating each individual theme with regard to the *imago dei*, let us first sketch out the relationship between the *imago dei*, knowledge of God and knowledge of the self.

To set the creator and the *imago dei* side by side is to show the inseparable relationship⁸³ that exists between the original, i.e. God the creator, and the copy, i.e. the image of God in human beings. The human creature was endowed with the *imago dei* in order to understand God's word and to obey God. Hence Calvin believes that knowledge of God was given to Adam before the fall, in order that human beings may respond to God. This would appear to increase the status of human dignity within creation. Yet this special gift also points out human responsibility for the fall. "Inasmuch as we are God's creatures, we ought to serve his honor and glory, and obey his commandments. And we are not allowed to excuse ourselves by claiming that we lack ability and, like impoverished debtors, cannot pay our debt. For the guilt that binds us is our own, arising from our own sin, leaving us without the will or the capacity to do good (John 8; Rom 7)."⁸⁴

It is unclear how Calvin's theological epistemology in the 1536 *Institutes* functions in

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid. *Culpa enim nostra est et peccati nostri quod nos victos tenet, ne quid bene aut velimus agere aut possimus (Ioan. 8. Rom. 7.).*

⁸³ As Jane Douglass has noted, while this relationship is one of tension it also has positive aspects. Jane Dempsey Douglass, "The Image of God in Humanity: a Comparison of Calvin's teaching in 1536 and 1559," in *In Honor of John Calvin 1509-64*. ed. E. Furcha (FRS: ARC, 1987), 177-178.

regard to objective and subjective processes of knowledge. **Objective knowledge can be defined as the objectivity of the *cognitio dei* represented in Scripture. Subjective knowledge points to that which human reason apprehends regarding the knowledge of God.** In this edition Calvin's argument is weak when it comes to presenting the sources of knowledge as objective, even though he mentions that "nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves."⁸⁵ "The Apostle, Peter, perfectly instructed by the Master as to how much was permitted to him, reserved nothing else for himself or others: 'Let him who speaks,' he says, 'speak only the words of God (I Peter 4: 11).' What else is this but to reject all invention of the human mind in order that God's pure Word may be taught and learned in the believers' church?"⁸⁶ Hence Calvin appears to be arguing that Scripture gives us an objective understanding of the *cognitio dei et nostri*. The 1536 edition of the *Institutes* is clearly characterized by an orientation to Scripture, as can be seen by Calvin's extensive use of citations from Scripture, and which are almost invariably prefaced by the authoritative statement: "the scriptures speak of ..."⁸⁷ However, Calvin does come to recognize the above problem and elaborates upon his understanding of Scripture in the second edition of the *Institutes*.

Calvin's understanding of knowledge in the 1536 *Institutes* points to human consciousness under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, though his exposition is not yet precise. "We are persuaded that there is for us no other guide and leader to the Father than the Holy Spirit, just as there is no other way than Christ; ... Therefore,

⁸⁴ O. S. I, 38. This succinct description is expanded in the second edition of the *Institutes* of 1539 in order to declare that God is not the author of sin. Human beings were indeed corrupted, but it was a self-corruption.

⁸⁵ O. S. I, 37.

⁸⁶ O. S. I, 238.

⁸⁷ O. S. I, 80.

the Holy Spirit, while dwelling in us in this manner, illumines us with his light, in order that we may learn and plainly recognize what an enormous wealth of divine goodness we possess in Christ. He kindles our hearts with the fire of love, both toward God and neighbor, and day by day He boils away and burns up the vices of our inordinate desire.”⁸⁸

Since human understanding of the knowledge of God had been lost after the fall, it is only by the Holy Spirit’s illumination that we can regain knowledge of God. In other words, human beings did indeed once possess such knowledge before the fall. The better formulation would be that human beings possess the knowledge of God because they are created with the integrity of human nature. For Calvin, the stress falls upon the health of the human state without the disturbance of sin. However, the question of how human beings possess the knowledge of God still needs to be clarified throughout the *Institutes*.

By the illumination of the Holy Spirit in our renewal, the knowledge of God once more comes to awareness in believers. Believers are restored to that state in which they were created, and come to recognize the intention of the creator towards the human creature which is unfolded through Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus Christ that believers are adopted to be children of God, and in him that they recognize God not only as sovereign Lord, but also as a loving Father. Calvin was able therefore to place the episodes of his own life into God’s hands and to trust in God’s parental provision, particularly as he fled from Paris in 1534 after Cop’s speech.⁸⁹ Calvin’s argument

⁸⁸ O. S. I, 86.

⁸⁹ Letters, Nr. 20. C. O. 10, 37-38. *Si id temporis, quod vel exilio vel secessui destinatum est, tanto in otio transigere datur, praeclare mecum agi existimabo. Sed de iis viderit Diminus, cuius providentia*

points out that Christian existence, in terms of knowledge of the self, cannot be separated from God who constantly beholds his creation and his children and brings them to eternity.

In this brief outline, we see the close relation of Calvin's theological epistemology to his doctrine of the *imago dei*; this is mainly because Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* is intellectual and rationalistic, namely in its correspondence to the knowledge of God. However, the objectivity and the subjectivity of knowledge remain unclear here, and are not well established until the 1539 *Institutes*.

1.2. The human relation to God

1.2.1. Terminology

Calvin distinguishes three different existential states when describing the human relation to God, each of which corresponds to a particular variation in the expression of the *imago dei*. (1) Calvin uses the phrase "subsistence in God" (*in Deo victurus*) in order to describe the idea that the *imago dei* is both endowed and constantly sustained by the creator within creation.⁹⁰ However, (2) Calvin recognizes that the *imago dei* remains effaced as long as human beings continue to be divided from God (*a Deo divisus*) and alienated from him (*alienus factus*) due to the disturbance of sin.⁹¹ In

omnia melius providebit. Expertus sum quod non liceat nobis in longum prospicere. Quum promitterem mihi omnia tranquilla, aderat in foribus quod minime sperabam. Rursum quum inamoenam sedem meditarer. Nidus mihi in tranquillo componebatur, praeter opinionem. Et haec omnia manus Dimini, cui si nos committimus ipse erit sollocitus nostri. Johannes Calvin, *Johannes Calvins Lebenswerk in seinen Briefen*, vol. 1. trans. Rudolf Schwarz (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 33-34.

⁹⁰ O. S. I, 38.

⁹¹ In his paragraph dealing with the *imago Dei* in the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin uses reference to Gen 1 to support his understanding of the bequeathing of the *imago Dei* in the act of creation. Reference to Gen

such a state the gifts of divine grace are lost. Accordingly, after the fall, Adam is separated from God's sustenance. Calvin argues that sin is the corruption of human nature. The outcome of this situation is seen in the fruits of sin, i.e. ignorance, iniquity, impotence, death, and judgment.⁹² The mutually antithetic states of subsistence in God and alienation from God correspond directly to that antithesis of the possession of the *imago dei* and its loss.

The third state (3) is found in the renewal of the *imago dei*, which Calvin outlines in the section on God's love in Christ. Calvin thinks of this in terms of our participation in Christ (*Christo communicamus*). "In short, if we partake of Christ, in Him we shall possess all the heavenly treasures and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which lead us into life and salvation."⁹³ To participate in Christ is to become a child of God, since God adopts believers to be his children in Christ. In this way, believers can enter the kingdom of God which is only given in Christ.⁹⁴ These three descriptions of the *imago dei* as a human relation to God all correspond to God's love, which is manifested both in his work in creation as well as in recreation.

1.2.2. The relationship between the Father and his children

In his chapter on prayer, Calvin argues that Christians are adopted as God's children

3 is used in order to illustrate the obliteration of the *imago dei* due to the defection of human beings. But in this section, Calvin does not yet discuss directly the issue of the *imago dei*'s renewal. There appears to be no evidence in the narrative of Gen 3 to establish the claim that the *imago dei* was actually effaced after the fall. This effacement can only be inferred from Paul's later claim regarding the necessity of renewal for the *imago dei* (II Cor 4: 16). Calvin refers to this later within the section on God's love in Christ. O. S. I, 40-41.

⁹² O. S. I, 38; 130.

⁹³ O. S. I, 41. *Denique si Christo communicamus, in ipso possidemus coelestes omnes thesauros ac spiritus sancti dona, quae nos in vitam ac salutem deducant.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

in Christ's name and may therefore call God "Father." He bases this claim upon the vocative of the Lord's Prayer: "*Our Father* who art in heaven." Furthermore, it is by being in Christ that believers come under God's benevolence, which was promised to them in him.⁹⁵ In his chapter on faith, the Father's characteristics are discussed. This occurs within Calvin's analysis of the opening line of the creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Calvin stresses here that it is God the creator who is the Father. The Father created the world for his children and nourishes his children through his fatherly love. This care continued in his sending of Christ.⁹⁶ This twofold understanding of God, as creator and as Father, highlights both human dependence upon God and God's loving sustenance. This also suggests God's accommodation to human existence, because a sovereign creator would have the right to treat his creatures however he wants. Yet despite such sovereign freedom, God sent his Son for the salvation of these human creatures: just as he created them in the beginning, he now came to adopt them as his children.

However, the sending of the Son must first be appreciated within the context of God's judgment of humanity under the law and human alienation from God.⁹⁷ If we follow this move in reverse, we see the sovereign creator already in the role of Father at the moment of creation, displaying God's loving intentions and the consistency of his love as the principle of his actions. After all, Christ is given in order to reconcile us to God.

⁹⁵ O. S. I, 105-106.

⁹⁶ O. S. I, 75-76.

⁹⁷ O. S. I, 38-39.

1.2.3. The relationship between Christ and God's children

Calvin prefaces his exposition of the law with a paragraph describing God's love in Christ. He asserts that Christ is the reality in which God's love is shown. This coincides with the love shown in creation. Calvin thinks of Christ as the perfect image of God.⁹⁸ "Holy men knew God only by beholding him in his Son as in a mirror."⁹⁹ Yet the relationship between the *imago dei* in human beings and that in Christ remains here unclear.

For Calvin, Christ "was one God with the Father—[who] put on our flesh, to enter a covenant with us and to join us closely to him."¹⁰⁰ Human reconciliation to God is achieved by Christ's payment on the cross of the debt of our sin. God's benevolence is expressed in Christ and communicated to us through our adoption as children through him. In this way, not only those gifts which were given in creation but human nature itself are renewed in the Holy Spirit.¹⁰¹ From this perspective, God participates in human existence through Christ in redemption, and human beings responsively participate in God through Christ.

⁹⁸ O. S. I, 40-41.

⁹⁹ O. S. I, 239.

¹⁰⁰ O. S. I, 40.

¹⁰¹ O. S. I, 40-41; 106; 239.

1.3. Human nature¹⁰²

1.3.1. The integrity of human nature

As Calvin explains, God made Adam as the parent of the whole human race, and Adam possessed the *imago dei* which was the integrity of his human nature. Calvin describes this ‘upright’ human nature as consisting of wisdom, righteousness, power and life.¹⁰³ Thus Adam had reflected the characteristics of God and had been in consonance with God’s character. In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin links the knowledge of God to the *imago dei*, which is reflected in believers when they contemplate God in Christ. It is through the expression of human understanding that believers reflect the *imago dei*. “How could they either have comprehended God’s mysteries with the mind, or have uttered them, except by the teaching of the Son to whom alone the secrets of the Father are revealed? Therefore, holy men knew God only by beholding him in his Son as in a mirror. Nor have the prophets prophesied concerning God in any other way than by the Spirit of the same Son.”¹⁰⁴ It would seem here that human beings mirror the *imago dei* in their ability to understand the gospel and to live out the teachings of Christ. Yet it is precisely this shift of the *imago dei* from Adam’s upright nature—encompassing wisdom, righteousness, power and life—to human understanding which remains unclear in this edition. It is far from clear what Calvin means by his claims that the integrity of human nature implies that human beings were created to apprehend God, and that in this way human beings can respond to

¹⁰² Calvin’s discussion of human nature in the *Psychopannychia* of 1534 became the basis of his analysis of human beings, as we have it in the *Institutes* from 1539 to 1559. In the *Institutes* from 1539 to 1550, Calvin’s main discussions on human nature and its corruption are found within the chapter on the knowledge of man. It is in the 1559 *Institutes* that Calvin provides us with a systematic doctrine regarding human beings. Compare Calvin’s discussion of human nature in the *Psychopannychia* (C. O. 5, 179-180 and 210) with the 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15.

¹⁰³ O. S. I, 38.

God and obey him and thus honor their creator.¹⁰⁵

The integrity of human nature signified a condition of spiritual health without the disturbance of sin, a condition which was sustained by the grace of God. In contrast, the *imago dei* is now effaced and human nature totally corrupted after Adam's fall. The integrity of human nature in its contrast to the corrupted state directly parallels the antithesis of the second Adam to the first Adam.

1.3.2. The antithesis between the first Adam and second Adam

In his section dealing with the second part of the creed, Calvin discusses the person and work of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶ Calvin tells us that Christ was sent by the Father to become human and to act as mediator in order to liberate humankind from death—not only the death of the body, but that of the soul. Due to his possession of both divine and human essences, he is called Immanuel and is the one through whom human beings can ascend to God. The office of the mediator is to turn the children of human beings into the children of God. The Son of God as mediator is thus the means for this transition. “This therefore is our hope, that we are sons of God, for God's natural son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from flesh, bones from bones, that he might be one with us. What was ours, he willed to belong to himself. So that what was his might belong to us, and thus to be both Son of God and son of man in common with us.”¹⁰⁷ The disobedience of Adam led human beings into confusion, yet

¹⁰⁴ O. S. I, 236.

¹⁰⁵ O. S. I, 37.

¹⁰⁶ O. S. I, 77-84.

¹⁰⁷ O. S. I, 79.

in the obedience of the second Adam this confusion was removed.¹⁰⁸

In brief, the loss of the *imago dei* means the corruption of human nature. Jesus Christ became human—conforming to what Adam possessed in creation, i.e. the integrity of human nature—in order to restore our fallen nature.

1.4. The glory of God

1.4.1. Subjective and objective aspects of the glory of God

In the first part of the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin introduces God as sovereign creator and Lord. Because of his sovereignty, the whole creation is to serve his glory: “to keep his rule, accept his majesty, and in obedience recognize him as Lord and king.”¹⁰⁹ For human beings to glorify God means that they should live a life which is in relation to God, and which the creator designs for them. In other words, human beings as the works of God must recognize their position in creation and correctly set the goal of their lives in response to their creator. Human beings, as the best work of God, represent God’s glory by displaying the excellence of God’s workmanship. This is **the objective dimension of the glory of God**. In responding to God, human beings are conscious of God’s sovereignty and his glory in the world. This is **the subjective dimension of the glory of God**.

¹⁰⁸ O. S. I., 80.

¹⁰⁹ O. S. I. 37.

1.4.2. Human corruption

Fallen human beings are alienated from God and deny God as the creator. Calvin deals with this issue in his section on knowledge of the self, following the description of the creation of human beings. Calvin stresses that the perversity of unbelievers does not excuse their actions; their deeds simply remain unacceptable to God. “Inasmuch as we are God’s creatures, we ought to serve his honor and glory, and obey his commandments.”¹¹⁰ Fallen human beings cannot glorify God because they have abandoned their nature, which was created for the sole purpose of responding appropriately to God. The subjective dimension of God’s glory is effaced where human beings are not aware of this glory. The objective dimension is also disrupted due to the corruption of human nature.

1.5. Life and death

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin examines the state of the soul after death. The contrast he presents between the state of believers’ souls and those of unbelievers corresponds both to that antithesis between the first Adam and the second Adam, and to the possession of the *imago dei* and its post-lapsarian loss. “From this it follows that man was stripped and deprived of all wisdom, righteousness, power, life, which—as has already been said—could be held only in God. As a consequence, nothing was left to him save ignorance, iniquity, impotence, death, and judgment (Rom 5).”¹¹¹ The two types of human existence in this world correspond to the two states after death, in the period before the last judgment: (1) eternal life in the kingdom of God and (2) eternal

¹¹⁰ O. S. I, 38.

punishment. This is described in his chapter on faith, in the section dealing with the resurrection of the body. “All will, by a sudden change, cross over into an immortal nature: the godly indeed into glory of life, the reprobate into condemnation of death.”¹¹² We note here that Calvin maintains the human soul to be immortal, regardless of whether it is with God or without God.

The human soul functions either with correct knowledge of God or with false knowledge of God; the soul exists and lives as it was intended in life with God, or it persists in existence, functioning improperly with sin into death. The former bears a healthy and living *imago dei*; the latter a sick and distorted one.

1.5.1. Life

In his section dealing with the creation of human beings, Calvin briefly describes the *imago dei* as a way toward eternal life. “He was endowed with wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and was so clinging by these gifts of grace to God that he could have lived forever in Him, if he had stood fast in the uprightness God had given him. But when Adam slipped into sin, this image and likeness of God was cancelled and effaced, that is, he lost all the benefits of divine grace, by which he could have been led back into the way of life.”¹¹³ In this sense, life signifies human subsistence on God.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² O. S. I, 93.

¹¹³ O. S. I, 38. *Sapientia, iustitia, sanctitate praeditum, atque his gratiae donis Deo ita haerentem, ut perpetuo in eo victurus fuerit, si in hac integritate naturae, quam a Deo acceperat, stetisset.* Battles translates the phrase “*in hac integritate naturae*” as “in his uprightness.” I prefer the translation “the integrity of human nature.”

In his section on God's love in Christ, we find a succinct description of the life which is derived in Christ. "Through [Christ] we are renewed from day to day, that we may walk in newness of life and live for righteousness."¹¹⁴ Thus life in Christ signifies the newness of the believer's life, who is transformed by the Holy Spirit.

In Calvin's exposition of the creedal affirmation, "I believe in eternal life," he tells us that in eternal life the human body is transformed into an immortal state and that the soul exists without the accusations of conscience before the glory of God.¹¹⁵ Through resurrection into eternity, the soul is unified with an immortal body, and the human being as a new whole resides with God in peace. In other words, eternal life is the combination of perfect human nature with an immortal body, both of which abide in God.¹¹⁶ Therefore, this current temporal life with the *imago dei* is not yet eternal life but rather a way toward it.

1.5.2. Death¹¹⁷

In delineating God's judgment through the law, Calvin describes human corruption in terms of disobedience to God. It is in this respect that they are called "the children of God's wrath,"¹¹⁸ and it is because of this disobedience that they are "hurtling to death and destruction."¹¹⁹ This can be seen in the law, which instructs us both of God's will and his righteousness. Citing Deut 27 and Gal 3, Calvin argues that the state of the fallen soul is displayed in the law. "But he pronounces a curse and announces the

¹¹⁴ O. S. I, 40.

¹¹⁵ O. S. I, 93.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ This concept is discussed to a large degree in the *Psychopannychia* of 1534. See C. O. 5, 204-205.

¹¹⁸ O. S. I, 38-39.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

judgment of eternal death upon all who do not fully and without exception keep the whole righteousness of the law (Duet 27; Gal 3).”¹²⁰ Calvin concludes: “Now we are ready to understand what we are to learn from the law. God is the Creator, our Lord and Father. For this reason we owe him glory, honor, and love. Since, however, not one of us performs these duties, we all deserve the curse, judgment, in short, eternal death.”¹²¹ Therefore, Calvin sees death as having a twofold meaning: death points to the end of this life, to the end of our biological existence, but it also signifies the state of the fallen soul, which encounters God’s judgment. In this ‘eternal death’, the fallen soul unites with the resurrected body only to be sent into eternal damnation. Calvin repeats this argument in his section dealing with eternal life: “On the other hand, the ungodly and the reprobate, who have not sought and revered God with pure faith, inasmuch as they will have no part in God and his Kingdom, will be cast with the devils into eternal death.”¹²²

1.6. The grace of God

As we saw above, the gifts of an upright nature are the gifts of divine grace in creation. Calvin twice mentions the grace of God, when he contrasts the gifts sustained by the grace of God with the loss of these gifts.¹²³ The contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam also points to the contrast between human merits and God’s grace. Calvin stresses that “since it is not in our power or ability to discharge what we owe the law, we must despair of ourselves and must seek and

¹²⁰ O. S. I, 39.

¹²¹ O. S. I, 39-40.

¹²² O. S. I, 93.

¹²³ O. S. I, 38.

await help from another quarter.”¹²⁴ In his chapter on faith, Calvin discusses the Holy Spirit who dwells in believers and illuminates their minds. In this way, believers receive the benefits of Christ, which are beneficial precisely through the grace of God. “And all these gifts depend not upon any duties or merits of ours, but are given freely to us from the divine bounty, and gratuitously.”¹²⁵ This clear differentiation between human abilities and God’s grace, which sustains the gifts of the *imago dei*, is a decisive theme in expressing the absolute distance between God and human beings as well as human dependence upon God. This approach can be seen through all the editions of the *Institutes*.¹²⁶

In describing the renewal of the *imago dei*, Calvin shifts the focus from the grace of God to the grace of the Holy Spirit. “God offers to us and gives us in Christ our Lord all these benefits, which include free forgiveness of sins, peace and reconciliation with God, the gifts and grace of the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁷ This grace which restores the *imago dei* is also the grace of Christ, which is “the power and action of the Spirit: through grace God the Father, in the Son, accomplishes whatever good there is; through grace He justifies, sanctifies, and cleanses us, calls and draws us to himself, that we may attain salvation.”¹²⁸ One should note at this stage that in the *Institutes* of 1536, Calvin does not yet clearly differentiate the grace of God in creation from the grace of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

1.7. Eternity and temporality

One tends to come away from Gen 1: 26-28 with the impression that it is the *imago*

¹²⁴ O. S. I, 40.

¹²⁵ O. S. I, 85.

¹²⁶ C. O. 1, 308; the 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15, 4.

dei, gender and human dominion which seem to constitute humankind in their creation. In the *Institutes* of 1536, the imago dei and the likeness of God are accepted as characteristics of humankind. Calvin tends toward the idea that the imago dei correlates chiefly to those eternal aspects in human beings. Human dominion and gender, however, are related more to temporal matters, and thus for Calvin do not correspond to the order of eternal life. “There is twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and civil life that must be maintained among man.”¹²⁹ Yet this does not mean that Calvin thinks the temporal aspects have nothing at all to do with the imago dei. Calvin tells us that the imago dei can be represented by the figure of the governor, and in so doing picks up the topic of secular authority. **The imago dei in relation to political and social dimensions constitutes its *temporal dimension***, but within the 1536 *Institutes* this is only found in the figure of government officers. Calvin has no doubt that the imago dei provides the ground for the preservation and respect of secular authority, although he admits that we behold this merely in its deformity.¹³⁰ For Calvin, government represents **the order of creation**. To set the social ordinance under God’s authority is to preserve humanity and religious freedom. It is in this way that human life is provided for and true religion maintained.¹³¹

1.8. The remnant of the imago dei

In 1536, Calvin discusses rather the phenomenon of conscience within the framework

¹²⁷ O. S. I, 40.

¹²⁸ O. S. I, 85.

¹²⁹ O. S. I, 233.

of the law in order to highlight human perversity against God. He uses this as a bridge in showing how the law points to human salvation in Christ.¹³² Calvin adopts Paul's thought in Rom 2, where the law is presented as being engraved upon human hearts, and identifies this with conscience and the ability to discern good from evil. He admits that while the knowledge of God remained in fallen humankind, i.e. in human conscience, the *imago dei* was destroyed after the fall.¹³³ This implies human indebtedness to God in order to fulfill that aim for which they were created.¹³⁴ At this point, one may well ask what the correlation is between the law, the knowledge of God and human conscience. Calvin offers an extended answer in his *Institutes* from 1539 through to 1550, which we will trace in the following chapters.

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin's use of the word 'conscience' has a twofold meaning. The conscience mentioned above pertains to fallen humankind. Yet Calvin also speaks of the liberated conscience of believers. "The conscience, to which the benefit of such freedom was due, has now been set free."¹³⁵ This God-oriented conscience "is instructed in piety and in reverencing God."¹³⁶ This conscience deals with the kingdom of God and is set above all temporal jurisdictions.¹³⁷

It cannot be denied that this compact version of the *Institutes* leaves us with many unfinished descriptions and open questions regarding Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei*. Yet in his own time, over the next twenty-three years of his life, he would

¹³⁰ O. S. I, 274-275.

¹³¹ O. S. I, 260 and 275.

¹³² O. S. I, 38-39.

¹³³ O. S. I, 39.

¹³⁴ O. S. I. 40.

¹³⁵ O. S. I. 229.

¹³⁶ O. S. I. 232.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

seek to answer these questions and complete these descriptions. In places, we will even perceive a change of heart, although the variations are never radical. In the next chapters we will follow these traces through the 1539, 1543, 1550 and 1559 *Institutes* and contemplate Calvin's growing picture of the imago dei in these systematic works.

CHAPTER TWO

The Image of God in the *Institutes* of 1539

2.1. Knowledge of God and knowledge of the self

In the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin adds two new chapters on knowledge of God and knowledge of the self. Particularly important is the addition of two paragraphs describing the role of Scripture,¹³⁸ which help display the objective dimension of the *cognitio dei et nostri*. Calvin sees two faces of God displayed in Scripture, and this new insight already pushes Calvin's understanding of the knowledge of God far beyond where it was in the 1536 *Institutes*.¹³⁹ On one hand, God is beyond his revelation in the world; yet on the other, God is indeed revealed in his works, namely in creation, redemption and in the word of God. Consequently, we find both an inevitable tension and correlation between the creator God and his human creatures.

We see the tension expressed in the fact that God has to remain strictly divine, strictly 'other'¹⁴⁰ over against the human creature which, although endowed with the *imago dei*, remains a created being. These two 'beings' must not be confused. We see the

¹³⁸ C. O. 1, 292-293.

¹³⁹ O. S. I, 37.

¹⁴⁰ Wendel, *Calvin*, 151.

positive correlation in the opportunity for these human creatures to ascend to God through participation in the spirit, i.e. by living out the knowledge of God as believers in him. To ascend to God is also to achieve happiness in life. “The ultimate aim of the good life, now, relies on his knowledge [of God], which shows God’s will (John 17: 3).”¹⁴¹ Thus the means of interaction between God and the human creature is now set. “Indeed, it is noted that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which contains empty speculation, but that which is solid and fruitful when we perceive it. Because God manifests himself by his powers, the strength of which we feel within ourselves, we have the privilege of his benevolence.”¹⁴²

2.1.1. The objectivity of the knowledge of God and the self

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin speaks of the objective knowledge of God. In his description, it is Scripture which provides the authority of God’s revelation. This occurs through the Holy Spirit. For Calvin, the Holy Spirit witnesses to the authority of Scripture. “For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know.”¹⁴³ It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit within the text and within the believer which constitutes the authority of Scripture.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ C. O. 1, 286. *Quoniam ultimum beatæ vitæ finem in sui cognitione repositum esse voluit Dominus (Ioan. 17, 3).*

¹⁴² C. O. 1, 288-289. *Atque hic quidem observandum est, invitari nos ad Dei notitiam, non quæ inani speculatione contineatur, sed quæ solida futura sit et fructuosa, si percipiatur a nobis. A suis enim virtutibus manifestatur Dominus: quarum vim quia sentimus intra nos, et beneficiis fruimur, vividius.* This passage has been translated in accordance with the Latin edition of 1539. In his *Instruction in Faith* (1537), trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Kentucky: John Knox, 1977), 21, Calvin clearly asserts that human beings are born in order to know God.

¹⁴³ C. O. 1, 863.

¹⁴⁴ C. O. 1, 295.

Calvin finds, according to Scripture, that creation manifests God in an objective way. This opens up a new dimension in understanding the way Calvin perceives the knowledge of God. For Calvin, God is manifested in the human creature, in the processes of the natural world and in the cultural world.¹⁴⁵ If human beings had not failed to obey God, they could have remained good reflections of God and could have retained appropriate knowledge of him. But since Adam fell into sin, human nature was corrupted and this knowledge was lost. Yet despite this human corruption, God still sustains his creation and reveals himself through both natural and cultural worlds. In this way, God's objective action of watching over and governing his creation continues.¹⁴⁶ This also expresses the human position within the world: human beings are an aspect of creation, which can understand the creator in his work and respond to him. Calvin believes that the tendency of human beings to make now their own gods and to fail truly to recognize their maker is due to the human mind's corruption after the fall.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, the provision of Scripture was necessary to assist human meditation on God. "Thus it is clear that God has provided the assistance of the Word in order to instruct those to whom he has been pleased; for his likeness imprinted upon the order of the universe is not effective sufficiently."¹⁴⁸

The objectivity of human knowledge of God is found in Scripture and in God's work in creation, both of which reveal God. "Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate into the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to

¹⁴⁵ C. O. 1, 288.

¹⁴⁶ Wendel, *Calvin*, 163.

¹⁴⁷ C. O. 1, 290.

¹⁴⁸ C. O. 1, 292-293. *Quum itaque palam sit, Deum erga eos omnes, quos unquam erudire cum fructu voluit, subsidium verbi adhibuisse, quod effigiem suam in mundi compositione impressam parum esse*

adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his work whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself.”¹⁴⁹ Thus **objective knowledge refers to that which is gained through God’s revelation in his words and works.** In this context, Calvin does not yet mention God’s revelation in the work of redemption, which will be asserted in his chapter on faith. Thus, the ‘knowledge of God’ tends to deal simply with ‘knowledge of the creator’ even though Scripture is admitted as the authority of the knowledge of God.

Moreover, it still remains vague in this context why the creation is in fact insufficient for revealing God. Our options here for response to this question will lie most likely in human corruption as well as in the corruption of creation because of sin.

To summarize, Calvin asserts three levels of the objectivity of knowledge. First, the objectivity of knowledge is the work of the Holy Spirit, who testifies to the authority of Scripture. Second, Scripture is given to assist human understanding in regards the knowledge of God. Third, the entire creation, including human creatures, promotes knowledge of God.

2.1.2. Knowledge in its subjective aspects

In the 1536 *Institutes*, the subjective aspect both of the knowledge of God and of the self was seen in conscious human knowledge which had been enlivened by the Holy

efficacem provideret. The phrase *in mundi compositione* is revised for the 1559 edition, where it reads: *in pulcherrima mundi fora.* The English translation is my own.

¹⁴⁹ C. O. 1, 289.

Spirit. **Subjective knowledge is thus located in the mind of the believer.** This succinct statement is unpacked in the 1539 *Institutes*. Here Calvin stresses the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, through which the human mind can accept the authority of Scripture from God. “For even if it wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit. Therefore, illuminated by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else’s judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of man.”¹⁵⁰

In this way, both subjective and objective aspects of knowledge coincide in terms of the teaching of Scripture. In Calvin’s passage on the Word and the Spirit in the 1539 *Institutes*, he asserts that it is the Holy Spirit who activates the Word of Scripture transforming it into the gospel which, for Calvin does not stand against the law but embraces it. This is important for understanding the Word of Scripture and the incarnate Logos; Christ alone is the theme of Scripture and this is disclosed by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit does not merely affect the Word; the Holy Spirit also quickens the human mind, thus enabling it to understand the Word as the gospel.¹⁵¹ This shows the effects of the Holy Spirit both in an objective way—i.e. in God’s works—as well as in a subjective way—i.e. in God’s special work: the renewal of the human mind. In this way we are directed toward human consciousness of the gospel. “The Word itself is not quite certain for us unless it be confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit... For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our

¹⁵⁰ C. O.1, 295.

minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the word."¹⁵² 'The gospel' refers to the invisible things of God, so that we find the image of God disclosed in the Word of God. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the minds of believers are both enabled to recognize the gospel and modified into the divine image.

2.1.3. The character of the *cognitio dei ac nostri*

2.1.3.1. The shift of the *duplex cognitio nostri*

In the *Institutes* of 1539, Calvin contrasts knowledge of God to knowledge of the self. It has already been noted that in this edition Calvin stresses the *duplex cognitio nostri* by differentiating the pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian states.¹⁵³ Calvin does not hesitate to admit that a particular nobility was given to our nature "which ought truly to arouse in us a zeal for righteousness and goodness. For we cannot think upon either our first condition or to what purpose we were formed without being prompted to meditate upon immortality, and to yearn after the Kingdom of God."¹⁵⁴ His comparison of the initial, created state of humanity with the current state of human corruption aims at eliciting both a feeling of distress and an eagerness for change—human beings were created and adorned with godly gifts for the purpose of fulfilling the creator's intentions, therefore they must recognize their responsibilities in this regard. Furthermore, recognizing our inability to achieve God's will after the fall

¹⁵¹ C. O. 1, 302. Cf. Wilhelm Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1957), 9-22.

¹⁵² C. O. 1, 302.

teaches us to be humble.¹⁵⁵

2.1.3.2. The character of the knowledge of God and the self

Calvin shifts his understanding of knowledge from an objective view in 1536 to a subjective view in 1539. In the 1536 edition he writes: “Nearly the whole of *sacred doctrine* consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves.”¹⁵⁶ In the 1539 edition we find: “Nearly all *the wisdom we possess* ... consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”¹⁵⁷ In the second edition, Calvin seems to give us an existential interpretation which corresponds to God’s revelation and the benefits which we receive in recognizing God. It can be termed ‘existential’ because it is more than just an abstract philosophical understanding. “Plato seems to have been compelled to consider that we sin only out of ignorance. ... The sinner tries to evade his innate power to judge between good and evil. Still, he is continually drawn back to it.... It is falsely said, therefore, that man sins out of ignorance alone.”¹⁵⁸ This insight is grounded upon Christian experience. Believers experience either fear of God or peace in God with this knowledge; these coincide respectively with God’s judgment or with the life in God.

In his chapter on the knowledge of God, Calvin goes on to contrast God’s sovereign

¹⁵³ C. O. 1, 279. Eva Maria Faber, “Der Mensch als Bild Gottes,” in *Symphonie von Gott und Mensch* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), 117-124.

¹⁵⁴ C. O. 1, 306.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. See also C. O. 1, 279-280.

¹⁵⁶ O. S. I, 37. *Summa fere sacrae doctrinae duabus his partibus constat: cognitione Dei ac nostri.*

¹⁵⁷ C. O. 1, 279. *Tota fere sapientiae nostrae summa, ... , duabus partibus constat: cognitione Dei, et nostri.*

¹⁵⁸ C. O. 1, 331.

nature to corrupted human nature.¹⁵⁹ Calvin introduces God as the fountain of truth, as wisdom and goodness, righteousness, rectitude, mercy, power and holiness. Not only did he create the universe, he sustains it, and in this respect he deserves gratitude from human beings. In contrast, the human creature is characterized by blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity and injustice, and has lost its sense of gratitude toward God.¹⁶⁰ This contrast between God's divine nature and humanity's depraved nature presents us with Calvin's understanding of the relation between the creator and his human creatures. For Calvin, since God created human beings this must be the presupposition of the relationship between them. The variations in the state of human nature correspond to the changes in the human relation to God. However, understanding the human position in creation, i.e. as a creature of God, leads to an appropriate human life which is thankful for God's gifts and lives out a God-oriented life with these gifts.

The above statements bring several points to light. First, the contrast appears to be an unchangeable reality which stresses the absolute distance between creator and creature. The creator is addressed as sovereign Lord¹⁶¹ and humankind is pictured as a deformed creature. This distance can be seen in God's eternal election, in which the elect are given divine grace in Christ in order to restore them to the original state of creation. This is discussed in chapter eight, which deals with the predestination and providence of God. At this point, Calvin again stresses God's grace in election, a grace which could never be derived from human merits. "But because he well knew that God could foresee nothing good in man except what he had already determined

¹⁵⁹ C. O. 1, 279.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

to bestow by the benefit of his election, he does not resort to that absurd disorder of putting good works before their cause.”¹⁶² The recognition of God’s sovereignty serves to allow for God’s freedom in election and predestination, which is beyond human understanding even though it is described in Scripture and recognized in faith. “If this thought prevails with us, that the Word of the Lord is the sole way that can lead us in our search for all that it is lawful to hold concerning him, and is the sole light to illumine our version of all that we should see of him, it will readily keep and restrain us from all rashness.”¹⁶³

Secondly, with the *duplex cognitio nostri*, Calvin modifies Luther’s understanding of the comparative mode of the *cognitio dei et hominis*.¹⁶⁴ He follows Luther in stressing the simultaneous functioning of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self, i.e. that the more human beings know themselves as fallen the more they come to pursue the knowledge of God. The more human beings are aware of sin, the more they pursue the knowledge of God. Yet Calvin deviates from Luther by stressing the contrast between the pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian states. In this correlation of the creator to his creature, the contrast between the nature of the creator, i.e. that which was copied in the *imago dei*, and corrupted human nature accentuates the loss of the *imago dei*. This awareness of self-corruption makes human beings humble. “For what is that origin? It is that from which we have fallen. What is that end of our creation? It is that from which we have been completely estranged.”¹⁶⁵ It is in this way that the human mind attains the room to learn this knowledge of God, and with it the image of

¹⁶¹ The topic of God’s sovereignty is elaborated and extended in the 1539 *Institutes*. This occurs together with the enlargement of both the chapter on God’s predestination and providence as well as the chapter on the knowledge of God.

¹⁶² C. O. 1, 867. See also C. O. 1, 868-870.

¹⁶³ C. O. 1, 863.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Gerhard Eberling, *Lutherstudien 1*, 239-246.

God is renewed. In his 1539 description of the *imago dei*, Calvin cites Col 3: 9-10 in order to illustrate the renewal of the *imago dei*.¹⁶⁶ “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self in knowledge according to the image of its creator.” Moreover, it is the correlation between the creator and the human creature which the human mind experiences. “Here, then, is what God’s truth requires us to seek in examining ourselves: it requires the kind of knowledge that will strip us of all confidence in our own ability, deprive us of all occasion for boasting, and lead us to submission. We ought to keep this rule if we wish to reach the true goals of both wisdom and action.”¹⁶⁷

Thirdly, the existential orientation of the *cognitio dei ac nostri* can be seen in Calvin’s teaching on repentance.¹⁶⁸ For Calvin, repentance is grounded upon faith, which is itself rooted on the assurance of God’s goodness as revealed in Christ. In other words, faith is the knowledge of Christ which is held with assurance, and which in turn bestows upon believers in their unity with Christ the peace of God.¹⁶⁹ In chapter nine, which deals with repentance, Calvin agrees that penance consists of a process of mortification and vivification. “But, certain men¹⁷⁰ well versed in penance, even long before these times, meaning to speak simply and sincerely according to the

¹⁶⁵ C. O. 1, 306.

¹⁶⁶ C. O. 1, 307-308.

¹⁶⁷ C. O. 1, 305.

¹⁶⁸ This description is already found in the 1536 *Institutes* in his chapter on the false sacraments, in the section on penance. O. S. I, 170. Since Calvin had already asserted the comparative model of the knowledge of God and the self since the 1539 *Institutes*, his understanding of penance helps us to comprehend the functioning of the knowledge of God and the self in this context.

¹⁶⁹ C. O. 1, 456. *Cognitionem divinae voluntatis dum vocamus, non intelligimus comprehensionem, qualis esse solet earum rerum quae sub humanum sensum cadunt.* See also C. O. 1, 457. *Nam ut dubia et versatili opinione non est contenta fides, ita nec obscura perplexaque conceptione; sed plenam et fixam, qualis de rebus compertis et probatis esse solet, certitudinem requirit.*

¹⁷⁰ Calvin does not mention particular theologians in this context.

rule of Scripture, said that it consists of two parts: mortification and vivification.”¹⁷¹ Calvin tells us that penance provides a dual subjective awareness: first of the sinful character of the self, and of God’s judgment. Mortification works in the souls of believers who recognize their sin and God’s pending judgment upon them. In acknowledging this sin, they become unsatisfied with themselves and grieve over their souls which have been infiltrated by sin. As a consequence, believers strongly desire a change of life.¹⁷² Yet in this encounter with God’s vengeance, they become humble and are terrified and begin to despair.¹⁷³ “For they were striving for this one thing: that, confused by their sins and pierced by the fear of divine judgment, they should fall down and humble themselves before him whom they had offended, and with true repentance return into the right path.”¹⁷⁴ While Calvin accepts this understanding of repentance, he deepens and elaborates it in three ways, focusing on the turning of our lives toward God, on the fear of God and on the aspects of mortification and vivification. His notion of the fear of God must be surveyed in this context.

Calvin argues that fear of God’s judgment elicits repentance in two ways. First, recognition of divine judgment, which examines human deeds and thoughts, compels human beings to change and to live out a God-oriented life, i.e. one which is acceptable to God and in turn liberates us from God’s wrath. Calvin cites Jer 4: 4 “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem”, and Acts 17: 30-31 “While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

¹⁷¹ C. O. 1, 687.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness.” Calvin speaks of the subjective awareness of God’s impending penalties upon an ungodly mode of life marked by evil deeds. With this awareness comes the desire for a change of life, since God can only accept that life which is appropriately in accord with his rule. Thus in this way human beings find peace before God.¹⁷⁵

Second, fear of God’s judgment not only motivates penance in general, but also urges believers to return to the Father. Calvin refers to Deuteronomy,¹⁷⁶ where we see God’s hate of sin and his role as judge against evil deeds. God instructs and urges his children to repent by the use of punishments. In penance, believers not only fear God’s penalties, but also come to hate sin and the results of sin, both of which displease God. In support, Calvin appeals to 2 Cor 7: 10 “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret.”¹⁷⁷

This negative side to the knowledge of God reminds us of Calvin’s understanding of God as judge in the 1536 *Institutes*,¹⁷⁸ punishing those who do not obey him. In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin’s understanding of God shifts. God is now the one who urges his people to return to him under the threat of his punishment.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ C. O. 1, 689.

¹⁷⁶ C. O. 1, 690. *Exemplum habes Deuteronomi vigesimo nono*. Calvin does not mention chapter or verse.

¹⁷⁷ C. O. 1, 690.

¹⁷⁸ C. O. 1, 37 and 39. In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin’s work on God as judge can be found mainly in the sections on the knowledge of God and on the law. As a judge God encounters the children of his wrath and punishes the unrighteous. Correspondingly, the law acts as a mirror which reflects human inability to achieve the imperatives of the law. In this description, human beings are threatened with eternal death.

¹⁷⁹ In Calvin’s elaboration of his understanding of the law in 1539, he shifts his stress on the orientation of the law, which now points out the necessity of finding God’s grace in Christ. Moreover, Calvin relates human consciousness of God’s judgment to knowledge of the self, which induces fear of eternal death and makes human beings humble and ready to search out God’s mercy and pursue a God-oriented life. C. O. 1, 373; 431; 434. However, this shift in Calvin’s interpretation of the law suggests

2.2. The imago dei as a relation between God and human beings¹⁸⁰

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin enlarges his understanding of the imago dei as a human relation to God in two ways. First, Calvin defines this relation as participation in God in creation.¹⁸¹ This coincides with participation in Christ, which one encounters in his descriptions of the renewal of the imago dei in the *Institutes* since 1536. This implies an active relation which occurs from the human side. Secondly, in the *Institutes* of 1539 Calvin adds a chapter detailing the similarities and differences between the New Testament and the Old Testament, yet where God's covenantal love is seen as connecting the two. The promise of the covenant in the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, who brings salvation to human beings.¹⁸² In this sense, God's relation to human beings shifts from one of fatherly love in creation to one of covenantal love in Christ. At this point, we find two parallels in the reciprocal relationship between God and human beings.

that believers too confront the judgment of God, which compels them to find God's mercy in Christ. In other words, God the Father can also be judge at those times when believers do not follow his law.

¹⁸⁰ There is no precise consensus among scholars on the question of whether Calvin's understanding of the imago dei is to be seen as relational or as a natural orientation. Barth, Torrance and Oberman stress that Calvin's understanding of the imago dei highlights a relational dimension. Engel thinks it stresses a human relation to God as well as human nature. Gerrish thinks the imago dei embraces both orientations, though the relational aspect is highlighted. Brian A. Gerrish, "The Mirror of God's Goodness: A Key Metaphor in Calvin's View of Man," in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 153-154; Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946); Heiko A. Oberman, "The Pursuit of Happiness," in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1993), 251-283; Mary Potter Engel, "Imago Dei," in *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Academic, 1988), 39-72; Thomas F. Torrance, "Imago Dei I-III," in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 35-82.

¹⁸¹ C. O. 1, 307. *Nam parentem omnium nostrum Adam creatum esse constat ad imaginem et similitudinem Die. Quo indicatur factum esse participem divinae tum sapientiae, tum iustitiae, tum virtutis.* C. O. 1, 308. *Bonorum enim omne genus participatione cum ipso adhaerebat, eorum nexu perpetuo cum eo victurus, si in ea modo quam acceperat integritate stetit.*

2.2.1. Fatherly love and human participation in God in creation

According to Calvin's interpretation of the first part of the creed, he asserts that God the Father not only provided us with a world in which to live,¹⁸³ but that he also endowed us with the *imago dei*. God's direct, 'hands on' participation in the creation of human beings is unique and involves the participation of the Trinitarian God in his eternal council. However, the provision of the world, the endowment of the *imago dei* and the constant provision for and satisfaction of human needs show God's fatherly love and his participation in continuing human existence.

As for human existence, Calvin thinks of the *imago dei* as human participation in the characteristics of God, which consist of wisdom, righteousness, truth, uprightness, power, and purity.¹⁸⁴ The human creature is able to respond to God's word and to obey God. Moreover, human beings are to be grateful for this endowment and for God's love.¹⁸⁵ In this way, the human creature glorifies the creator.

2.2.2. Covenantal love and human participation in Christ in redemption

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin adds a new chapter on the similarities and differences between the Old and the New Testaments, where he outlines his belief that the covenant of God, which points to God's promise, is the unifying thread which runs through both testaments. This notion is expressed particularly in the similarity of the two covenants.

¹⁸² C. O. 1, 817.

¹⁸³ C. O. 1, 511-512.

¹⁸⁴ C. O. 1, 307-308.

Due to his stress on the covenant—a covenant which human merits or efforts cannot achieve—Calvin argues that the *imago dei* is better seen as a relational orientation. Nothing which stems from human capacities can assist reconciliation to God. Calvin proposes three points in support of his assertion. First, he recognizes that the Jews were adopted into the anticipation of eternal life. This adoption is affirmed through the oracles, the law and the prophets. Yet by its very nature as adoption, it cannot be achieved genetically, generation after generation. No natural means can assure or accomplish adoption by God. Secondly, all human communication with God is due to God’s mercy. Human merits cannot assist in this human relation to God. Finally, it is only in Christ that the promise of God is given to human beings.¹⁸⁶

We notice a shift here in the stress placed upon God’s relation with human beings. In the 1536 *Institutes* the focus is on God’s fatherly love which is seen in his sending of Jesus Christ; in the 1539 *Institutes* the stress shifts to God’s covenantal love in fulfilling his promise.

That human beings may partake in Christ is the effect of the Holy Spirit upon us. In the work of the Spirit, believers can participate in Christ. But what does participation in Christ actually mean? Calvin argues that partaking in Christ coincides with regeneration: it is a twofold involvement in Christ—a process encompassing the ‘mortification’ of the old man and ‘vivification’ into new life. For Calvin, the aim of regeneration is the restoration of the *imago dei*. Human beings are regenerated into

¹⁸⁵ C. O. 1, 279.

¹⁸⁶ C. O. 1, 802-803.

the righteousness of God through the work of Christ and by partaking in him.¹⁸⁷

To summarize, the *imago dei* signifies reciprocal participation between God and human beings. It is because of fatherly love that God created human beings with the *imago dei*, and he sustains them because of this love. Human beings could, with the *imago dei*, respond to God by partaking in God's characteristics. Yet after the fall, human beings were alienated from God. It is due to God's covenantal love that he gives us Jesus Christ for our redemption, and so that human beings can participate in Christ and communicate with God. The process of mortification and vivification points to human participation in Christ. In this edition, the interrelated relationship between God and human beings becomes more concrete.

2.3. The *imago dei* as the integrity of human nature

2.3.1. The creation

In his expansion of the section on the knowledge of God, Calvin highlights the point that human beings contemplate God in nature, and that this reminds us that we are the best works of God. "Yet we comprehend their [i.e. human beings as the works of God] chief purpose, their value, and the reason why we should ponder them, only when we descend into ourselves and contemplate by what means the Lord shows in us his life, wisdom, and power; and exercises in our behalf his righteousness, goodness, and mercy."¹⁸⁸ It is clear here that human beings are to contemplate their own marvelous nature as creatures and are to do this by contemplating God's

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

workmanship in themselves. This workmanship reflects the glory of God.

2.3.2. The 1539 imago-text

In the 1539 *Institutes*, one notes that Calvin does not discuss the workings of human nature when describing the imago dei. He tends to describe rather the relational dimension of the imago dei. Although the imago dei is defined as the integrity of human nature in creation and is renewed through the human mind, citing Eph 4: 23, the correlation between the imago dei and human nature remains unclear.¹⁸⁹

In relating the imago dei to human nature, it appears that Calvin thinks of human nature as a created thing upon which God bestows his godly gifts. When this created nature is healthy and clothed with spiritual gifts then human beings become the best works of God in creation; they leave their corrupted human nature behind, evidence of another human existence, one alienated from God. It is only in relation to God that human beings can again be God's best works and be supported by God's grace.

The variation seen in the imago dei corresponds directly to the variation in the human relation to God. Human nature either expresses the imago dei through the grace of God or, separated from God's grace, represents merely the loss of the imago dei. These two types of human existence are described as a contrast of those characteristics between the first Adam and the second Adam.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ C. O. 1, 289-290.

¹⁸⁹ See the above discussion on the human relation to God.

2.3.3. What is natural?

In his chapter on human corruption, Calvin clarifies his use of the word ‘natural’. He uses this word to refer to corrupted human nature, in order to assert that this depraved nature is grounded upon human perversity. “We call it ‘natural’ in order that no man may think that anyone obtains it through bad conduct, since it holds all men fast by hereditary right.”¹⁹¹ Calvin supports his argument for calling this state ‘natural’ by referring to Augustine, who “in view of man’s corrupted nature, is not afraid to call ‘natural’ those sins which necessarily reign in our flesh wherever God’s grace is absent.”¹⁹²

However, Calvin insists that this depraved nature is merely an accidental quality which arises on account of the fall. In other words, he denies that the actual substance of human nature, as it was given at creation has changed in the soul. “We deny that it has flowed from nature in order to indicate that it is an adventitious quality which comes upon man rather than a substantial property which has been imprinted from the beginning.”¹⁹³

If we reason back from this, we find that Calvin thinks of the *imago dei* as a substantial human property engraved upon us at creation. Yet he avoids using the expression “*human nature*”; by refusing to call this nature human he opens up a space in which the sustenance of the grace of God must be the condition of the operation of this nature. For Calvin, it is only corrupted nature which functions with the support of

¹⁹⁰ C. O. 1, 308. Calvin omits here the reference to Rom 5 which we found in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

human capacities. The expression of the *imago dei*, on the other hand, is sustained only by divine grace. Calvin's tendency to adopt "nature" here when describing the state of human existence is an attempt to stress the role of divine grace, yet this can easily lead to confusion.

2.3.4. The renewal of human nature

In his chapter on repentance, Calvin departs from traditional interpretations of the concept¹⁹⁴ and develops his own ideas, in which repentance signifies a true turning of our lives toward God. On the basis of this understanding, Calvin goes on to examine this transformation not only in terms of external expressions, but also in regards human nature as it is found within the soul. Calvin stresses that it is only the transformed soul which can produce the outward works coherent to its restored state. Calvin appeals to Ezek 18: 31, Deut 6: 5, and Jer 24: 7 to support his assertion of this transformation.¹⁹⁵ "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people and I will be their God" (Jer 24: 7); "Cast away from you all the transgression that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek 18: 31); "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Deut 6: 5). For Calvin, it is Moses and the Prophets who illustrate best the repentance of the Israelites, who are transformed in their whole being. Such total repentance displays the extent of change which occurs through the deepest layers of the heart and of our affections. This movement from the denial of their wickedness to

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ C. O. 1, 312.

¹⁹⁴ C. O. 1, 687.

the pursuit of God’s righteousness points to the inward transformation of the soul and its sincere turning toward God.

Reasoning back from this, Calvin cites Isa 58: 6, “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” Calvin reads this as satire by the Prophet, condemning the works of hypocrites, which are merely external expressions of conversion without sincere repentance.

Furthermore, Calvin inserts yet another section on the process of mortification and vivification, in which he attempts to clarify further the concrete transformation which occurs in human nature in this process.¹⁹⁶ In regeneration, the flesh must be mortified so that the spirit may be vivified.¹⁹⁷ The stress here is certainly on the death of the flesh, and is supported by reference to Rom 8: 7, “For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot.” Yet Calvin highlights not only the necessity of abandoning the flesh, which in its innate disposition is “full of evil and of perversity,”¹⁹⁸ but also the difficulty of such an abandonment. It is impossible, in Calvin’s view, to remove the influence of the flesh completely, because the flesh corrupts human nature in its entirety. “Nor can we think of the flesh as completely destroyed unless we have wiped out whatever we have from ourselves.”¹⁹⁹ Because of the flesh we are set entirely against God’s law.

¹⁹⁵ C. O. 1, 689.

¹⁹⁶ Calvin identifies repentance with regeneration from the 1539 *Institutes* on. C. O. 1, 690. *Nam si vere morti eius communicamus, eius virtute crucifigitur vetus noster homo, et peccati corpus emoritur, ne amplius vigeat primae naturae corruptio. Si resurrectionis sumus participes, per eam suscitamur in vitae novitatem, quae Dei iustitiae respondeat.*

¹⁹⁷ C. O. 1, 690.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ C. O. 1, 690.

Therefore, Calvin argues for a denial of our depraved nature in order that we may obey God's law. Repentance produces a renewal of our nature which can bear good fruits, such as righteousness, judgment and mercy.²⁰⁰ Further, Calvin attributes the renewal of nature to the effect of the Holy Spirit. "That comes to pass when the Spirit of God so imbues our souls, steeped in his holiness, with both new thoughts and feelings, that they can be rightly considered new."²⁰¹ It is clear here that Calvin thinks of the renewal of the *imago dei* as the renewal of human nature, a redirection of the way the human mind and heart function, orienting them toward God.

2.3.5. Against the Anabaptists

In his chapter on the knowledge of the self, Calvin strongly refutes the arguments of certain Anabaptists regarding the renewal of human nature. They maintain that human nature after regeneration no longer needs to worship God nor needs to discern good from evil; the restored human nature is completely under the control of the Holy Spirit which now directs the life of believers. "The children of God, they assert, restored to the state of innocence, now need not take care to bridle the lust of the flesh, but should rather follow the Spirit as their guide, under whose impulsion they can never go astray."²⁰² Calvin explains that certain Anabaptists misunderstand what it means to be liberated from the curse of 'the old man' through Christ. Because of this superficial understanding of Christian freedom and 'innocence', any difference between just and unjust, good and evil, truth and falsehood, is for them no longer necessary. Calvin appeals to the relation between Christ and the Spirit as "one Christ

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² C. O. 1, 350.

and one Spirit of Christ.”²⁰³ Calvin then appeals to the Spirit, who cannot tolerate iniquities but is the producer of virtues and justice. In this way, the same Spirit enables believers to judge each thing appropriately, to keep proper temperance and to pursue God’s righteousness.²⁰⁴

Calvin argues that the Holy Spirit is that which cleanses us of all impurity and enables us to obey God’s words. Calvin stresses that human obedience to God can be insisted upon only when believers are first freed from their unbridled desires and have had their affections redirected toward the good. Furthermore, Calvin cites 2 Cor 12: 7, in which even Paul was hindered by the messenger of Satan. Taking up Paul’s statement, Calvin asserts that sanctification is a life-long process, inasmuch as hindrance arises from our dwelling in mortal bodies; it is the flesh which begets all vices and causes the moral inertia so characteristic of our nature. “Thus it comes about that, far removed from perfection, we must move steadily forward, and though entangled in vices, daily fight against them. From this it also follows that we must shake off sloth and carelessness, and watch with intent minds lest, unaware, we be overwhelmed by the stratagems of our flesh.”²⁰⁵

To summarize, with the expansion and elaboration of the 1539 *Institutes* Calvin’s understanding of the *imago dei* with regard to human nature has become less ambiguous in comparison to the 1536 *Institutes*. The insertion of his view on the *imago dei* as human participation in God displays Calvin’s stress on its relational dimension, though we note that Calvin’s use of Eph 4: 23 does not explain much in

²⁰³ C. O. 1, 351.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

terms of the *imago dei*'s natural dimension. Calvin's assertion of human corruption, which he describes as "natural", assists us to understand his view on the total corruption of human beings which occurs in the fall. His arguments regarding the renewal of human nature present its close relation to the knowledge and effect of the Holy Spirit. Finally, restoring the *imago dei* is a life-long process in which the new life must fight against the unbridled affections and idleness of the flesh.

2.4. Human corruption and the *imago dei*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, between his work on the knowledge of the self and on the law, Calvin discussed the remnant knowledge of God. In 1539, this discussion is expanded, divided and placed into two separate chapters entitled: "The Knowledge of God" and "The Knowledge of the Self."

2.4.1. Remnant of the knowledge of God

In his new chapter on the knowledge of God, Calvin argues that a remnant of the knowledge of God has survived. The fallen can still find traces of God within the natural world. Yet this knowledge is not sufficient to bring human beings back to God—only Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for reconciliation with God. For Calvin, this relic of the knowledge of God resides within the human mind and beholds God's splendor in his work in nature.²⁰⁶ While this remnant is not sufficient for reconciliation, it is sufficient to make human creatures inexcusable for any ignorance of God. After all, human beings were created to recognize the workmanship of the

²⁰⁶ C. O. 1, 286-287.

creator.

2.4.2. Human conscience

In his chapter on the knowledge of the self in the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin cites Rom 2: 14-15 and identifies human conscience with the natural law. Calvin identifies three aspects within the knowledge of God: to know God, to know God's will toward us and to frame our life according to his rule.²⁰⁷ In explaining the third aspect, Calvin argues that knowing God's rule is to orient our lives toward God, and this bears the fruits of righteousness.²⁰⁸ For Calvin, those capacities and abilities which can be used to benefit this life are given to believers as well as non-believers. In other words, Calvin sees this third aspect of knowledge, i.e. to live according to God's rule, as the natural law which, after the fall, was engraved upon the hearts of all human beings. To support this claim he cites Rom 2: 14 and claims that "There is nothing more common than for a man to be sufficiently instructed in a right standard of conduct by natural law (of which the apostle is here speaking)."²⁰⁹

Because the law is imprinted on the natural being of each person, this excuses no one from God's judgment.²¹⁰ "The purpose of natural law, therefore, is to render man inexcusable. This is not a bad definition: natural law is that apprehension of the conscience which distinguishes sufficiently between just and unjust, and which

²⁰⁷ C. O. 1, 327. ..., *et spiritualem illam perspicentiam, quae tribus potissimum rebus constat, Deum nosse, eius erga nos voluntatem, et formandae secundum illam vitae rationem.* Calvin revises this sentence in the 1559 *Institutes*. The second aspect is written as *paternum erga nos eius favorem, in quo salus nostra consistit.* The word *illam* in the third aspect is replaced by *legis regulam*. The revision of the 1559 *Institutes* gives us a clear picture of what Calvin wants to express. I provide here my own English translation of this text.

²⁰⁸ C. O. 1, 330.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

deprives men of the excuse of ignorance, while it proves them guilty by their own testimony.”²¹¹ Thus conscience has a very close relation to the knowledge of God and the law. In this sense, Calvin’s understanding deviates from those philosophical understandings which would see knowledge as the opposite of ignorance. Calvin thinks that human beings are given at least conscience, with which they can discern just from unjust.²¹²

Calvin’s apparent lack of differentiation between the temporal character of conscience, as natural law, and its eschatological character, as confronting the judgment of God, requires clarification. In his discussion on the ability to discern good from evil, Calvin relates knowledge to the Decalogue. His aim here is to illustrate that even corrupted understanding still possesses the common ability to discern good from evil. While this ability shows the advantage of human reason in contrast to animals, reason is blind when it comes to the law in the first table of the Decalogue. “And if we want to measure our reason by God’s law, the pattern of perfect righteousness, we shall find in how many respects it is blind! Surely it does not at all comply with the principal points of the first table; such as putting our faith in God.”²¹³ Calvin understands this problem of mental blindness as being grounded in the tendency of the fallen soul to function on the basis of sense perceptions rather than on the Holy Spirit.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ C. O. 1, 331. Calvin changes the word *sensus* in the 1539 edition to *agnitio* in 1559 text displaying the direction in which his thought matured. This notion can also be found in his *Psychopannychia*. C. O. 5, 203-204.

²¹² C. O. 1, 331.

²¹³ C. O. 1, 332.

²¹⁴ Ibid. Calvin often expresses spiritual apprehension as ‘seeing’ or ‘beholding’. In contrast, the blindness of human beings points to an inability to understand the knowledge of God. These expressions are also found in the context of faith. Cf. Barbara Pitkin, *What Pure Eyes Can See: Calvin’s doctrine of faith in its exegetical context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30.

Therefore, the fallen mind cannot achieve that knowledge contained in the first table of the Decalogue. However, this is not to say that fallen reason cannot apprehend the first table at all, since even “profane men desire to worship God.”²¹⁵ In spite of the lack of knowledge regarding the first table, Calvin admits that the fallen soul does possess some understanding of the second table. “Men have somewhat more understanding of the precepts of the Second Table because these are more closely concerned with the preservation of civil society among them.”²¹⁶ By appealing to human experience, Calvin speaks of the dilemma within the fallen soul in bearing the knowledge of God. “And this is the common judgment of human reason: the mark of a servile and abject person is to bear it with patience; that of an honorable and freeborn man to shake it off.”²¹⁷ However, conscience in this context points to the remnant of the knowledge of God in the law, which is given as a whole at the beginning of creation. In the fall, this given knowledge is obliterated. In this way, Calvin’s understanding of conscience displays eternal as well as temporal dimensions.

Schreiner comments: “A remnant of the divine image, the human conscience serves not only to condemn the human being before the judgment of God but to conserve society by distinguishing good from evil, equity from injustice and order from disorder.”²¹⁸ Thus, human conscience coincides with knowledge, albeit a deformed form of knowledge. “It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has

²¹⁵ C. O. 1, 332.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

engraved upon the minds of men.”²¹⁹ This corresponds to the remaining knowledge of God in creation, and to Calvin’s assertion that human beings are responsible for their inability to recognize God. However, Calvin’s understanding of conscience in relation to the *imago dei* leaves us still with an important question: What is the precise correlation between our conscience and the knowledge of God, and how do we define the boundary between them?

2.4.3. The excellence of creaturehood

Although it tended more to highlight the corruption of human nature, that remnant of the knowledge of God mentioned above was in fact adopted to display **the excellence of creaturehood**, i.e. the excellence of the human creature. In other words, human beings and human nature still remain God’s best work even after the fall.

Calvin adds a new section on the strength of human understanding within this fallen state. Calvin rejects that idea which suggests that fallen humankind totally lost any perception of God and became blind, and appeals rather to the word of God and to human experience. For Calvin, human nature was engraved with an eagerness for the love of God. After the fall, human nature did indeed become corrupt, yet the desire to seek the truth was not effaced completely. Therefore, fallen humankind still longs for the truth, even though they wander astray and toil in vain. This wandering search for truth appears as a token of the remnant of the *imago dei*.²²⁰ In turn, Calvin points to this deficiency in brute animals in order to highlight the excellence of the human

²¹⁸ Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (North Carolina, Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1991), 87.

²¹⁹ C. O. 1, 1112.

creature.

Precisely here one confronts Calvin's flexible rhetoric. In his description of the *imago dei*, he asserts that it was obliterated after the fall, as he notably wants to stress the consequences of the fall.²²¹ Yet while arguing that corrupted human nature still remains above the rest of creation, Calvin displays a high evaluation of the human creature. This can also be seen in his treatment of the human ability to deal both with "earthly things" and "heavenly things."²²²

2.4.4. Human responsibility for the loss of the *imago dei*

2.4.4.1. Instruction in Faith in 1537

Calvin describes human responsibility for the fall in yet another way in his 1537 *Instruction in Faith*. He focuses here on the variation of human nature. Calvin argues that at the beginning of creation, human beings were endowed with the *imago dei*, and that it lent them a particular nobility. Yet instead of being content with the excellence of human nature as it was provided by the creator, human beings were proud and raised themselves up inordinately. As a consequence, the *imago dei* was severely violated.

In this text, Calvin argues that human beings were created with the *imago dei* in order to recognize God. "At first man was formed in the image and resemblance of God in order that man might admire his Author in the adornments with which he had been

²²⁰ C. O. 1, 324.

²²¹ C. O. 1, 308-309.

nobly vested by God and honor him with proper acknowledgment.”²²³

In contrast, the now perverted state is characterized first by a corrupted intellect, which produces falsehood and ignorance regarding the knowledge of God, and secondly by the deformed will which is consumed by inordinate desires against the divine order.²²⁴ Moreover, this perverse nature now rages against its creator, who, however, having made this creature and despite its fall still sustains it. Human beings do violence to themselves in the fall, inasmuch as human nature is a part of the divine order. Human beings are responsible for the fall because although they possessed sufficient knowledge to obey the rule of the creator, they chose to act against God using those very capacities God had given them so that they may follow his word.

To summarize, Calvin highlights human nature as it was first created: it was able to understand the word of God but could make the choice to obey God or to turn away from him. This human autonomy was misused in the fall. However, the workings of human nature in making this decision against God displays the violence committed by human beings to God’s set order in that they were not satisfied with the nobility of their endowment and stepped over the boundary placed upon them as creatures.

2.4.4.2. The 1539 *Institutes*

At the opening of his chapter on the law in the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin summarizes the *cognitio dei et hominis* in correspondence to the law. Knowledge of God consists in

²²² C. O. 1, 324-325.

²²³ *Instruction in Faith* (1537), 24.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 25.

the revelation of God's majesty and our appropriate worship of him in this light, as we find in the first commandment. Yet the law displays the inability of human beings to reach God's righteousness, and compels us to abandon self-confidence in our own strengths to achieve virtue. In abandoning self-confidence, we learn to be humble and turn to search for God's mercy in Christ.²²⁵

Furthermore, Calvin asserts that human conscience—the natural law—can be identified with the Ten Commandments, and that these are imprinted even upon fallen human beings. He highlights the operation of conscience within the human mind and points out the often vivid reactions of the corrupt mind under the accusations of its conscience. Yet as we have already seen, the natural law does not give sufficient direction regarding how one is to worship God. This deficiency occurs on account of the corruption of our original human nature. In this way, the fallen are not aware of the vanity of life and cannot learn to be humble. "Besides this, he is so puffed up with haughtiness and ambition, and so blinded by self-love, that he is yet unable to look upon himself and, as it were, to descend within himself, that he may humble and abase himself."²²⁶ For this reason, God provides us with the two tables of the law in order to compensate for the insufficiency of natural law.

Calvin's argument then progresses to touch upon God's constancy and consistency as the sovereign Lord, as the one who deserves human obedience due to that divine order illustrated in the law. He admonishes believers not to follow the caprices of the mind and their inordinate affections, but to rely on God's will and pursue

²²⁵ C. O. 1, 371.

²²⁶ C. O. 1, 372.

righteousness at all times.²²⁷ Calvin argues that God has the right to require our obedience because God is always consistent with his own being, thus he can only accept righteousness, and only stand against iniquity. “Whatever he requires of us, because he can require only what is right, we must obey out of natural obligation.”²²⁸ Thus based on this reason, Calvin claims that we can make no excuse for our failure to achieve God’s requirements: it is our duty.

Furthermore, we have no one other than ourselves to blame for sin and its power over the human mind. “If our lust in which sin reigns so holds us bound that we are not free to obey our Father, there is no reason why we should claim necessity as a defense, for the evil of that necessity is both within us and to be imputed to us.”²²⁹ Calvin discusses human perversity prior to the chapter on the law. He does not feel that it is necessary to appeal to his understanding of human corruption in order to support his assertion here. Moreover, Calvin sees obedience to God in terms of a human acknowledgement of the relationship between the infinite creator and the finite creature. In Calvin’s view, even the fallen person is aware of our duties because of the accusation of conscience.

2.5. Eternity and temporality

2.5.1. Human corruption

In his chapter on the knowledge of man, Calvin differentiates the human ability to approach “earthly things” from that ability to approach “heavenly things”. He does

²²⁷ C. O. 1, 372.

²²⁸ C. O. 1, 373.

this in order to explain the functioning of corrupted human nature and to illustrate the remnant of the *imago dei*. The former embraces the ability to preserve the present life within human community, i.e. the development of social systems in order to secure this life and to perform social justice. Nevertheless, the ability to manage earthly things does not go beyond the life in this world.²³⁰ It would seem in this context, that Calvin thinks that natural law is given as the order of creation which is engraved upon us and authorized by God.

Calvin states that it is a natural instinct within human beings which organizes social ordinances. Under the heading of “earthly things” Calvin lists secular authority, the family system, social sciences and natural science.²³¹ Social ordinances are therefore to be understood as earthly things.

“Heavenly things” consist of the knowledge of God, the mysteries of the kingdom of God and the value of existence, to which human intellect hardly approaches after the point of human corruption.²³² Once again we meet Calvin’s flexible rhetoric in his illustration of the remnant of the *imago dei*. In the 1539 *imago* text, perverse human existence is described as “earthly filth” in order to establish a clear antithesis with heavenly purity. It is clear that in his description of the *imago dei*, the emphasis falls upon its renewal. Hence, “the residue of the *imago dei*” is illustrated as earthly filth in order to produce the contrast. But in his section on human corruption in the 1539 text, Calvin describes corrupted human reason positively, particularly in its ability to achieve temporal things. “Its efforts do not always become so worthless as to have no

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ C. O. 1, 324-325.

²³¹ Ibid.

effect, especially when it turns its attention to things below.”²³³ This positive description is focused upon human activity in the creation of social ordinances, in the arts and in the sciences.²³⁴ Yet suddenly perverse human existence—i.e. in terms of the remnant of the *imago dei*—is no longer earthly filth, but is a gift of the Holy Spirit for the common good of all human beings.²³⁵ With this high respect for human nature, Calvin asserts that the *imago dei* is the ground upon which all human beings, be they believers or non-believers, deserve good treatment in society. This notion will be discussed fully in the next section on Calvin’s teaching on the law.

2.5.2. The description of the *imago dei*

In the description of the *imago dei* within the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin states that Chrysostom thought of the *imago dei* as signifying human dominion over the other creatures. Calvin agrees that this points to the human capacity to govern, i.e. our temporal political character. Nevertheless, Calvin insists that the *imago dei* is “an inner good of the soul,” and not an outward orientation. The antithesis between that life oriented toward heaven and that bound to the world is the presupposition of Calvin’s interpretation of the *imago dei* in 1539.²³⁶

To summarize, it is interesting to note that according to Calvin’s understanding of the knowledge of the self, i.e. *duplex cognitio nostri*, the practice of social ordinances is not separated from heavenly things at the beginning of creation. After the fall, ‘heavenly things’ are no longer pursued and the exercise of social ordinances is

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ C. O. 1, 326.

deformed, a deformity we recognize in the remnant of the imago dei. Yet in the imago-description of the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin highlights that eschatological character of the renewal of the imago dei.²³⁷ However, it must be said that the tension and inconsistency between the temporality and eternity of the character of the imago dei in Calvin's theology follow that in the 1536 *Institutes*. The tension and inconsistency are growing due to Calvin's positive description and recognition of the remnant of that nature which was imprinted at the beginning of creation.

2.6. The imago dei as the foundation of ethics

2.6.1. The sixth commandment—"You shall not kill"

In Calvin's exposition of the sixth commandment in the 1536 *Institutes*, he identified two aspects to this prohibition: a passive aspect, i.e. in doing no harm to one's neighbors, and an active aspect, i.e. to help and provide for both friend and foe.²³⁸ In his 1537 *Instruction in Faith*, Calvin omitted the active aspect and argued that the imago dei was the basis of the commandment. Because of the imago dei, fellow human beings have to be treated as sacred. No one can injure a human being without doing violence to the imago dei within him or her.²³⁹ However, the description remains generally unclear. Does the imago dei point to God's authorship of human beings here or to something else? Is Calvin presenting us with an eschatological dimension of the imago dei or with a temporal one in this context? In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin appeals both to the imago dei and to the fact that we share the same

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ C. O. 1, 308.

²³⁷ Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, "Imago Dei I," in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 43-45.

²³⁸ O. S. I, 50.

²³⁹ *Instruction in Faith* (1537), 33.

humanity with our fellow human beings in order to establish a foundation for the value of human life, arguing thus that it should neither be wounded nor destroyed. In this context, Calvin sets up a parallel between the *imago dei* and our shared humanity. He asserts that the *imago dei* is a universal mark in humankind which refers to God the creator and lawgiver. He does not pursue any further discussion of the relation between the *imago dei* and God in this context, returning to the topic in his discussion of redemption and grace in Christ.²⁴⁰ This implies two decisive points: first, that there must be a remnant of the *imago dei* which is not completely obliterated after the fall, and second, that it only has an eschatological orientation, i.e. as a relation to God.

Within the expansion of his discussion on the law in the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin interprets the law under the concept of the *cognitio dei et hominis*. For Calvin, the law functions to give us true knowledge of God, that human beings may know God by encountering his throne and serve him correctly in worship. In regards knowledge of the self, corrupt human beings must learn to deny themselves due to the unrighteousness of the self.²⁴¹ This exposition on the knowledge of God and the self reflects Calvin's teaching on the *cognitio dei et hominis* at the beginning of the book. It is clear in this context that Calvin thinks of the law as a mirror which reflects human iniquity. Therefore, the stress of the *cognitio hominis* falls upon human awareness of the necessity for humility, without any comparison between pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian states.²⁴² However as we have seen, the law is imprinted upon the human heart and points to human conscience, thus manifesting human responsibility for its own corruption by recognizing this difference between good and

²⁴⁰ C. O. 1, 409.

²⁴¹ C. O. 1, 371.

²⁴² Ibid.

evil. Human beings are indebted to God because they are created to serve their maker.²⁴³

Calvin asserts the view that fallen human beings are accused by conscience and thus feel the judgment of God. While the law teaches them knowledge of God, natural law does not assist them toward true worship of God, which alone can please God. “But man is so shrouded in the darkness of errors that he hardly begins to grasp through this natural law what worship is acceptable to God. Surely, he is very far removed from a true estimate of it. Besides this, he is so puffed up with haughtiness and ambition, and so blinded by self-love, that he is yet unable to look upon himself, and as it were, to descend within himself, that he may humble himself and confess his own miserable condition.”²⁴⁴ As regards the *imago dei* in this context, Calvin mainly points to its eschatological orientation as communion with God.

If we reason back from this, then we find Calvin telling us what true knowledge of God must be. In his section on self-denial in the Christian life, he argues that it is possessed in the true worship of God, i.e. participation in God by being subject to God’s will.²⁴⁵ Calvin stresses that the chief aim of self-denial is to achieve relationship with God, although relations to fellow human beings play a role here as well. “Now we apprehend that denial our self-denial has regard partly to men, partly, and chiefly, to God.”²⁴⁶ From the perspective of the renewal of human nature, Calvin thinks of human beings as innate relational beings, i.e. as possessing by nature a

²⁴³ C. O. 1, 371. In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin changes the term “the law” (*lege*) to the “two tables” (*duabus tabulis*) of the law.

²⁴⁴ C. O. 1, 372.

²⁴⁵ C. O. 1, 1133.

²⁴⁶ C. O. 1, 1129. *Porro haec nostri abnegatio partim quidem in homines respicit, partim vero idque praecipue in Deum.*

relation to God and to fellow human beings. Citing Rom 12: 1-2, Calvin tells us that the maker of the universe wants his people to have true knowledge of him and to serve him correctly in two ways. On the one hand, believers must be cleansed in order to become God's temple and to worship God genuinely. On the other hand, through the effect of the Holy Spirit God transforms his people into a renewed mind, so that believers dedicate and concentrate their lives to glorifying God by following his rule in daily life.²⁴⁷ Calvin stresses the importance of self-denial when meditating on God's will, and we must continue to believe in God's benevolence in Christ.²⁴⁸ In this sense, his assertion of self-renunciation corresponds to the renewal of the *imago dei*, which points to human participation in God in response to God's goodness in Christ. This suggests that God dwells within human corporeality through the *imago dei*.²⁴⁹

In regards our shared humanity, Calvin argues that God establishes the whole human race—not merely the church—as a community where each individual person is responsible for the security of others. It is God who ordains our shared humanity. “The Lord has willed that we consider those two things which are naturally in man, and might lead us to seek his preservation: to reverence his image imprinted in man, and to embrace our own flesh in him.”²⁵⁰ With this presupposition in place, Calvin can discuss the preservation of communal life in a passive sense—a discussion derived and expanded from the 1536 *Institutes*. He argues that the law prohibits human beings from all violence as it injures and does harm to fellow human beings. Injury points to the physical and visible result of violence. This establishes an innate sense of security, which signifies the basic need to guard human life. Moreover, it is

²⁴⁷ C. O. 1, 1127-1128.

²⁴⁸ C. O. 1, 1133-1134.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

demanded of human beings that they guard the life of their neighbor. This promotes the general safety of the entire community.²⁵¹

In the 1539 *Institutes*, in the section on loving one's neighbors—found in Calvin's succinct exposition of the sixth commandment—one notes that Calvin asserts the active sense of the relation to fellow human beings. In his section on self-denial in the chapter on Christian life, Calvin gives two reasons in support of his assertion to love one's neighbors. Departing from any idea of human merit, Calvin stresses God's commandments and the *imago dei* as the ground of this love for one's neighbors. Yet the two reasons are inseparable from each other. God the sovereign Lord commands the whole human race to do good.²⁵² Furthermore, God's commandment is grounded on the image of God which is found in all human beings whether they are Christians or not. God adorns all human beings with his image, even though Christians may deserve more respect because the *imago dei* has been restored in them.²⁵³ At this point, Calvin can set the renewal of the *imago dei* and its remnant in fallen human beings side by side.

Furthermore, Calvin argues that the *imago dei* in human beings reminds Christians of God's benevolence which is given to them through God's image. In this sense, the image of God in human beings is a reminder of God's goodness in this world. "Say that you owe nothing for any service of his; but God, as it were, has put him in his own place in order that you may recognize toward him the many and great benefits

²⁵⁰ C. O. 1, 409.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² C. O. 1, 1131-1132.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

with which God has bound you to himself.”²⁵⁴

As a consequence, Calvin can go further and affirm the teaching to love one’s enemies. “It is that upon the image of God in [evil people], which cancels and effaces their transgressions, and with its beauty and dignity allures us to love and embrace them.”²⁵⁵

Upon this ground, Calvin can argue that the *imago dei* deserves not only respect but protection from violence due to God’s honor.²⁵⁶ In other words, fallen human beings are still bearers of the *imago dei*—they were also created in the image of God in the beginning even though they now carry this image in deformity. When we refer to the 1536 *imago*-text and the exposition of the sixth commandment in the 1539 *Institutes*, it is clear that the *imago dei* is referred to in its eschatological orientation. Yet the description of its deformity as it is found in fallen souls remains vague. Moreover, Calvin refers to human fraternity as God’s appointment, aimed at preserving communal life. His exposition of the sixth commandment coincides with the above teaching on the difference between heavenly things and earthly things.

2.6.2. The *imago dei* in government officers

In the 1539 *Institutes*, the *imago dei* is referred both to the order of creation and to government officers. As such, there is no change from the 1536 edition. “In short, for benefits received he will reverence and praise the Lord as their principal author, but

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ C. O. 1, 1131.

will honor men as his ministers.”²⁵⁷ Calvin seems to have creation in mind here, which functions under the authority of the sovereign God, but also refers to God’s providence in the cultural world. “But faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver—not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the sparrow.”²⁵⁸

To summarize, in these two added passages on the sixth commandment and on loving one’s neighbor, we find something new in Calvin’s understanding of the *imago dei*: the remnant of the *imago dei* is found to be both in an eschatological orientation and to be within the order of creation. Calvin seems to parallel both orientations of the *imago dei* in the 1539 *Institutes*. This assumption is supported by his polemical description of heavenly bliss and earthly filth as well as by his move to reject dominion as the *imago dei*. However, Calvin does not yet deal with inconsistent biblical descriptions of the *imago dei*, for example Gen 1: 26 and 1 Cor 11: 7. These are dealt with in the 1559 edition.

2.7. Life and Death

2.7.1. Life

2.7.1.1. The similarities and differences between the two Testaments

²⁵⁷ C. O. 1, 769. Calvin inserts a chapter on the predestination and providence of God in the *Institutes* of 1539.

²⁵⁸ C. O. 1, 511.

Calvin does not mention eternal life in his description of the *imago dei* in the 1539 *Institutes*. Yet by appealing to the Word of God, as given to the patriarchs, Calvin argues that the Jews are united to God through the covenant. He presents this argument in his new chapter on the similarities and differences between the two Testaments. Calvin admits that eternal life is indeed given to the patriarchs in the Old Testament. It is through their covenant with God and the Word of God that the Jews are set apart from the world and can anticipate eternal life. “Therefore, I say that without any doubt they entered into God’s immortal kingdom. For theirs was a real participation in God, which cannot be without the blessing of eternal life.”²⁵⁹ Furthermore, he unpacks the correlation between God’s covenant and eternal life by referring to the relation between God and his people: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26: 12). Calvin understands this relation between God and his people as grounded in the fact that God delivers his people out of death into everlasting mercy—this is not merely earthly joy.²⁶⁰ “But one cannot obtain such a presence of him without, at the same time, possessing life. And although nothing further was expressed, they had a clear enough promise of spiritual life in these words: ‘I am ... your God.’ (Ex. 6: 7).”²⁶¹ Although Calvin does not describe the *imago dei* as the way toward eternal life in the 1539 *imago-text* (as he did in 1536), the idea runs through his understanding of the human relation to God. In this context, the relation between human existence and God’s kingdom is constituted by the mutual relationship between God and human beings. In this way, Calvin’s understanding of the *imago dei* develops together with the expansion of his understanding of the human relation to God. This occurs in various contexts.

²⁵⁹ C. O. 1, 806.

²⁶⁰ C. O. 1, 806.

²⁶¹ C. O. 1, 807.

2.7.1.2. The Christian life

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin adds a chapter on the Christian life, where he deals with the relation between temporal life and the eternal in Christian experience. On the one hand, he encourages believers to withstand temptation in this world by contemplating eternal life. One notes that for the Reformers temptation seemed to imply the human desires of daily life which moved against faith.²⁶² Calvin suggests meditation on eternal life in order to assist believers to maintain their faith in daily situations. On the other hand, he also encourages Christians to make use of the world, which was after all intentionally created by the creator, our Father.

Calvin encourages Christians to keep eternal life in mind so that they may avoid the temptation to pursue the blessings of this world.²⁶³ For believers in times of trouble, the anticipation of eternal life drives their thoughts beyond the limitations of life in this world.²⁶⁴ Contemplating God assists believers to ascend to him. Calvin argues that after the fall, human beings love the things of this world, even though these things consist of vanity, uncertainty and temporality and direct the human mind against God.²⁶⁵ In contrast, eternal life consists of everlasting unity with God. In this way life is perfect, everlasting and has complete glory only in God. In this sense, it is good to be liberated from life in this world in order to be received into the heavenly

²⁶² Luther's commentaries on Rom 5: 1-11. *Luthers Epistel Auslegung*, vol. 1 (der Römerbrief), ed. Eduard Ellwein (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 43-51.

²⁶³ C. O. 1, 1143-1145.

²⁶⁴ C. O. 1, 1143-1144.

²⁶⁵ C. O. 1, 1143-1145.

life.²⁶⁶

With the foregoing description, Calvin seems to ignore our participation in temporal human existence and concentrates on the pursuit of the future life. Calvin does not mean to refrain from confronting the reality of this world. Rather he wants to confront the world with the reality of the kingdom of God. In his section describing how we must use the present life and its helps,²⁶⁷ Calvin advises Christians to enjoy the resources of this world, which the creator has prepared for the benefit of human beings. Yet in order to make proper use of the world, Calvin proposes two approaches: detachment from the world and attachment to future life. To what degree can Christians participate in this world? Calvin argues that when worldly things do not interfere with the human mind—whose task it is to contemplate eternal life—then they are an advantage to Christian life.²⁶⁸ Moreover, sensible treatment of the world shows good stewardship as creatures and our royal position under God's calling.²⁶⁹ The contrast between the temporality of life and eternity shows Calvin's twofold understanding of God's work. The temporal world displays the good intentions of the creator and assists human beings in the pursuit of their temporal existence. Within this temporal situation, we can anticipate eternal life. Further, by existing in the temporal world, Christians have the opportunity to examine their motives. Christians struggle to pursue those heavenly things which deliver everlasting blessings, and are strengthened in this by God's love. But they also feel the pull of human desire for earthly things, toward concentrating on the joys of this life.

²⁶⁶ C. O. 1, 1147.

²⁶⁷ C. O. 1, 1149.

²⁶⁸ C. O. 1, 1150.

2.7.2. Death

In his chapter on the *cognitio hominis* Calvin refers to the death of the soul as the impoverishment of human nature which stems from sin. “This is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed ‘original sin’, meaning by the word ‘sin’ the depravation of a nature previously good and pure.”²⁷⁰ After the fall, human beings lost all the benefits of divine grace. Calvin defines sin as a corruption of human nature, which has now become innate after Adam’s fall.²⁷¹ The corruption of human nature results in the death of the soul; in this state the human being is blind and the heart is depraved. Moreover, this fallen state subjects us to exorbitant desires.²⁷² “Therefore, after the heavenly image was obliterated in Adam, he was not the only one to suffer this punishment—that, in place of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth, and justice, with which adornments he had been clad, there came forth the most filthy plagues, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice.”²⁷³ The death of the soul can be addressed in another way. In his chapter on faith, Calvin uses an analogy based on the contrast between awareness and sluggishness. Faith is to be aware, to be conscious of the knowledge of God and of the self in contrast to the fallen state in which we observe only the sluggishness of the flesh.²⁷⁴ Calvin writes that the fallen soul is removed from the living root, i.e. Christ, and is now characterized by sluggishness, conjuring up images of indifference, inertia and an indulgence in this state. The fallen soul appears dead and in need of vivification.²⁷⁵ This also points to the bondage of the soul, which cries out for liberation from this state.

²⁶⁹ C. O. 1, 1149 and 1152.

²⁷⁰ C. O. 1, 306-307.

²⁷¹ C. O. 1, 312.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ C. O. 1, 307-308.

²⁷⁴ C. O. 1, 461.

2.8. The grace of God

2.8.1. The third part of the creed

The description of the third part of the creed in the 1536 *Institutes* remains unchanged in the 1539 edition. However, Calvin inserts an additional paragraph in order to explain how the grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit is transmitted to believers. Calvin describes how believers are cleansed and made sacred in Christ, the grace of whom is delivered to believers by the Holy Spirit.²⁷⁶ The way in which the Holy Spirit affected Christ is the same way it affects believers. In Christ the effect of the Holy Spirit is communicated to believers. Therefore, in whichever way the Holy Spirit affects believers, it is the effect of Christ. Moreover since Christ cannot be separated from God the Father, who sent Christ into the world, the description of God's grace in this context suggests that God's mercy and his complete blessing in the Son are given to us through the Holy Spirit.²⁷⁷ Hence we gain an improved understanding of God's grace as the power and action of the Holy Spirit when we view the topic from a Trinitarian perspective.

If we reflect on the 1539 imago text, we find that the explanation of the third part of the creed corresponds with the renewal of the imago dei, and does so via human transformation into new life through the Holy Spirit.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ C. O. 1, 537-538.

²⁷⁷ C. O. 1, 536.

²⁷⁸ C. O. 1, 308.

2.8.2. Human corruption

Calvin presents an enormously enlarged description of human corruption in the 1539 *Institutes*. We find this in chapter two, on the knowledge of man. On the one hand, he shows here the degree to which the grace of God—for affecting salvation—is unattainable by human abilities, and presents this in his discussion on free will. On the other hand, he recognizes the diverse effects of the Spirit both in salvation as well as in the state of human corruption by pointing, for example, to humanity’s corrupted reason which nevertheless establishes social ordinances and achieves the heights of art and science. In this description, it is the same, one and only Holy Spirit who affects human beings regardless of whether they are in a state of corruption or whether they are participating in the recreation. Nonetheless, the orientations of these effects are diverse. “We ought to understand the statement that the Spirit of God dwells only in believers as referring to the Spirit of sanctification through whom we are consecrated as temples to God. Nonetheless he fills, moves, and quickens all things by the power of the same Spirit, and does so according to the character that he bestowed upon each kind by the law of creation.”²⁷⁹

In his discussion on corrupted human reason, Calvin describes such reason positively since it does actually achieve things, albeit not the kingdom of God. Yet these achievements are the effect of the Holy Spirit. “Its efforts do not always become so worthless as to have no effect, especially when it turns its attention to things below.”²⁸⁰ This positive description particularly takes into account social ordinances, and the arts and sciences. Thus Calvin’s position is no longer a condemnation of

²⁷⁹ C. O. 1, 327.

“earthly filth”, but an appreciation of the gift of the Holy Spirit for the common good of human beings.²⁸¹ Corrupted reason can differentiate between good and evil in regards to social ordinances, especially in regards to political orders and social justice, even though human beings often wander astray from that order.²⁸² Thus we see the ability of human beings to preserve this present life within human community: the development of social systems in order to secure life and achieve social justice within the community. Nevertheless, this ability to manage temporal things does not go beyond life in this world. Therefore, according to Calvin, it is a natural human instinct to organize social systems; it appears as an inborn natural law within human reason.²⁸³

Calvin sees the grace of God most clearly expressed in the recreation rather than in the original creation. He argues that the Holy Spirit provides certain people with particular capacities in order to improve the common good via the cultural world, i.e. in the development of the arts and sciences. Yet he immediately qualifies this description with reference to two kinds of grace in order to create a balance in human existence. He makes two points: first, the endowment of the Holy Spirit toward the improvement of communal life is a divine action and gift. This wonderful gift from God should be accepted with joy and diligently invested.²⁸⁴ Second, if human beings are proud of their competence in developing true aspects of the cultural world, it has to remain clear to them that this ability is confined to understanding only transitory and unstable things and has no reference to the kingdom of God. Knowledge of God is given only to believers in Christ. Calvin follows Augustine’s view here, namely

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ C. O. 1, 326.

²⁸² C. O. 1, 324-325.

that gratuitous gifts, such as faith and the love of God, are lost after the fall and that natural gifts, such as the ability to discern good from evil, have become corrupted.²⁸⁵

Therefore, the power of the Holy Spirit on believers sustains the *imago dei*, which represents wisdom, righteousness, power and life. The strength of the Holy Spirit also works on the whole human race for the good of all and in accordance to natural law.

2.8.3. The restoration of human will

Calvin pictures the renewal of the will in the same way as human nature, namely that it is restored to its original state. However, while its responsibility for causing Adam's fall shows the weakness of human nature, the renewal of the will signifies its recovery from such corruption.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, this renewed will is reinforced with fortitude²⁸⁷ and adheres to divine grace. "Therefore assistance is given to the weakness of the human will to move it unwaveringly and inseparably by divine grace, and hence, however great its weakness, not to let it fail."²⁸⁸

Calvin writes: "The first part of a good work is will; the other, a strong effort to accomplish it; the author of both is God."²⁸⁹ It is precisely the renewal of the will which displays the efficacy of God's grace. In other words, "this means nothing else than that the Lord by his Spirit directs, bends, and governs, our heart and reigns in it

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ C. O. 1, 340.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ C. O. 1, 345.

²⁸⁹ C. O. 1, 342.

as in his own possession.”²⁹⁰

2.8.4. Election

Calvin’s understanding of the grace of God is not limited to affecting creation and redemption. He refers to the grace of God as existing even before the beginning of the world because God in eternity chose the elect before creating heaven and earth. Calvin adds a chapter on predestination and God’s providence in the 1539 *Institutes*.²⁹¹ This brings his doctrine of election into close relation with his understanding of grace.

In this section, Calvin cites Eph 1: 4 in order to support the idea that believers are chosen before the creation of the world. Yet the main argument does not fall upon God’s election in eternity. Rather the main problem is why God selects some and forsakes others. Calvin argues against any position which would see God choosing people based on the merits they can produce in this life—in other words, that God foreknows those human dispositions which can conform to God’s grace in election, and elects only these people. This would suggest that those who are not elected possess some innate characteristic making them unworthy of God’s election and susceptible to the fall into perversity.²⁹² “Therefore, he adopts as sons those whom he foreknows will not be unworthy of his grace; he appoints to the damnation of death those whose disposition he discerns will be inclined to evil intention and

²⁹⁰ C. O. 1, 340.

²⁹¹ This chapter remains unchanged up until the edition of 1559.

²⁹² C. O. 1, 865.

ungodliness.”²⁹³ Rather Calvin appeals to 2 Tim 1: 9 and explains that believers are called to conform to God’s will and are given the grace to achieve it.

Furthermore, grace is given by Christ before creation and before time. Believers receive the grace of Christ and by this grace his gifts are communicated to them. “Surely the grace of God deserves alone to be proclaimed in our election only if it is freely given. Now it will not be freely given if God, in choosing his own, considers what the works of each shall be. We therefore find Christ’s statement to his disciples, ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you (John 15: 6),’ generally valid among all believers. There he not only rules out past merits but also indicates his disciples had nothing in themselves for which to be chosen if he had not first turned to them in his mercy.”²⁹⁴ God’s grace to the elect is given from eternity. Yet believers are illuminated by the Holy Spirit when they receive the gifts of Christ in the temporal world. Therefore, it does not matter how excellent or inferior human dispositions may be.

In conclusion, with regard to ‘heavenly things’ the grace of God in the Holy Spirit illuminates those who attain salvation in Christ. In this sense, God’s grace is confined to believers only. Yet in relation to earthly things, the grace of God in the Holy Spirit adorns particular people with special gifts in accordance with God’s will. Thus the diverse orientations of the work of the Holy Spirit have to be understood from a Trinitarian perspective, i.e. where God the Father is the creator, and the Holy Spirit animates the creation according to natural law. The exception here is those special gifts given to some, who contribute to the benefit of the community. However, the

²⁹³ C. O. 1, 865.

grace of God which sustains believers must be traced back to God's inner-Trinitarian counsel in eternity, because it is here where God selects those human beings to whom he will give his grace for the purposes of achieving eternal life. For Calvin, human beings certainly do not deserve eternal happiness since they have betrayed God and have disobeyed him.

2.9. The glory of God

Calvin's conception of the glory of God stands in close relation to the *imago dei* as, in the 1559 *Institutes*, he defines the *imago dei* as a reflection of God's glory.²⁹⁵ This definition did not simply appear in 1559 without a process of theological development. The human creature receives both body and *imago dei* as works of God, and these display his workmanship in creation.²⁹⁶ Moreover, the renewal of the *imago dei* attributes even greater glory to God through its redemption.²⁹⁷ Thus two levels of God's work manifest his glory. Yet one needs to investigate Calvin's commentaries as well as the *Institutes* in order to trace the development of Calvin's understanding of the glory of God. Since Calvin completed his commentaries after 1539, I will examine this theme first in the 1539 *Institutes* and then follow it chronologically through the commentaries.

²⁹⁴ C. O. 1, 866.

²⁹⁵ The 1559 *Institutes*, I, 15, 4.

²⁹⁶ C. O. 1, 286.

2.9.1. Calvin's use of the expression "the glory of God" in relation to the imago dei

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin uses the terms "majesty" and "glory" when describing God's craftsmanship in creation. The majesty of God is expressed in God's workmanship, as manifested in creation, and in this context is identified with God's glory. Calvin expands this section into approximately twenty-five pages.²⁹⁸ This description of God's glory in creation is aimed at removing any excuse human beings may have for not recognizing God.

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin portrays God as sovereign creator and king. In this way human creatures glorify him by recognizing his majesty and by obeying him. In contrast, human beings owe God glory even after the fall since they were created to serve his glory.²⁹⁹ In his description of human beings in the 1538 catechism, Calvin uses the passive verb *veneraretur*, which comes from *venero* meaning to worship or honor. However Calvin does not directly point out here that human beings are created for the glory of God.³⁰⁰

2.9.2. Creation

In the 1539 *Institutes*, the glory of God has a close relation to revelation. We see this relation particularly in terms of Calvin's work on the knowledge of God. On the one hand, Calvin points to that objective knowledge of God which is manifest in creation;

²⁹⁷ C. O. 1, 308.

²⁹⁸ C. O. 1, 286. Cf. C. O. 1, 279-304.

²⁹⁹ O. S. I, 37-38.

this embraces both the natural and cultural worlds. Thereby the glory of God can be seen in creation through the knowledge of God. On the other hand, Calvin points out the human inability to apprehend this objective knowledge of God—yet declares that human beings have no excuse for their ignorance. In the midst of this dilemma, he concludes that it is necessary for God to provide us with Scripture in order to show us the appropriate knowledge of himself. In regards our topic of interest, human beings as works of God radiate God’s glory. At the same time, human beings can behold the glory of God in themselves and in God’s other works in the world. However, in this chapter Calvin highlights particularly the remnant of the knowledge of God in its relation to the glory of God. The fallen still possess the natural ability to access knowledge of God in creation and are thus not protected from the accusations of conscience. In other words, the fallen have no excuse for their ignorance of the knowledge of God.

2.9.2.1. Glory of God as that objective knowledge of God as expressed in creation

For Calvin, although God’s nature is incomprehensible to human understanding, his majesty is disclosed through the creation of the world and his glory is engraved upon each individual creature. Human creatures ought most to *radiate* the glory of God, because they possessed the advantage of being able to *behold* God’s glory in creation above all other creatures. The glory of God expressed in creation means that human beings have no excuse for not seeing the greatness of God in the universe.³⁰¹ Calvin supports his assertion by appealing to Heb 11: 3, arguing that this well-organized

³⁰⁰ C. O. 5, 324. *Homo primum ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei Formatus fuit, ut in suis ornamentis, quibus a Deo splendide vestitus erat, eorum autorem suspiceret, et qua decebat gratitudine veneraretur.*

world mirrors the invisible God allowing human beings to apprehend God in it.³⁰² Calvin uses “mirror” in order to highlight the reflection of God’s wisdom and power, which he describes here as God’s glory and majesty.³⁰³ It is clear that Calvin’s understanding of the glory of God in relation to God’s characteristics needs to be deepened here. All the beauty of the world clearly manifests the providence of God, which assists the human mind to break forth and behold God’s glory.³⁰⁴

In addition to human inexcusability for ignorance regarding knowledge of God as it is revealed in the natural world, Calvin moves to formulate a positive function of the knowledge of God as revealed within the cultural world. “Knowledge of this sort [in creation], then, ought not only to arouse us to the worship of God but also to awaken and encourage us to the hope of the future life. For since we notice that the examples that the Lord shows us both of his clemency and of his severity are inchoate and incomplete, doubtless we must consider this presage even greater things, the manifestation and full exhibition of which are deferred to another life.”³⁰⁵ The occurrences of the cultural world are sustained by God toward the end, when the unjust will be punished and the righteous receive their reward.

Calvin asserts once again that God’s providential power sustains the world. The world presents us with a picture of God’s power which allows human beings to recognize God within it. Yet Calvin now tells us that God’s glory can be seen also in human nature which is the ground of the cultural world. “Yet we comprehend [the

³⁰¹ C. O. 1, 286. *Nam quum sit natura incomprehensibilis, et ab humana intelligentia procul abconditus: certas suae maiestatis notas, quibus, pro tenuitatis nostrae modulo, comprehendi queat, singulis suis operibus impressit.*

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ C. O. 1, 287 and 289-290.

workings of the cultural world's] chief purpose, their value, and the reason why we should ponder them, only when we descend into ourselves and contemplate by what means the Lord shows in us his life, wisdom, and power; and exercises in our behalf his righteousness, goodness and mercy."³⁰⁶ Good and evil occur in the world in order to show that God watches over and guides the human world. To contemplate God's work in creation is to recognize within our very nature the ability God gave us at the beginning of creation to attain knowledge of him. This echoes the description at the beginning of the whole section, where Calvin sees the happiness of life as aimed at the knowledge of God.

2.9.2.2. Glory of God as subjective knowledge of God seen by human beings in creation

Calvin outlines the subjective dimension of the glory of God in two ways. First, the above description suggests that the pre-lapsarian human could not understand God's nature but could apprehend God's revelation through the self and through creation. In particular, human nature was endowed with the *imago dei* in correspondence to God's nature. Christians can apprehend the glory of God in creation, in Scripture and through the Holy Spirit who affects the transformation of the new life in Christ.

Secondly, fallen human beings can behold the glory of God through their remnant knowledge of God; this however must operate in a state of deformity. In this context, Calvin does not introduce the Holy Spirit in relation to God's revelation in terms of redemption—where the human mind is restored and can once again apprehend God as

³⁰⁵ C. O. 1, 289.

sovereign Lord. “But although the Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom in the mirror of his works with very great clarity. Such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull toward so manifest testimonies, and they flow away without profiting us.”³⁰⁷ Therefore, the knowledge of God remains confused in fallen human beings. Calvin refers to Heb 11: 3 and Rom 1: 19 in order to address God’s revelation in creation and human blindness in not seeing it. “He means by this [Heb 11: 3] that the invisible divinity is made manifest in such spectacles, but we have not the eyes to see this unless they be illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith. And where Paul teaches that what is to be known of God is made plain from the creation of the universe (Rom. 1: 19), he does not signify such a manifestation as men’s discernment can comprehend; but, rather, shows it not to go farther than to render them inexcusable.”³⁰⁸ One may well ask to what degree Calvin thinks here of human blindness in knowing God? Calvin tells us that the fallen mind pursues the knowledge of God in the world; yet it quickly follows its own interest, resulting in the establishment of idols. “Sometimes we are driven by the leading and direction of these things to contemplate God; this of necessity happens to all men. Yet after we rashly grasp a conception of some sort of divinity, straightway we fall back into the ravings or evil imaginings of our flesh, and corrupt by our vanity the pure truth of God.”³⁰⁹

To summarize, Calvin argues that the glory of God in creation points to God’s wisdom and power in designing and sustaining the natural and cultural worlds. Yet his aim in referring to the glory of God is to show the knowledge of God which is

³⁰⁶ C. O. 1, 289-290.

³⁰⁷ C. O. 1, 290.

³⁰⁸ C. O. 1, 291.

apprehended in the human mind as revelation. On the one hand, fallen human beings have no excuse for their neglect regarding the knowledge of God. On the other hand, the remnant of this knowledge of God points to the function of human nature, which was God's original, marvelous work in creation. In this sense, the glory of God is objectively shown in terms of God's workmanship in creation, which embraces both human beings and the world. Subjectively, despite their perversity human beings are still vaguely aware of the glory of God. Therefore, as we saw above, these corrupted human beings may lack the glory of God, but are still responsible for the fall and have no excuse for their ignorance of the knowledge of God.

2.9.3. Justification

Calvin adds a new chapter on justification and human merits to the 1539 *Institutes*. Here Calvin refers the glory of God to God's righteousness, in distinction from the righteous acts of human beings. The point here is to teach us that glory must be given to God alone.³¹⁰ God alone is righteous and has bestowed upon us his righteousness in Christ, thus justifying believers in Christ. As a consequence, gifts of righteousness in Christ are communicated to us.³¹¹ Believers must express their gratitude for God's kindness. They glorify God in recognizing their merits and righteousness, both of which have been given by God. Yet Calvin argues that it is not only believers who are bestowed with God's righteousness; the world too has to subject itself to God—according to Calvin's reading of Paul—because God appoints the order of creation

³⁰⁹ C. O. 1, 286.

³¹⁰ C. O. 1, 752-753 and 765-766.

³¹¹ C. O. 1, 752.

which should also glorify God.³¹²

After arguing that God alone is righteous and bestows righteousness on believers, Calvin tells us that believers glorify God in justification: “we should swear that our righteous acts and our strength are in the Lord.”³¹³ In turn, believers should not trust the righteousness of works, which in any case are given by God and do not honor human creatures. Believers should not depend on their works nor put their assurance in them. They are to look beyond these works and ponder God’s goodness in bestowing them. Believers must first recognize God’s sovereignty and goodness in Christ in order to apprehend that righteousness which occurs in justification and is gratuitously given to believers through Christ. Only then can believers respond to God with gratitude and honor. It is in this attitude and response of believers, i.e. in gratitude and humiliation, that God is glorified.

To summarize, Calvin thinks here of God’s glory as God’s strength, which justifies human beings and bestows upon believers the gifts of Christ. Yet Calvin refers to the glory of God in order to establish a contrast between the righteousness of God and human merits. The glory of God can be found in creation as well as in redemption. This is to say that what human beings possess is given by God, even though it seems to be human capacities which achieve these earthly things. In Calvin’s view, divine gifts display human impotence, the inability of human beings to reach such ‘heavenly things’. Clearly God’s work and ability is greater. Therefore, the glory of God reflects God’s power in these diverse works, and in these works God is glorified.

³¹² This idea is found in Rom 3: 19. Calvin gives the biblical citation in the 1543 *Institutes*.

2.9.4. Faith

The power of the Holy Spirit, which affects the human mind and thus enables it to understand the gospel, is the key to finding the meaning of the glory of God: by it are the invisible things of God made visible. In this context, the glory of God is compatible with the grace of Christ, which in turn is differentiated from the grace of God in creation. In the 1539 *Institutes*, the grace of Christ is defined as the power and action of the Holy Spirit. We find this in the chapter on faith where Calvin deals with the third part of the creed on the Holy Spirit. Here the grace of God points to the strength of the Holy Spirit in bringing believers to salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in and persuades believers toward salvation first by quickening their minds so that they can comprehend that which is veiled, namely the goodness which God provides in Christ, and by enabling them to receive it.³¹⁴ In this way, Calvin illustrates how the grace of Christ is to be found in human beings through human consciousness, where the life of the believer is compatible with that of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as we saw above, regardless of however the Holy Spirit affects believers, it is in the end the effect of Christ.³¹⁵

Having now seen that the grace of God is the power of the Holy Spirit in bringing human beings toward salvation, we need to examine briefly how Calvin thinks of creation being sustained by God. In his section dealing with the first part of the creed, Calvin describes God as the creator who lays the foundation of creation by his Word

³¹³ C. O. 1, 752-753.

³¹⁴ C. O. 1, 536.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

as well as by the power of the Holy Spirit.³¹⁶ Furthermore, both human beings and the world can function only on the basis of divine goodness, sustenance and perseverance. Calvin emphasizes that if the whole creation were to be set apart from the almighty creator, then it would be defeated and whither into nothingness.³¹⁷ This description corresponds directly with the imago statement: the loss of the imago dei with human corruption occurs because the flow of God's sustenance has been disturbed. Calvin sees the grace of God as the power of the Holy Spirit acting in diverse ways, including but not limited to such fields as the creation, the diverse operations of the natural world and in recreation.

To summarize, the glory of God is compatible here with the power of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the special grace of God in Christ which is understood and seen by the minds of believers. Therefore, the glory of God in this context is the strength of God's revelation in Christ. Yet one notes that the glory of God in the 1539 *Institutes* appears to highlight God's objective work in creation, in redemption and in revelation. Although Calvin argues that the glory of God in revelation means the apprehension of the gospel through the effect of the Holy Spirit, he does not mention here the dynamic of transformation which occurs in human nature. In this way, Calvin's understanding of the imago dei as the glory of God still remains unclear.

In conclusion, Calvin's understanding of the imago dei can be pictured better through this elaboration of the *duplex cognitio* and the relationship between God and human beings. The imago dei in relation to human nature has been deepened through his own interpretation of the depravity of human nature and of its restoration. Furthermore,

³¹⁶ O. S. I., 76.

Calvin's understanding of the workings of corrupted nature is unfolded through the expansion of his understanding of human corruption itself. In this way, his doctrine of the imago dei in relation to 'heavenly things' and 'earthly things' is developed further. Yet clarity is still lacking. Moreover, with this expansion we find that the tension between the eternity and temporality of the imago dei has also increased. Although Calvin does not directly admit that the imago dei is not completely effaced after the fall—he admits this first in the 1559 *Institutes*—his positive evaluation of human talents, particularly in the arts and sciences, leaves us with a question for his next editions: Where does Calvin position the corrupted state of human nature, seeing that it is neither that state in possession of the renewed imago dei nor that of mere brute animals?

³¹⁷ O. S. I, 76.

CHAPTER THREE

The Image of God in the *Institutes* of 1543 and of 1550

In the imago text from 1543, Calvin adds a short insertion citing 2 Cor 3: 18. This deserves an independent analysis in regards the way in which he correlates the glory of God and the imago dei. I will also provide here a survey of Calvin's section on the worship of images, as this will assist our understanding of the knowledge of God. The 1550 Institutes is important because Calvin has provided us here with a complete discussion of human conscience, which is necessary in order to understand his notion of the remnant of the imago dei. Since Calvin has not made so many variations to the text in these two editions, I will examine them together in one chapter.

3.1. Against the worship of images

In two new paragraphs and two new sections in his chapter on the law, Calvin argues against what he sees as 'image worship' in the church. Though he cites Ex 20: 25, Calvin's reasons against the worship of images are based on a psychological insight, namely that image worshipers identify these images with the gods; they believe that divine power inheres in the images. Through their admiration of God in the images and their personal practices, they come to believe that God actually dwells in the images. Yet the result is that God is then bound within the image and, as a

consequence, the human mind becomes fastened upon it. For Calvin, “there is no difference whether they simply worship an idol, or God in the idol.”³¹⁸ Misunderstanding the knowledge of God causes image worship and is idolatry in accordance with the biblical prohibitions. Calvin’s argument against iconolatry displays his understanding of knowledge. By appealing to Augustine’s views, Calvin says: “Indeed, what Augustine says is true, that no one thus gazing upon an image prays or worships without being so affected that he thinks he is heard by it, or hopes that whatever he desires will be bestowed upon him.”³¹⁹

Interestingly, Calvin goes on to differentiate art and its appreciation from image worship. For Calvin, paintings and sculptures are to be classified as art and are gifts from God. Yet Calvin carefully distinguishes the function of art, for example in instruction, from its misuse. “It remains that only those things are to be sculptured or painted which the eyes are capable of seeing: let not God’s majesty, which is far above the perception of the eyes, be debased through unseemly representations.”³²⁰ With this clarification in place, Calvin moves to argue against image worship in the church, again citing Augustine: “When [images] are established in these seats, in honorable loftiness, so that they are attended by those who pray and those who sacrifice, by the very likeness of living members and senses—although they lack both sense and life—they affect infirm minds, so that they seem to live and breathe.”³²¹

Surprisingly, this displays Calvin’s high evaluation of the human creature, who is created with the integrity of human nature and is responsible for its own decisions.

³¹⁸ C. O. 1, 390.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ C. O. 1, 391.

Humanity's noble quality demands independence from the visible world; it can behold a spiritual world beyond this material one.

3.2. The renewal of the imago dei based on 2 Cor 3: 18 in the 1543 imago text

3.2.1. The term “mirror”

In the 1543 imago-description—which we find in chapter two on the knowledge of the self—Calvin adds a reference to 2 Cor 3: 18 immediately after those citations from Eph 4: 23 and Col 3: 10, which were used in the 1539 *Institutes*. The Corinthians text tells us that Christians, like a mirror, reflect the imago dei as the glory of God. Yet interestingly, Calvin does not mention at all the term “mirror” or “reflection” in this edition.³²² In the 1540 commentaries on Rom 2: 10, Calvin tells us that God's invisible majesty is expressed through his works in creation. In this sense, the universe itself mirrors God's workmanship. In this commentary, Calvin relates the word “mirror” to the word “representation” and stresses that to represent does not mean to possess the same essence as that which is represented. “The Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews says, that this world is a mirror, or the representation of invisible things. He does not mention all the particulars which may be thought to belong to God; but he states, that we can arrive at the knowledge of his eternal power and divinity.”³²³ It is clear that Calvin understands human beings as representing God through their knowledge of him and by expressing God's characteristics in their lives.

³²¹ C. O. 1, 392.

³²² C. O. 1, 308.

³²³ *Comm Rom 1: 20* in 1540. The Latin *sigllatim*, here translated as “all the particulars”, is inserted in the last edition of the Commentary to the Romans in 1560. *Qua ratione Apostolus ad Hebraeos, secula dicit esse specula, seu spectacula rerum invisibilium. Non recenset autem sigllatim quae in Deo considerari possunt: sed docet ad aeternam usque eius potentiam et Divinitem perveniri.* John Calvin,

3.2.2. The renewal of human nature and the reflection of God's glory

Following upon the above discussion, Calvin describes how the image of God is renewed in us. In this description, he draws heavily on biblical references. Yet despite his efforts the correlation between the glory of God, the effect of the Holy Spirit and human nature remains unclear. He argues that renewed human nature can achieve knowledge of God in Christ (Col 3: 9-10). He follows the biblical texts and adopts the term "mind" in reference to the renewal of the *imago dei* in Eph 4: 23. Thus he believes the significance of 2 Cor 3: 18 is compatible with that of Eph 4: 23 and Col 3: 10 in regards the *imago dei*. He argues that the glory of God is manifested in the gospel and becomes visible to us. The gospel is Jesus Christ. This position corresponds to his 1540 commentaries on Rom 1: 3: "It is then a definition of the gospel, by which Paul expresses what is summarily comprehended in it. I have rendered the words which follow, *Jesus Christ our Lord*."³²⁴

Calvin then moves on to illustrate the power of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, affecting the human soul and transforming it into the image of Christ. One notes that Calvin defines the image of God as the soundness of the soul. The description here is succinct, yet it displays a switch in Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* from being 'a reflection of the glory of God' to 'the soundness of the soul'.

Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Romanos, ed. Thomas H. L. Parker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 29.

³²⁴ *Comm Rom 1: 3* in 1540. *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Romanos*

In using the concept of the soundness of the soul, Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* appears to have taken a step toward a more anthropological orientation, namely toward focusing on the restoration of human nature. Previously, Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei*, as we have it within the *imago*-descriptions, was expressed more in terms of a relation to God. However, we must still investigate how Calvin interprets the *imago dei* in relation to the glory of God in 1543.

3.2.3. The necessity of identifying "God"

Calvin's usage of the phrase "the glory of God" poses the question of who Calvin understands "God" here to be. This is particularly interesting since the Greek text of 2 Cor 3: 18 reads "the glory of the Lord."³²⁵ Does Calvin identify the meaning of 'God' with 'the Lord' and thus in turn with 'Christ' in this context?

In his chapter on faith, where he discusses the first part of the creed, Calvin does indeed identify God the Father with Jesus Christ as Lord, inasmuch as the eternal God is revealed in Christ and the prophecy of the Old Testament is fulfilled in him. He provides numerous biblical proofs from the Old and New Testaments to support this assertion. "John testifies that it was the glory of the Son which had been revealed through Isaiah's vision (John 12: 41; Isa 6:1), even though the prophet himself writes that he saw the majesty of God."³²⁶ Moreover, Calvin speaks of Christ as the Lord, the one who established the world. "Obviously the titles of God that the apostle in The Letter to the Hebrews confers upon the Son are the most glorious of all: 'In the

³²⁵ την δόξαν κυρίου.

³²⁶ C. O. 1, 484-485.

beginning, thou, O Lord, didst found heaven and earth.’ (Heb 1: 10; Ps 101; 102).”³²⁷

Calvin’s tendency is to stress the deity of Christ and the unity of Father and Son. This can be seen clearly in the enlargement of his understanding of the Trinity in the 1539 *Institutes*. It seems equally clear that these additions are the defensive product of Calvin’s dispute with Caroli in 1537.³²⁸

At this point, we find that the glory of God could be defined as either the glory of Christ or the glory of God in Christ.

3.2.4. The illumination of the Holy Spirit and the recognition of God

Calvin asserts that the human mind can apprehend God’s revelation in Christ, the living image of the Father. Yet this objective appearance of Christ can only be subjectively understood in the human mind through the work of the Holy Spirit. “Did not Christ descend to earth in order to reveal the Father’s will to men? And did he not faithfully carry out his mission? This is obviously so. But nothing is accomplished by preaching him if the Spirit, as our inner teacher, does not show our mind the way. ... It therefore remains for us to understand that the way to the Kingdom of God is open only to him whose mind has been made new by the illustration of the Holy Spirit.”³²⁹

The invisible God is revealed, i.e. made visible, in Christ; yet Christ can only be

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Farel, Viret and Calvin were accused by Caroli of Arianism in Geneva in 1537. The event resulted in Calvin’s leaving Geneva and starting afresh in Strasburg. Barth gives a brief overview of this history and an outstanding theological observation on the disputations from both sides. Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 309-345, esp. 325-327. See also Calvin’s letters, No. 34. An Francois Daniel in Orleans: Die Lausanner Disputation und ihre Folgen in 1536. C. O. 10, 62-64. No. 50. An einen Berner Pfarrer: Klage gegen Caroli in 1537. C. O. 10, 85-87. No. 64. An Simon Grynäus: Bericht über den Streit mit Caroli in 1537. C. O. 10, 106-109. John Calvin, *Johannes Calvins Lebenswerk in seinen Briefen*, vol. 1, trans. Rudolf Schwarz (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 51-57.

³²⁹ C. O. 1, 329.

understood through the quickening of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, we find a shift from knowledge of the creator to knowledge of the redeemer. Perhaps a better formulation is that the creator is apprehended completely through the revelation of the redeemer. “Indeed, he had likened human wisdom to a veil that hinders the mind from seeing God.”³³⁰

Interestingly, Calvin believes that God’s mysteries are made manifest by the Holy Spirit. These mysteries are so deeply hidden from human insight that they can be disclosed only by the revelation of the Spirit.³³¹ In this sense, Calvin’s approach to God’s mysteries is identified with that knowledge which is given by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Calvin cites Ezek. 36: 26-27, in which the heart signifies the human will. For Calvin, the renewal of human will is God’s work: it is God who turns a heart of stone into a new heart with a new spirit. “If, therefore, a stone is transformed into flesh when God converts us to zeal for the right, whatever is of our own will is effaced. What takes its place is wholly from God.”³³² The Holy Spirit enlivens the human soul, and in this way human understanding and the will are also restored. Thus it is clear that the illumination of the Holy Spirit has a close relationship to the knowledge of God.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ C. O. 1, 321-322.

³³² C. O. 1, 340.

3.3. Conscience and the remnant of the imago dei in the *Institutes* of 1550³³³

The publication of the 1543 *Institutes* did not bring an end to Calvin's continuing contemplation of his systematics, nor to their enlargement. In the next edition he makes an assertion regarding human conscience which is closely related to our topic.

3.3.1. Definitions and terminology

In the *Institutes* of 1550, Calvin cites Rom 2: 15-16 and speaks of conscience as a witness, by which human beings are accused of their guilt before God's judgment. Clearly for Calvin, conscience bears a close relation to knowledge and human consciousness. Human awareness of God's judgment becomes a standard against which we may test the orientation of our lives. Thus human beings know life's criterion and are either pushed to fulfill it or try everything to escape from its testimony of guilt. In other words, human conscience points to an uneasy human mind which senses God's judgment.³³⁴ "It is a certain mean between God and man, for it does not allow man to suppress within himself what he knows, but pursues him to the point of making him acknowledge his guilt."³³⁵

However, conscience is not always "bad"; we do have "good conscience". Calvin supports this claim by citing 1 Tim 1: 5, Acts 24: 16, 1 Peter 3: 21 and Heb 10: 2. Good conscience refers to "an inward uprightness of heart" or "peace of mind" which conforms to faith. "It is a lively longing to worship God and a sincere intent to live a

³³³ Calvin helpfully subdivides the 1550 *Institutes* into paragraphs. For background information, see Wendel, *Calvin*, 117.

godly and holy life.”³³⁶ Good conscience generally refers to Christian conscience. In contrast, bad conscience refers to “the feeling of the fear of God,” and points to the state of a fallen soul.³³⁷

3.3.2. The relation between conscience and human ordinances

Since the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin has discussed conscience under the topic of the law. Conscience signifies the imprint of the law within fallen souls. Christian conscience is liberated from the outward order, from the orders of government and church. In other words, even though institutional arrangements may mature into long-held traditions, they have no power over Christians.

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin identifies conscience with natural law. This would suggest that in their original creation human beings were given knowledge of God in terms of such law. This, however, was seriously deformed after the fall and as a consequence human beings are now subject to social ordinances as ordained by God. This can even be displayed historically in the tension between Calvin and the city council in Geneva after his return from Strasburg in 1541. Calvin was called by the city council to commission the constitution of the church in Geneva. Yet at the same time, the city council made its secularist intentions clear: the new church order in Geneva was not to infringe upon their political benefits. This bore consequences, for example, upon the celebration of Holy Communion and the ordination of pastors.³³⁸

³³⁴ C. O. 1, 841.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ In his original plans, Calvin proposed holding Communion once a month. Yet in order to correspond with the Bernese Churches, Communion was celebrated quarterly in Geneva as was

Interestingly in the 1550 *Institutes*, Calvin clearly differentiates God as the object of conscience from secular authority, which constitutes social ordinances.

3.3.3. The 1540 commentaries on Rom 2: 14-15

As we saw above, Calvin differentiates good conscience, i.e. liberated Christian conscience, from bad conscience, which is bound to the natural law. He makes this distinction in order to draw a contrast between the freedom and bondage of conscience. The distinction depends upon whether the sense of guilt before God is properly released. In other words, believers no longer fear God or his judgment, because they no longer stand under the accusation of conscience.³³⁹ At this point Calvin can distinguish knowledge of God in terms of human consciousness from human conscience.

Calvin supports this approach in his 1540 commentaries on Rom 2: 14-15. Here Calvin argues that conscience is more than mere consciousness. He writes that the human conscience is a psychological orientation. “[Paul] could not have more forcibly urged them than by the testimony of their own conscience, which is equal to a thousand witnesses. By the consciousness of having done good, men sustain and comfort themselves; those who are conscious of having done evil, are inwardly harassed and tormented.”³⁴⁰ By adding emotion to conscience, Calvin establishes conscience as an awareness of God’s wrath both through the law and through this

required by the city council. Calvin’s compromise to the council reflects his understanding of ecclesiastical order and government authority, both being ordained by God and belonging to the law. August Lang, *Johannes Calvin* (Leipzig: Verlag von Rudolf Haupt, 1909), 108. Wendel, *Calvin*, 71.

³³⁹ C. O. 1, 841.

feeling of fear. “A simple awareness could repose in man, bottled up, as it were. Therefore, this feeling, which draws men to God’s judgment, is like a keeper assigned to man, that watches and observes all his secrets so that nothing may remain buried in darkness.”³⁴¹ Conscience is like “a thousand witness,”³⁴² and acts as a touchstone of the quality of human existence, revealing it as being either in God or against God.

Furthermore, in the commentaries on Rom 5: 1, Calvin highlights the peace which is found in God in contrast to the restlessness of the conscience. “Peace means tranquility of conscience, which arises from this,—that it feels itself to be reconciled to God.”³⁴³ Calvin goes further, asserting the operation of conscience in a legalistic way, describing the struggle in which human beings attempt to justify their actions. This temporal wrestling within the mind is related to God’s final judgment because this very restlessness remains the mind’s function until that judgment comes.³⁴⁴

In his letter to the Romans, Paul describes the death of fallen souls in their confrontation with the judgment of God. To set the stage for this discussion he places on the one hand the Jews with their law, and on the other the Gentiles with their conscience.³⁴⁵ In the 1540 commentaries on Rom 2: 14-15, Calvin discusses Paul’s claims that the human soul was created with the *imago dei*. After the fall, the Jews were accused by the law because human inability manifests a lack of righteousness. For Calvin, Gentiles possess conscience as a remnant of that knowledge of God. This

³⁴⁰ *Comm Rom 2: 15* in 1540. *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Romanos*, 45-46.

³⁴¹ C. O. 1, 841.

³⁴² *Comm Rom 2: 15*. *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Romanos*, 46.

³⁴³ *Comm Rom 5: 1*. *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁴⁴ *Comm Rom 2: 15*. *Ibid.*, 46. The idea is already found in the 1534 *Psychopannychia*.

³⁴⁵ *Comm Rom 2: 14-15*. *Ibid.*, 45-46.

implies the preservation of some rule of righteousness, i.e. the ability to discern good from evil, just from unjust. “He sets nature in opposition to a written law, meaning that the Gentiles had the natural light of righteousness, which supplied the place of that law by which the Jews were instructed, so that they were a law to themselves.”³⁴⁶ With this understanding in place, we now see that the entire human race was given knowledge of God at the moment of creation, and this can be shown in conscience after the fall. In other words, this remnant, natural knowledge of God is a deformed knowledge of the law which was written in two tables and points in the first to the true worship of God and in the second to the love of one’s neighbor.³⁴⁷ “It is enough to know, that they thought that there is a God, and that honor and worship are due to him. It matters not whether they permitted the coveting of another man’s wife, or of his possessions, or of any thing which was his,—whether they connived at wrath and hatred; inasmuch as it was not right for them to covet what they knew to be evil when done.”³⁴⁸

3.3.4. Christian conscience and secular authority

Calvin must address at this point the question of how we are to understand Paul’s position regarding secular authority in Rom 13: 1ff. Calvin’s response is to understand the natural law as given by God who is the only true lawgiver. As we have

³⁴⁶ *Comm Rom 2: 14. Ibid., 45. Naturam opposuit Legi scriptae, intelligens scilicet Gentibus naturalem iustitiae fulgorem illucere, qui Legis vicem suppleat qua Iudaei erudiuntur, ut sint ipsae sibi Lex.*

³⁴⁷ Calvin adopts this broad meaning of the law in all editions of the *Institutes*, although he discusses the Decalogue in the section on the law and sets judicial law within civil government. However, it seems that Calvin’s understanding of the law corresponds to God’s governance. In his *Against Libertines* in 1544, God’s ordinance was defined in three areas under the topic of God’s providence: the order of nature, the order of the cultural world and God’s governance in the church. With this notion, God’s governance is to be seen in the order of creation as well as the order of redemption.

³⁴⁸ *Comm Rom 2: 15. Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Romanos, 46. ...satis est quod Deum esse intelligunt, et illi honorem cultumque deberi. Non refert an alienae mulieris, et*

noted, the law that God gives us in the Decalogue includes two tables: the first regards the worship of God, the second regards the preservation of humanity and encompasses natural ordinances. This suggests that we are to obey secular authority. God as lawgiver deserves respect either through conscience, which is the imprinted law as appointed by God, or through the written law in the Decalogue. “My conscience is subject to the observance of the law, even though no man were alive in the world.”³⁴⁹ While social ordinances do point to the law of God, it is characteristic of the law that human beings want to achieve it by their own merits. In this way, human beings still find themselves under the law and confront God’s judgment. Conscience has to be liberated from the law through the work of Christ, who has fulfilled the law.

Citing I Cor 10: 28-29, Calvin subtly recognizes that while the law is bound to outward works, conscience is set free from the law because Christ has liberated us from it. Christians are not under the law, but they are under God in Christ. Christian conscience has the liberty to go beyond natural law. “A faithful man would sin if, previously warned, he nonetheless ate such meat. But however necessary abstention may be to him with regard to his brother, as is prescribed by God, still he does not cease to retain freedom of conscience.”³⁵⁰

Human conscience is referred to God alone. “For our consciences do not have to do with men but with God alone. This is the purport of that common distinction between the earthly forum and the forum of conscience. While the whole world was shrouded

possessionis, et cuiusvis rei cupiditatem permittant: an ad iram odiumque conniveant, nam quod perpetrare malum esse norunt, neque illis fas erit concupiscere.

³⁴⁹ C. O. 1, 842.

in the densest darkness of ignorance, this tiny little spark of light remained, that men recognized man's conscience to be higher than all human judgments."³⁵¹

In concluding his analysis of Christian conscience in its relation to civil and church law, Calvin argues that while Christian conscience refers to God in Christ alone, it has to be under civil and church law in order to revere the lawgiver. Calvin has no doubt that civil power is appointed by God. The rule of government, for Calvin, is not at all secular because it guides us to "the worship of God and the spiritual rule of right living."³⁵² In this way Calvin releases conscience from any conflict between God's authority and secular authority, since both serve the same end. The sovereign Lord looks after his people not only in the church, but also through the government of the cultural world.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ C. O. 1, 843.

³⁵² Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Image of God in the *Institutes* of 1559

In the 1543 *Institutes*, Calvin enlarged his chapter on faith to such a degree that he had to divide it into four separate chapters. This would foreshadow the final 1559 edition, where Calvin would divide the entire work into four separate books in accordance with the arrangement of the creed.

Here we find the knowledge of God and knowledge of the self as the leitmotiv which runs through the entire volume and intertwines each section. With the rearrangement of this final edition, the dual knowledge of God and the self inevitably corresponds to the threefold variations of human nature: as it was first created, in the state of human corruption and in its recreation.³⁵³ Consequently, the operation of this dual knowledge corresponds to Calvin's doctrine of the imago dei, embracing not only the imago dei and its remnant in fallen human beings but also its renewal.

³⁵³ Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, "Cognitio Dei et hominis," in *Lutherstudien*, vol. 1, 246-255.

4.1. Knowledge of God and of the self

4.1.1. An interrelated model

The first chapter of the 1559 *Institutes* is entitled: “The knowledge of God and that of ourselves are connected. How they are interrelated.” In this first chapter, Calvin argues that knowledge consists of the knowledge of God and of the self. These two forms of knowledge are interrelated so that the more knowledge of God increases, the more human beings are aware of their own corruption and are thus turned toward God. “To this extent we are prompted by our own ills to contemplate the good things of God; and we cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves.”³⁵⁴ Calvin introduces the knowledge of God first and sees knowledge of the self as a consequence. This is true even though the dynamic functioning of the knowledge of God and of the self is not a mechanical process but rather an intertwined one.³⁵⁵ The more the knowledge of God possesses the human mind, the more human beings reflect the divine image. While the essential subjective and objective dimensions of knowledge, as we found them in 1539, remain unchanged, they are deepened and elaborated through the assertion of the authority of Scripture.³⁵⁶ Calvin reinforces his argument for the inseparability of objective and subjective knowledge by explaining that God is both fountain and author of human

³⁵⁴ I, 1.1—When referring to the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, Book, chapter and page number will be given. The interrelated model of the knowledge of God and of the self is already found in the chapter on the knowledge of God in the 1539 *Institutes*. However, the interrelation of the knowledge of God and of the self is neither highlighted nor elaborated to this degree until the 1559 edition (I, 1, 1-3).

³⁵⁵ I, 1, 3. Cf. Eva-Maria Faber, “Der Mensch als Bild Gottes,” in *Symphonie von Gott und Mensch*, 121-124.

³⁵⁶ Calvin constantly enlarges his view of Scripture in his discussion of the knowledge of God from the 1539 *Institutes* through to 1550. In the 1559 *Institutes*, he elaborates his ideas and re-edits them into three new chapters (I, 6-8), thereby displaying the authority of Scripture and the effect of the Holy Spirit.

life and that created human nature has to be contrasted to the nature of the creator.³⁵⁷

God himself is the measure and benchmark of human existence inasmuch as human beings are created with the *imago dei*, i.e. with the characteristics of God.³⁵⁸

Human beings must be humble before God's perfection and must search for the knowledge of God. Calvin goes to great efforts to contrast this post-lapsarian with the pre-lapsarian state in order to heighten our awareness of the impoverished state of fallen human beings.³⁵⁹ This self-awareness of the impoverishment of human nature creates the necessary space and disposition within the fallen for seeking that which they have lost.

4.1.2. Human corruption

In his work here on human corruption, Calvin follows his description from the 1539 *Institutes*. He contrasts human nature—consisting of the *duplex cognitio nostri*—with God's nature in order to promote human humility and self-denial.³⁶⁰

4.1.3. The character of knowledge

In the 1559 *imago* text, Calvin speaks of the character of knowledge and cites Col 3: 10: “[you] have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in

³⁵⁷ I, 1, 1.

³⁵⁸ I, 1, 2; I, 2, 1; I, 15, 3-4.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ I, 1, 1-3; II, 1, 1-3; III, 3, 3; III, 7, 4. The interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self reflects the reality of human existence. For the fallen, God is seen only in the role of judge. For believers, knowledge of God becomes rather knowledge of God as creator and as redeemer. In the last edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin asserts that for believers God the judge has now become God the mediator. In this way, believers can still perceive God's role as judge when they find themselves under the influence of sin. God's pending judgment is therefore seen in a positive light in that it prompts people toward repentance.

knowledge according to the image of its creator.” Calvin explains that the interrelated model of dual knowledge is expressed in our renewal in Christ: with our self-denial comes an increase in our knowledge of God. Calvin infers that the pre-fall Adam is given a mind which can bear the image of God in creation.³⁶¹ Immediately Calvin tells us that the *imago dei* is not only present in the mind, but also “in the uprightness of the heart, and in the soundness of all the parts.”³⁶² In other words, the *imago dei* is the integrity of human nature in its entirety, expressing the characteristics of God as they were given in creation. Calvin also illustrates the knowledge of God in the prelapsarian Adam with the example of religious piety, which for Calvin means simply to know God. Knowledge of God is the acknowledgement of the advantage we have received from him, the gift of eternal life, and this knowledge gives believers a feeling of gratitude toward God. “Now, the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him.”³⁶³

The character of this knowledge is affirmed by denying image worship and idolatry which represent false knowledge of God, in contrast to the reality of human existence which reflects the *imago dei* and thus true knowledge of God.³⁶⁴

4.1.4. The “God” of the knowledge of God

From the 1539 *Institutes* through to 1550, the chapter dealing with the knowledge of God mainly pointed to the *creator* and his action in creation. Prior to 1559, the

³⁶¹ I, 15, 4.

³⁶² Ibid. This emphasis on the *imago dei* as a participation in God of human nature in its entirety can also be seen in the commentaries on Col 3: 10, where Calvin picks up the notion in referring to our transformation in Christ.

³⁶³ I, 2, 1.

doctrine of the Trinity was found in those chapters dealing with faith. In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin edits the doctrine of the Trinity into the topic of the knowledge of God as creator. Moreover, Calvin divides the knowledge of God into the knowledge of the creator, the knowledge of the redeemer and the knowledge of the work of Christ's grace which points to the effect of the Holy Spirit.³⁶⁵ Precisely speaking, the "God" of the knowledge of God in the 1559 *Institutes* now consists of both creator and redeemer.

God the creator provides us with the world and governs each occurrence in the world.³⁶⁶ Calvin then introduces the "God" of the knowledge of God as the redeemer, the one who was "first disclosed to the fathers under the law, and then to us in the gospel." This would suggest that even before the Father sent the Son for our salvation, God, as redeemer, saved the Old Testament fathers; the same redeemer was then incarnated in New Testament times thus fulfilling God's promise in the covenant.³⁶⁷

This new division on the knowledge of God in the 1559 edition brings two points to light. First of all, the Holy Spirit as a third person is conspicuously missing in the titles of the third and fourth books—where we would have expected such mention to be made. Instead Calvin stresses the close relation between the Father and the Son. It

³⁶⁴ I, 10-12.

³⁶⁵ The first Book is entitled: The Knowledge of God the Creator; the second: The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ, First Disclosed to the Fathers Under the Law, and Then to Us in the Gospel; the third: The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us from It, and What Effects Follow; the fourth: The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us Into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein. Hence it appears that in the 1559 *Institutes* Calvin divides the knowledge of God into the knowledge of the creator and that of the redeemer.

³⁶⁶ Calvin's doctrine on divine providence is found within his discussion on the knowledge of God as creator.

³⁶⁷ I, 13, 9; II, 6, 2-4.

is through the merits of the Son that believers receive the benefits of the Holy Spirit.³⁶⁸ For Calvin, the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Christ. One may well ask how Calvin understands the correlation between Christ and the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, especially as he is attempting to outline Christian dogma within a Trinitarian understanding. Secondly, this new division reflects the knowledge of God in the 1536 *Institutes* thus providing us with new insights into Calvin's view of the knowledge of God in this first edition, where Calvin described God as creator, judge,³⁶⁹ and redeemer. Thus in this sense, to understand who the "God" of the knowledge of God is we must look to the God who is revealed in his work.

4.1.5. Calvin's understanding of the Holy Spirit in Book III

Calvin introduces the Holy Spirit in Book III chapter 1 as the one who binds us to Christ upon whom the Father endowed his benevolence. "The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."³⁷⁰ In our union with Christ, Christ's benefits are communicated to us. The dwelling of the Holy Spirit in Christ is adopted

³⁶⁸ In Calvin's teaching on the Trinity, the difference between the Father, Son and Spirit is found in the history of God's revelation and "we must not seek in eternity a before or an after" (I, 13, 18). In eternity God is his essence in divinity, here the Father never exists apart from the Son and the Spirit. In the revelation of God, the Father is active in the beginning and is the source of the world and life. The Son is wisdom, counsel and the decreed inclination to create. The Spirit is the power and efficacy of creation. Calvin comes to this order "because the peculiar qualities in the persons carry an order within them, e.g., in the Father is the beginning and the source, so often as mention is made of the Father and the Son together, or the Spirit, the same of God is peculiarly applied to the Father. In this way, unity of essence is retained, and a reasoned order is kept, which yet takes nothing away from the deity of the Son and the Spirit" (I, 13, 20). Calvin's emphasis on the unity of the Godhead can also be seen in his refutation of Servetus who held that the Godhead of Christ is derived. For a good description of this concept see Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 59-60.

³⁶⁹ The idea of God as judge has been asserted in the section on the law since the 1539 *Institutes* as well as under the topic of regeneration, where God's judgment compels fallen human beings to change the mode of their life and induces God's children to repent. In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin correlates the law with the covenant, in which the law is enforced as positive instruction in order to assist Christians to search out God's mercy in Christ. See II, 7-8 and III, 3, 7; but especially, II, 7, 1 and II, 8, 2-4. Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 196-197.

³⁷⁰ III, 1, 1.

as a prototype of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers.³⁷¹ This suggests that Calvin wants to link closely the Father, Son and Spirit within the work of redemption. Rather than stressing the deity of the Holy Spirit,³⁷² Calvin introduces the Spirit here as the witness of Christ and cites 1 John 5: 6-7 in support: “Christ so ‘came by water and blood’ in order that the Spirit may witness concerning him (1 John 5: 6-7).”³⁷³ Calvin refers to the witness of the Spirit, which also reflects our testimony in receiving redemption through Christ’s merits, “a testimony we feel engraved like a seal upon our hearts, with the result that it seals the cleansing and sacrifice of Christ.”³⁷⁴

Calvin writes: “Also, we ought to know that he is called the ‘Spirit of Christ’ not only because Christ, as eternal Word of God, is joined in the same Spirit with the Father, but also from his character as the Mediator.”³⁷⁵ This mediatory character allows for the possibility of a connection between the divine and the human in terms of the renewal of the *imago dei*. What power is bestowed in Christ is vested then in believers through our union with him. Moreover, “he is called the ‘spirit of adoption’ because he is the witness to us of the free benevolence of God with which God the Father has embraced us in his beloved only-begotten Son to become a Father to us.”³⁷⁶ Yet the chief work of the Holy Spirit is faith: “faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit.”³⁷⁷ By faith, believers are restored as God’s temple. This teaching coincides with Calvin’s work on the Trinity.³⁷⁸

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² This idea is found in Book I, 13, 14-15.

³⁷³ III, 1, 1.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ III, 1, 2.

³⁷⁶ III, 1, 3.

³⁷⁷ III, 1, 4.

³⁷⁸ I, 13, 15.

In his chapter on the Trinity, Calvin argues for the deity of the Spirit, citing 1 Cor 13: 16-17 and 2 Cor 6: 16 for support. He asserts that while believers are the temple of God, it is the Spirit who dwells within them. “For, while God indeed frequently promises that he will choose us as a temple for himself, this promise is not otherwise fulfilled than by his Spirit dwelling in us.”³⁷⁹ Believers, as God’s temple, are filled with the power of the divine and in this way human beings receive the gifts of divine grace.

In concluding this section we note that for Calvin, the “God” of the *imago dei* points to the triune God in eternal counsel, although the ‘God’ in the context of the creation of human beings points to the creator and Father. When we speak of Christ as the image of God, this is in reference to the Father. The image of God in believers is renewed by being conformed to the image of Christ. In Christ, the Holy Spirit illuminates the human mind by giving faith to believers which consists of the knowledge of the redeemer and the certainty of God’s goodness in Christ. Thereby believers are in union with Christ and receive Christ’s gifts. In faith believers also recognize God as the Father, as the one who created heaven and earth, and whose intention in creation is to bring human beings into eternal life.³⁸⁰

Furthermore, the interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the self coincides with the human relation to God within the bounds of grace. In the *Institutes*, it is this grace which constitutes the ground of the expression of the *imago dei*. Finally, as we have seen, the history of the *imago dei* corresponds to the history of God’s revelation.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

4.2. The human relation to God

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin omits a section on the imago dei which had previously been in the *Institutes* from 1539 through to 1550. In this section, the imago dei was described in a very relational way. This is not to say that this relational aspect of the imago dei has now disappeared. Since, as we have already seen, for this final edition of the *Institutes* Calvin adopted the arrangement of the creed as his framework, so that the relational description of the imago dei has now been divided up into various sections of the text. The imago dei as a human relation to God is now to be understood through each sphere of God's work as it is revealed to us. In other words, the history of the imago dei reflects the history of God's revelation because God cannot forsake his glory in the imago dei, in the character of the human creature. "The Lord wills not to lose what is his in us, out of his own kindness he still finds something to love."³⁸¹ "They bear the image of God engraven on them ... Thus, although they have nothing of their own by which they obtain the favor of God, he looks upon his own gifts in them, and is thereby excited to love and to care for them."³⁸² This suggests that human beings will attain eternal life through the imago dei. "However much we have brought death upon ourselves, yet [God] has created us unto life. Thus he is moved by pure and freely given love of us into grace."³⁸³ The correspondence of the history of God's revelation, i.e. God's work in creation as well as in redemption, with the imago dei constitutes the particularity of Calvin's understanding of the imago dei in the 1559 *Institutes*. In short, it is a Trinitarian understanding.

³⁸⁰ I, 6, 1; II, 1, 5-6; III, 2, 28.

³⁸¹ II, 16, 3.

³⁸² *Comm Gen* 9: 6.

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin tends to conceive of the *imago dei* as a relational dimension within a Trinitarian understanding. This corresponds to the framework of the 1559 *Institutes*. The triune God participates in the *imago dei* in terms of his provision and subsequent restoration of it. Conversely, human beings obtain the grace by which the *imago dei* is restored. This occurs through our participation in Christ, the mediator.³⁸⁴

4.2.1. The relationship between God and humanity in creation

Calvin's understanding of God's participation in human existence is found in Book I, chapters three to five and fifteen to eighteen, where he mainly speaks on God the creator.³⁸⁵ However, Calvin's main understanding of God's participation in the creation of human beings remains unchanged since 1536. For Calvin, God the creator is intimately involved in the establishment of human existence: not only did he give human beings the *imago dei* as the result of an inner-Trinitarian decision but he continues to sustain and govern the cultural world. Human beings participate in God and express the characteristics of God by honoring him.

God's special provision for humanity is not merely found in creation, but can also be seen in redemption. Calvin recognizes a twofold significance to subsisting in God, consisting in the relationship between the creator and the creatures as well as between the redeemer and believers. "For that they might pass from death to life, it was

³⁸³ II, 16, 3.

³⁸⁴ I, 15, 4.

necessary to recognize not only as Creator but also as Redeemer, for undoubtedly they arrived at both from the Word.”³⁸⁶

Calvin first introduces God as creator, as the source and sustainer of human life. For Calvin, human beings are the best works of the creator because they resemble God’s characteristics³⁸⁷ and can also differentiate innately between good and evil. Yet they can also decide whether to obey God or to betray their origin.³⁸⁸ It is clear that human beings can be ambivalent in their decisions. However, it is interesting to note that such human ambivalence does not bother Calvin, who appreciates rather the autonomy of the human creature and happily declares it to be the nobility of the human character.³⁸⁹ But it is our experience of suffering, death and general dissatisfaction with life that the Christian religion confronts, and this is also tackled by philosophy.³⁹⁰ Nevertheless, for Calvin the sovereign Lord is in charge of human existence. One of the key features of the Christian doctrine of creation is the recognition that God the creator, “whose wisdom, power, and righteousness are incomprehensible,”³⁹¹ established the world and is the origin of human life. Moreover, God has prepared a way for human beings to return to this origin.

In his work on the *providentia dei*,³⁹² Calvin speaks of the sovereign Lord who sustains and rules each happening both in the natural and cultural worlds.³⁹³ It is true

³⁸⁵ The 1554 commentaries on Gen 1: 26-27 gives us the best description of God’s participation in the creation of human beings. *The argumentum of commentaries on Genesis and Commentaries on Gen 1: 26-27*.

³⁸⁶ I, 6,1.

³⁸⁷ I, 15, 1 and 8.

³⁸⁸ *Comm Gen 3: 16*.

³⁸⁹ I, 15, 8.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

³⁹¹ I, 14, 1. See also, I, 14, 2.

³⁹² Since the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin has presented the doctrine of predestination and divine providence in the same chapter. In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin sets the doctrine of providence under the topic of the

that Calvin's God is very dominant in this sphere. It is also characteristic of Calvin's theology that each created being must recognize and carry out that role which has been given it by the creator in the order of creation. Furthermore, the mystery of God has its counterpart in the knowledge of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit.³⁹⁴ However, Calvin argues that understanding and consciousness are characteristic of the human creature.³⁹⁵ Knowledge is the most important aspect of human existence because it is knowledge which guides and orients human life toward God. In this sense, it is hardly surprising that Calvin cannot tolerate image worship and idolatry,³⁹⁶ which easily abuses human understanding in its exercise of the knowledge of God. In short, God must act as God and human beings must act as human beings. Calvin sees an example of such false knowledge in the Manichean doctrine which places Satan on an equal level with God.³⁹⁷

The *imago dei* also points to the happiness of life which is sustained by God. Since human beings with the *imago dei* receive the knowledge of God, this in turn directs their lives appropriately.³⁹⁸ "Indeed, the knowledge of God set forth for us in Scripture is destined for the very same goal as the knowledge whose imprint shines in his creatures, in that it invites us first to fear God, then to trust in him. By this we can learn to worship him both with perfect innocence of life and with unfeigned obedience, then to depend wholly upon his goodness."³⁹⁹

knowledge of God as creator; the doctrine of predestination is found together with his discussion on election which comes after his teaching on the grace of Christ as given to believers in the Holy Spirit. For the development of this idea in Calvin's writings, see Wendel, *Calvin*, 263-268.

³⁹³ I, 16, 1; I, 18, 1.

³⁹⁴ II, 2, 20; III, 2, 33.

³⁹⁵ II, 2, 12-17.

³⁹⁶ I, 11-12.

³⁹⁷ I, 14, 3.

³⁹⁸ I, 5, 1.

³⁹⁹ I, 10, 2.

Calvin's intellectualism elicits here a tension within human existence. Perhaps the best example of this can be seen in his understanding of the relation between the guidance of the sovereign Lord and the human will, which necessitates an increased focus on God's love to ease the tension between God's dominant sustenance and humanity's necessary obedience. Calvin describes God's providential love in two ways. First, God's provision of the world itself and his management of it point out God's love toward human beings. The world is created in order to establish a home for human beings,⁴⁰⁰ and the continuing provision of the world retains the created order for human life.⁴⁰¹ It is clear that Calvin thinks of the bestowal of the *imago dei* as displaying fundamentally the love of God. God is the Father of human beings and nourishes his children with fatherly love. This is revealed in creation and in his sustenance of that creation.⁴⁰²

Second, God's love is expressed in the church which, for Calvin, is established through God's general care for the world. The church is constituted upon God's provision for the world because through the church the gospel can be preached thus meeting the basic need of believers.⁴⁰³ In this way, God chooses the church to become his dwelling place: that space where he both governs and manifests his unique love to his people.⁴⁰⁴ The church recognizes that God is not merely the nourishing creator of the world, but also the one who liberates human beings from the bondage of sin. Yet, as we will see below, the tension that exists in the relation between God and human beings continues within redemption.

⁴⁰⁰ I, 14, 2; 20- 22.

⁴⁰¹ I, 16, 6.

⁴⁰² I, 5, 10.

4.2.2. Human corruption

The discussion of human corruption focuses mainly on the questions of what sin is, and what corrupted human nature is that it should require restoration. In regards the relational dimension outlined above, Calvin argues that human beings fell into sin because of disobedience which in turn was caused by a lack of belief. “Unfaithfulness, then, was the root of the fall.”⁴⁰⁵ For Calvin, to disobey the word of God is to have contempt for God’s wisdom and truth. Without fear of God, human beings cannot listen to God and God cannot dwell in human beings.⁴⁰⁶ The above description presents us with a broken relationship between human beings and God. Importantly here, it is human beings who destroy that order which, according to Scripture, had placed the creator and his creatures in a parallel relationship. Thus God is dishonored and the nature of human beings perverted.

In 1559, Calvin highlights the life of the soul, consisting in the positive human relation to God. Yet conversely, human estrangement from God means the death of the soul.⁴⁰⁷ Calvin uses the expression “death of the soul” in order to describe the interruption in the flow of God’s sustenance. This disruption occurs because the human relation to God has been cancelled out. In short, sin interferes with human subsistence in God. At the same time, God’s provision is interrupted and the *imago dei* effaced, i.e. the expression of divine aspects in human nature is disrupted.

⁴⁰³ I, 17, 1.

⁴⁰⁴ I, 17, 6.

⁴⁰⁵ II, 1, 4.

4.2.3. Redemption

In regards redemption, Christ the mediator is sent by God in order that human beings may be reconciled to him. God's involvement in human existence through Christ, who is the reality of the divine covenant and promise, also constitutes human participation in God in which the *imago dei* is renewed and we are adopted as the children of God.⁴⁰⁸ Calvin suggests that in the Old Testament the deity of Christ had been disclosed through the prophets and by the description of Moses.⁴⁰⁹ In the Old Testament the concept of the highest power and the idea of righteousness characterize God's image⁴¹⁰ and in this way point to Christ: the Son as the prince of peace, the mighty God as Immanuel, the branch of David as Jehovah our righteousness.⁴¹¹ For Calvin, that Christ is Jehovah signifies the highest power and righteousness, and moves the church to acknowledge God's revelation in Christ and to glorify God.⁴¹² In God's works of grace through the Holy Spirit, God's participation in terms of his divine grace upon believers regenerates and restores the *imago dei*. In this way, and in Christ, believers have a share in and express once more God's characteristics.

Although human beings disobey God and are corrupt, God values the rest of what they have obtained from him. This displays God's view of the human creature as it is adorned with the *imago dei*, even though human beings possess only the natural knowledge of God after the fall. For Calvin, God's love to human beings in Christ shows that God loved human beings before the world was created and accepts them to

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ II, 1, 5.

⁴⁰⁸ III, 3, 9. I, 15, 5.

⁴⁰⁹ I, 13, 9.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ I, 13, 9.

become his children. Calvin adopts this notion from Augustine and quotes the African bishop in support:⁴¹³ “For he hated us for what we were that he had not made; yet because our wickedness had not entirely consumed his handiwork, he knew how, at the same time, to hate in each one of us what we had made, and to love what he had made.”⁴¹⁴ God sent Jesus Christ into the world because of his love. In this way God the creator is manifested through the redeemer, inasmuch as the Son reveals God the Father.

Calvin inserts a section on Jesus Christ as the invisible image of God in order to reinforce the above notion. Calvin points out that Jesus Christ is the incarnated *imago dei* who has come to reconcile human beings to God, inasmuch as human beings can acknowledge God only in Christ—this being necessary for salvation.⁴¹⁵ “For even if, properly speaking, faith mounts up from Christ to the Father, yet [this means]: although faith rests in God, it will gradually disappear unless he who retains it in perfect firmness intercedes as Mediator. Otherwise, God’s majesty is too lofty to be attained by mortal man.”⁴¹⁶

Calvin stresses Christ’s mediatory position as the *imago dei* in order to make a point of connection between human beings and God. **This connecting point between God and human beings is the *imago dei* of Christ.** “For this reason I subscribe to the common saying that God is the object of faith, yet, it requires qualification. For Christ is not without reason called ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col. 1: 15). This title

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ II, 16, 4.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. Cf. Aurelius Augustine. “Tractate CX, 6,” in *Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, trans. John Gibb (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher, 1995), 411.

⁴¹⁵ II, 6, 4.

warns us that, unless God confronts us in Christ, we cannot come to know that we are saved.”⁴¹⁷ Calvin tells us that while the *imago Christi* is the “image of the invisible God”, it is not analogous with that represented in human beings: this is because Christ is the divine one, the second person of the Trinity, who is dwelling in humanity. Furthermore, since Christ is called the second Adam, this expresses his full human nature.⁴¹⁸ Adam is not the image of the invisible God in terms of divine essence, but is the image of God in terms of God’s characteristics—this signifies an analogy through grace which is then renewed by redemption in Jesus Christ.

Calvin speaks of Christ as mediator, as the one who both possesses the divine essence and is still truly man. Jesus Christ became a man in order to redeem human beings. Through his sacrifice, the dominion of sin in human beings which had deformed the *imago dei* was now overthrown. Only in this way can the *imago dei* in human beings be restored. God communicates himself to these newly cleansed people through his representative, namely through Jesus Christ.

As for regeneration, God’s participation in the restoration of human beings occurs through the efficacy of the Holy Spirit. In correspondence to the *imago* text in Book I, chapter fifteen, where he cites 1 Cor 15: 45,⁴¹⁹ Calvin differentiates the grace of God in creation from the grace of Christ in terms of the restoration of the *imago dei*. The

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ II, 6, 4.

⁴¹⁸ Calvin provides a detailed view on Jesus Christ as mediator in Book II, chapter 14. Yet full clarity on this idea of Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God can be obtained from the commentaries on Col 1: 15. There God is manifested in his majesty and divinity in Jesus Christ, in the form of humanity. “The sum is this — that God in himself, that is, in his naked majesty, is *invisible*, and that not to the eyes of the body merely, but also to the understandings of men, and that he is revealed to us in Christ alone, that we may behold him as in a mirror. For in Christ he shews us his righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, his entire self. We must, therefore, beware of seeking him elsewhere, for everything that would set itself off as a representation of God, apart from Christ, will be an idol.” *Comm Col 1: 15*.

former is God's work brought about generally in creation by the power of the Holy Spirit in God's sustenance.⁴²⁰ The latter is a special provision through God's Son, through whom the Holy Spirit affects believers. Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the human mind is restored to the knowledge of God and reflects the *imago dei*.⁴²¹

After his discussions on redemption and regeneration, Calvin enlarges and edits his teaching on predestination and election. In this arrangement, we see the tension of the relation between God and human beings both in creation and in redemption. The tension in creation is that the sovereign God predestines the fall of Adam. Adam with free will failed to preserve what God gave him. The tension in redemption is that the sovereign God predestines election, in which some people are saved and some not. In regards redemption, it should be noted that God's participation merely coincides with the participation of the elect. In response to Calvin's theology here it is difficult not to raise serious questions, namely: if God is indeed governing, why then is the *imago dei*, the character of the human creature, at all effaced? And why does this sovereign Lord not govern the human will as a whole in order to bring it back to that state in which it was created? Why does the sovereign God wish that only believers, and not all humanity, should receive salvation and restoration into the *imago dei*?⁴²² These questions are addressed in Calvin's discussion of election, where he highlights human autonomy in order to assert human responsibility for the fall.

⁴¹⁹ I, 15, 4.

⁴²⁰ I, 1, 1.

⁴²¹ III, 3, 9.

⁴²² These questions were already raised by Pighius in 1543. *Defesio sanae et Orthodoxae Doctrinae: De Servitute et Liberatione Humani Arbitrii Adversus Calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis*. C. O. 6, 255-256. Calvin answers these difficulties by referring to the relation between God's will and human will in the doctrine of predestination in 1550. *De Aeterna Praedestinatione Dei*. C. O. 8, 292-295. Cf.

4.3. What is the imago dei in relation to human nature?

Calvin places the imago text of 1559 within the topic of human creation, i.e. in Book I, chapter fifteen. While discussing the question of what humankind is, Calvin describes the difference between body and soul, the imago dei, and human nature. This new arrangement and expansion gives us Calvin's first systematic discussion of human beings in the *Institutes*.

For Calvin the imago dei is not corporeal. Yet neither is the imago dei equal to the soul, nor to human nature. Calvin does see the imago dei as having a seat in the soul. But the essential correlation between the imago dei and the expression of human nature is that the imago dei is a purely gratuitous adornment of God's grace.⁴²³ The imago dei is expressed through the soul, and human nature as a whole participates in this expression. Yet this expression occurs only under condition: namely, that the imago dei has to be sustained by special power through communion with God. Human nature by itself cannot achieve this. In this way, Calvin perceives the imago dei as the integrity of human nature, and as the excellence of the human creature above other animals. In this way, Calvin sees his view as differentiated from other philosophical and even Manichean understandings.

4.3.1. The imago dei and the immortality of the soul

Calvin realizes that 'immortality' has both a positive and a negative meaning. The immortality of the soul points merely to the soul's essence. This essence exists

Heiko A. Oberman, "The Pursuit of Happiness," in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation*, 255-259.

everlastingly and bears either the life of God or the death of sinfulness. In his description of eternal life, in regards Christian life, Calvin identifies immortality and heavenly immortality with eternal life.⁴²⁴

Calvin provides three proofs in order to demonstrate the immortality of soul. First, he argues that human conscience can differentiate good from evil and respond to the judgment of God. It has this ability due to fear which occurs in the soul and which is beyond any corporeal framework. In short, the ability to differentiate good from evil and to respond to God's judgment provide evidence of an immortal soul.⁴²⁵ A second proof that Calvin puts forward is the activity of the soul through dreams. When sleeping we see a separate mode of function of the body.⁴²⁶ Thirdly, because the *imago dei* is immortal, the essence of immortality in the *imago dei* is found in close relation to eternal life.⁴²⁷ It seems that the term "immortality" signifies either human conscience as the fear of God or faith in God. Yet in the *Institutes*, Calvin does not explain why immortality should be a substantial property of the soul. For this we must turn to his commentaries on Gen 2: 7. There Calvin identifies three stages in the creation of human beings. In the last of these stages God endows the created human soul with the *imago dei*. Immortality is simply annexed to the *imago dei*.⁴²⁸ In other words, God created human beings to anticipate eternal life through this immortal gift. In this way, immortality now constitutes the essence of the soul so that the fallen soul also remains immortal.

⁴²³ Calvin does not differentiate the image of God from the likeness of God. I, 15, 3; *Comm Gen 1: 26*.

⁴²⁴ III, 9, 3-4.

⁴²⁵ I, 15, 2.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ I, 15, 4.

⁴²⁸ *Comm Gen 2: 7*.

In Book III, chapter nine, regarding meditation on eternal life, Calvin encourages Christians to have a disciplined life in which the activity of the flesh will not govern the Christian's mind and where the things of the world will not have much impact on the thoughts of believers.⁴²⁹ Despite Christ's victory over the dominion of sin, the desires of the flesh and the love of this world still present a problem for believers. Calvin's way out of this dilemma is the contemplation of eternal life: "There is no surer or more direct course than that which we receive from contempt of the present life and meditation upon heavenly immortality."⁴³⁰ In this context, the expression "heavenly immortality" is identified with eternal life.

4.3.2. The imago dei as non-corporeal

4.3.2.1. The creation of the world

In discussing the creation of the world in the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin examines God's act of creating the human body—this reminds us once again of Calvin's constant emphasis on the workmanship of God. The beauty both of the body and of the mind hints in the creation of human beings at the creation in them of a microcosm of the cosmos.⁴³¹ Human beings are named examples of God's righteousness, wisdom, and goodness. Yet in this passage Calvin does not highlight the imago dei.

4.3.2.2. The creation of human beings

In his chapter on the creation of human beings, Calvin reminds us that human beings are given an immortal soul despite having been created from simple clay. Calvin

⁴²⁹ III, 9, 3.

⁴³⁰ III, 9, 4.

⁴³¹ I, 5, 2-3.

contrasts this pre-fall human state to the current state of corruption and appeals to the immortality of the soul in order to assert first the aim why such a perfect nature was given to Adam, and secondly human responsibility for this corrupted state. “Since God not only deigned to give life to an earthen vessel, but also willed it to be the abode of an immortal spirit, Adam could rightly glory in the great liberality of his Maker.”⁴³² Further, Calvin argues that the immortal soul is the nobler part of humanity. Subsequently for Calvin, the corporeal aspect of human existence is less splendid than this immortal essence. To support this view, Calvin cites Gen 2: 7 and 18: 27. The contrast between body and soul is founded on the substantial difference between these two aspects of humanity, both of which radiate the glory of God and God’s workmanship albeit to different degrees.⁴³³

Calvin points to the median position human beings possess in creation. On the one hand, human beings are attached to the earth, from which the rest of creation also proceeds. On the other hand, God adorns this simple and corruptible clay with an immortal spirit, granting human beings special dignity within creation.⁴³⁴

Calvin differentiates the two substances of body and soul. Although the human body also radiates the glory of God to a certain degree, the image of God has its seat in the soul. Calvin sees several signs of the immortality of the soul, for instance, human intelligence which can communicate with the source of life.⁴³⁵ Calvin locates this ability to go beyond the self, beyond the immediate necessities of material life, within the human mind thus heightening the contrast with the body. “For the sense

⁴³² I, 15, 1.

⁴³³ I, 15, 3.

⁴³⁴ I, 15, 1.

perception inhering in brute animals does not go beyond the body, or at least extends no farther than to material things presented to it. But the nimbleness of the human mind in searching out heaven and earth and the secrets of nature, and when all ages have been compassed by its understanding and memory, in arranging each thing in its proper order, and in inferring future events from past, clearly shows that there lies hidden in man something separate from the body.”⁴³⁶ In this sense, Calvin’s understanding of the *imago dei* is completely enveloped within the intellectual dimension of human existence.

4.3.2.3. The *imago-text*

According to Calvin, Osiander declared that the *imago dei* also embraced the human body, and that the idea of Christ’s human body was already present in the eternal counsel of the Trinity so that Adam was in fact created in accordance with Christ’s design. In other words, the image of God can be identified with Christ’s humanity even from eternity.⁴³⁷ Adam is created in accordance with that blueprint of human nature held from eternity in the second person of the Trinity. At the same time, for Osiander, the image of God is the image of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit because God created human beings “in our [i.e. the threefold God’s] image.”⁴³⁸ Thus the way in which God the Father and God the Spirit dwell in Christ is also the way they dwell in human beings. But in what way is our human nature to be identified

⁴³⁵ I, 15, 2-3.

⁴³⁶ I, 15, 2. These notions are discussed in detail in his commentaries. See *Comm. I Cor 15: 45-47. Comm. I Cor 12: 18-24. Comm Eph 4: 18. Comm. Gen 2: 7. Comm. Psalm 115: 1-3. Psychopannychia*, C. O. 5, 181; 201.

⁴³⁷ Andreas Osiander, *Schriften und Briefe 1549 bis August 1551*, in *Anderas Osiander D. Ä. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 9, eds. Gerhard Müller and Gottfried Seebaß (Güterloher Verlaghaus: Güterloh, 1994), 468.

⁴³⁸ Osiander, *Schriften und Briefe 1549 bis August 1551*, 466 and 472.

with Christ's human nature? In this sense, Calvin sees Osiander arguing that human nature must be endowed with an essential, ontic righteousness, and not a righteousness which is given purely through God's grace. Therefore, the righteousness of God is no longer a supernatural gift, but is already a part of humanity from their created beginnings.⁴³⁹

If Osiander had not pictured the *imago dei* as embracing the body of Jesus Christ in the Trinity, then his doctrine of the *imago dei* would probably have been better accepted by Calvin. Yet as it stands, Calvin rejects Osiander's view on two grounds. First, Calvin is not satisfied with a view which sees the image of God as embracing the body which is predestined in eternal counsel. Calvin wants to leave room open for Adam not to sin. If Adam had only maintained the original state, then Christ might not have come in human form for our salvation.⁴⁴⁰ Calvin argues against Osiander's identification of the *imago dei* with Jesus Christ's constitution as both human and divine. It is difficult to make humanity compatible with the procedures of the Trinity. In the Trinity, the Son is begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Son.⁴⁴¹ The question is how the Son can bear the image of the Spirit, if the Spirit is begotten from the Son. For Calvin, the problem here is that the procedure of the second and third persons of the Trinity is destroyed. Moreover, if the image is to include the body in the second person of the Trinity, then this cannot conform with the Spirit who is non-corporeal.⁴⁴² When we bear in mind Calvin's understanding of the "God" of the *imago dei* and of the knowledge of God, we can easily understand Calvin's reservations regarding Osiander.

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 477-478.

⁴⁴⁰ I, 15, 3.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

4.3.3. The integrity of human nature

In Book I, chapter fifteen of the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin addresses the integrity of human nature. This integrity fundamentally concerns the expression of the faculties of the soul which are given at creation, faculties which represent the characteristics of God. “Accordingly, the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his maker.”⁴⁴³ This points to Adam before the fall, a state which Calvin describes in two new sections teaching on the integrity of human nature.⁴⁴⁴

In the *imago* text, the integrity of human nature as the image of God is inferred through the renewal of human nature. Citing Eph 4: 23, Calvin argues: “In the first place he posits knowledge, then pure righteousness and holiness. From this we infer that, to begin with, God’s image was visible in the light of the mind, the uprightness of the heart, and in the soundness of all parts.”⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ I, 15, 3.

⁴⁴⁴ I, 15, 6-7. These new textual insertions reinforce Calvin’s understanding of the pre-lapsarian Adam and the *cognitio nostri*. Calvin’s understanding of the human state *pre lapsum* is already illustrated in the argument against Pighius view of free will in 1543. In order to argue against Pighius, Calvin surveys the views of free will in the church fathers and points out the problem in Pighius’ understanding of free will. Pighius thinks the nature of human will, as a natural gift, is not corrupted after the fall. For Pighius, the impact of sin causes the effacement of supernatural gifts. Natural gifts are not deformed. This is not acceptable to Calvin who stresses the state of total corruption after the fall. The correlation between grace and the workings of the human will in Pighius’ position lies between that of the Reformers and Pelagius. In this way, Calvin highlights the contrast between the state before the fall and that after the fall, which is decisive in understanding human nature and free will. This is also found in the writings of the church fathers. Calvin argues that Pighius does not differentiate the two states at all. *Defesio sanae et Orthodoxae Doctrinae: De Servitute et Liberatione*

In the 1548 commentaries on Eph 4: 23-24, Calvin understands “mind” to encompass both the lower and higher ranks of the appetites of the soul. He then proceeds to contrast the Holy Spirit, which affects the minds of believers toward renewal, with the spirit of the mind.⁴⁴⁶ This renewal presents a transformation of the soul as a whole through the effect of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴⁷ As for the 1560 commentaries on Rom 8: 6—“To set the mind on the flesh is death”—Calvin thinks “mind” could be more appropriately translated here as “minding” since it is an active form. He identifies the activities of the mind with the activities of the heart in his interpretation of the way the fallen state functions under the flesh. “That under this word [mind] are included all the faculties of the soul—reason, understanding, and affections, it seems to me that minding (*cogitatio*—thinking, imagining, caring) is a more suitable word.”⁴⁴⁸ Calvin uses “mind” or “heart” synecdochically, i.e. as representing the expression of the faculties of the soul as a whole.⁴⁴⁹ Thus human nature as a whole, and not just the ‘mind’, is totally corrupted after the fall. We can infer from this that the God-oriented existence of humankind either exists with the integrity of human nature or is destroyed in total corruption. Although the *imago dei* is a gratuitous gift of divine grace, it is expressed in the correspondence of all aspects of the soul. When discussing regeneration, Calvin often speaks of “turning to God”.⁴⁵⁰ This suggests that the *imago dei* points to human participation in Christ, turning one’s life and entire being toward God.

Humani Arbitrii Adversus Calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis. C. O. 6, 247; 279-288; 357-373. For Calvin’s view of the pre-lapsarian state, see also C. O. 6, 285-286.

⁴⁴⁵ I, 15, 4.

⁴⁴⁶ *Comm Eph 4: 23*.

⁴⁴⁷ *Comm Eph 4: 24*. Calvin defines his use of the word “spirit” in chapter fifteen, section two. In this context, spirit points to soul and is contrasted with the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁴⁸ *Comm Rom 8: 6* in 1560.

⁴⁴⁹ I, 15, 4. See also *Comm Gen 1: 26-27*.

Calvin adds a description of the renewal of the *imago dei* to the topic of regeneration. Calvin sees the renewal of the *imago dei* as a life-long process along with the gradual restoration of human nature in the grace of Christ. “And, indeed, this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruption of the flesh, ... that they may practice repentance throughout their lives.”⁴⁵¹ Yet at this point one may ask how the *imago dei* as the integrity of human nature is expressed in a gradual process of human restoration in the grace of Christ. This will be discussed in Part III.

4.3.4. Against the Manichees and particular philosophical understandings

4.3.4.1. Against the Manichees

In the *Institutes* of 1559, Calvin expands one section of his argument against the Manichees, who maintained that God instilled a portion of divinity into human nature when creating human beings. If it is true, as Calvin argues, that the *imago dei* is expressed in the integrity of human nature, then this Manichean view threatens the proper understanding of a God-oriented human existence.

Calvin chose two contemporary theologians as representatives of this stream of thinking: Servetus and Osiander. According to Calvin, Servetus argues that

⁴⁵⁰ III, 3, 6. See the previous section on “the *Imago Dei* in the *Institutes* of 1539.”

⁴⁵¹ III, 3, 9. This corresponds to the description Calvin gives us in his work against the Anabaptist’s view of regeneration in the 1539 *Institutes*. See the previous section on “the *Imago Dei* in the *Institutes* of 1539.”

humankind received God's substance when he breathed into the nostrils of the human being at its creation.⁴⁵²

Calvin argues against this understanding and stresses the mutability of human nature: it was corrupted and consists of wicked desires, passions, ignorance and infirmity. This portrays a changeable and ambivalent aspect to human nature. This mutability and infirmity are characteristics of human, not divine, nature. "Nothing is more inconstant than man."⁴⁵³ Moreover, Calvin sees human nature possessed by ignorance and wickedness after the fall. Therefore, it is impossible for Calvin to derive human nature from the essence of God.

In order to deepen the discussion Calvin adopts a view based on Acts 17: 28, "we are God's offspring." Reading this verse through a Pauline lens, Calvin understands this statement to mean that human beings were endowed with divine gifts, i.e. the *imago dei*, and not that human beings are substantially divine. Calvin tries to establish a parallel between, on the one hand, created human beings adorned with the *imago dei* and, on the other hand, the angels. "Therefore we must take it to be a fact that souls, although the image of God be engraved upon them, are just as much created as angels are."⁴⁵⁴

Further, Calvin appeals to the creation *ex nihilo*. Human beings are to be counted among creation even though they were endowed with spirit. The spirit is a divine gift,

⁴⁵² I, 15, 5.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

which will return to God after departing from the body. But this is not to say that the spirit itself is divine. Rather it is merely a divine gift.⁴⁵⁵

Calvin then portrays Osiander as Manichaeistic because Osiander “ought to have considered the manner of the indwelling [of the deity]—namely, that the Father and Spirit are in Christ, and even as the fullness of deity dwells in him, so in him we possess the whole of deity.”⁴⁵⁶ For Calvin, believers in Christ receive the effects of the Holy Spirit in terms of power. This can be seen in Christ’s role as mediator and in the fact that believers receive the righteousness of God through the merits of this mediator. The Holy Spirit affects Christ with power via an indwelling, a power which is poured also upon believers.⁴⁵⁷

Calvin argues against Osiander: “He does not recognize the image of God in man apart from essential righteousness, as if God were unable to make us conform to himself by the inestimable power of his Spirit, apart from Christ’s pouring his own substance into us.”⁴⁵⁸ Against this, Calvin refers to the renewal of the *imago dei* as found in 2 Cor 3: 18. He stresses that this renewal consists in our being conformed to God, not “by an inflowing of substance, but by the grace and power of the Spirit.”⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ III, 11, 5.

⁴⁵⁷ Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (North Carolina, Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1991), 63-64. Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 133-134; 138. Calvin explains this idea in his 1546 commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 47.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

4.3.4.2. Deviation from popular philosophical understandings

Calvin appreciates philosophical research into human nature and distinguishes various interpretations of it.⁴⁶⁰ Yet Calvin does not want to cohere to such philosophical understandings of human nature because he finds that the effect of sin has not been sufficiently considered. Calvin tends to discuss human nature in terms of its origin, to which we must then contrast this corrupted nature. “Hence the great obscurity faced by the philosophers, for they were seeking in a ruin for a building, and in scattered fragments for a well-knit structure. They held this principle, that man would not be a rational animal unless he possessed free choice of good and evil; also it entered their minds that the distinction between virtues and vices would be obliterated if man did not order his life by his own planning. Well reasoned so far—if there had been no change in man.”⁴⁶¹ Thus for Calvin, the restoration of human nature is to bring it back to what it once was, to that state in which human beings were created. And it is not a partial restoration. This restoration is a movement of the whole human being into a newness which reflects the original state, where the integrity of human nature once again reflects the glory of God as God’s best work.⁴⁶²

In conclusion, Calvin’s understanding of human nature bypasses both the philosophical ignorance of the effects of sin and Manichean thought, in which human nature is seen to be divine. Calvin views human nature as created, yet endowed with the gift of God, i.e. the *imago dei*. Thus, human nature does not come from any divine

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ I, 15, 6-7. Calvin speaks in general terms of “the philosophers” or of “the” philosophical discourse. Only when he has a specific issue in relation to the expression of human nature does he point out individual names, such as Aristotle. However, it remains unclear in this context which philosophical traditions or scholars he has in mind.

⁴⁶¹ I, 15, 7.

substance which could not be defiled by sin. Human nature has to depend on the grace of Christ in the Spirit. Only thereby can human nature express that integrity imprinted upon it in the beginning. Calvin's deviation from both philosophical and Manichean thought stresses his view that human nature was created either to subsist in God in uprightness or to be alienated from God in corruption.

4.3.5 The excellence of creaturehood

The idea that the *imago dei* is the excellence of the human creature, and is that which promotes humanity above all other creatures, is not found in the first edition of the *Institutes*. Yet in the 1537 catechism, Calvin does not see the fallen state of humankind as being any better than the state attributed to animals. "It is commonly agreed that if our life is without religion we are most miserable and in no way better than brute animals."⁴⁶³ In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin enlarged his understanding of human corruption. In that text, corrupted reason still expressed a small amount of zeal for the truth: a remnant inclination of human nature. By the time we reach the commentaries on Genesis in 1554 and the 1559 *Institutes*, the *imago dei* signifies the excellence of the human creature.

4.3.5.1. The commentaries on Genesis in 1554

4.3.5.2. The argumentum

Calvin introduces his view on the aim of creation, in which the creator manifests his particular care toward the church. "The end to which the whole scope of the history

⁴⁶² I, 15, 4.

tends is to this point, that the human race has been preserved by God in such a manner as to manifest his special care for his Church.”⁴⁶⁴ Because Calvin concentrates on God’s special guidance for the church, he tends to explain the excellence of the human creature in terms of God’s intention in creation, i. e., God endowed human beings with the *imago dei* so that they may anticipate eternal life. “Man, after he had been endued with the light of intelligence, and adorned with so many privileges, fell by his own fault, and was thus deprived of all the benefits he had obtained; afterwards, by the compassion of God, he was restored to the life he had forfeited, and this through the loving-kindness of Christ; so that there should always be some assembly on earth, which being adopted into the hope of the celestial life, might in this confidence worship God.”⁴⁶⁵ For our discussion, it is necessary to examine how Calvin understands creation.

Calvin tells us that God created the world as a theater, in which he placed human beings. By beholding God’s marvelous work, human beings honor God. Furthermore, God created the world in order that human beings should enjoy the creation and obey God both in their own lives and in their management of this world. For Calvin, the creation of human beings is the summit of God’s creative activity. Human beings are endowed with understanding and reason and this distinguishes them from the animals. How is it that understanding and reason give human beings dignity? For Calvin, human beings were created in this way in order that they may ascend to God. The material needs of life cannot restrain the human mind; the image of God is

⁴⁶³ *Instruction in Faith* (1537), 21-22. Also see the 1538 catechism C. O. 10, 313. Cf. John I. Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary* (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1997), 7.

⁴⁶⁴ *The argumentum of the commentaries on Genesis*.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

adorned upon human souls⁴⁶⁶ and this adornment points to their eschatological character which longs for eternal life and frees them from the restraints of this life.⁴⁶⁷ Hence it becomes clear that human understanding operates within human nature in order to achieve eternal life. The creator made human beings with this intention.

4.3.5.3. The commentaries on Gen 2: 7

We should note here Calvin's approach to the inconsistencies between the narratives of Gen 1: 26 and Gen 2: 7. Calvin considers the narratives in Gen 2 a complement to Gen 1.⁴⁶⁸ That said, when discussing the creation of human beings in the commentaries on Gen 2, Calvin also compares human beings to the remaining creatures. Both animals and the human body are created from the earth. Thus on one hand, Calvin sees human beings sharing this common feature with animals, namely that they are taken from the earth.⁴⁶⁹ Yet this human 'clay' is adorned with the *imago dei*. This displays the human advantage within creation.

Calvin presents two points in his commentary in order to illustrate the excellence of the human creature. First, human beings were formed out of clay upon which the adventitious gift of God, i.e. the *imago dei*, is adorned. For Calvin, human identity is constituted by the clay and the *imago dei* together. The clay reminds human beings that they are similar to the rest of creation, formed out of this earthly element. For Calvin, the remaining creatures too are created as living beings, i.e. they are given souls. It is the *imago dei* which reminds human beings that they are endowed with an

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ *Comm Gen 1- 2.*

extra gift of God, in addition to the soul and which constitutes the immortality of the human soul. On the one hand, Calvin tells us that humankind learns to be humble by apprehending this earthly creaturehood. On the other hand, human beings possess dignity through the endowment of the *imago dei*, and this points to their duty to serve their author.⁴⁷⁰

Secondly, Calvin sees human dignity also displayed in the elaborate process gone into for the creation of human beings. “Three gradations, indeed, are to be noted in the creation of man; that his dead body was formed out of the dust of the earth; that it was endued with a soul, whence it should receive vital motion; and that on this soul God engraved his own image, to which immortality is annexed.”⁴⁷¹ This characterizes the excellence of human creaturehood.

4.3.5.4. The *Institutes* of 1559

In Calvin’s work on the creation of human beings in the 1559 *Institutes*, he states that the outward expression of human lives also displays the excellence of this creaturehood. Yet in the main these excellent gifts are found in the soul. Calvin sees these gifts as spiritual, and through them human beings are not restrained by the mere necessities of this life. That life which is directed toward heaven excels the lives of other creatures. On the one hand, the excellence of the human creature points to the integrity of human nature in creation.⁴⁷² On the other hand, it highlights human reason after Adam’s fall, which can still access the knowledge of God. It is the

⁴⁶⁹ I, 15, 3.

⁴⁷⁰ *Comm Gen 2: 7*.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

knowledge of God which functions in human reason and constitutes the *imago dei* so that human beings can approach eternal life, even though eternal life can only be completed in the last judgment. But without the *imago dei*, human beings would be in eternal perdition. This idea from the 1559 *Institutes* corresponds to Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* as that way toward eternal life which we saw in the 1536 *Institutes*.⁴⁷³

4.3.5.5. The imago-text

In the 1559 text, which is an enlargement of previous editions, Calvin defines the *imago dei* only in terms of a God-oriented and eternal life. He does this in order to exclude any possibility of it including either the human body or, as a consequence, gender. In comparison with the 1536 and 1539 texts, his usage of the phrase “spiritual and eternal life” in 1559 shows Calvin's rhetorical stress against Osiander's view.⁴⁷⁴ Eternal life here signifies human reason in this world in an existence which is oriented toward God and which continues into eternity.

Calvin appeals to John 1: 4 in order to justify his understanding of the *imago dei* in terms of human intellect. “John confirms this same point in other words, declaring that ‘the life’ which was from the beginning in God's eternal word ‘was the light of men’ (John 1: 4). It was his intent to praise God's singular grace, wherein man excels the remaining living creatures, in order to separate him from the multitude because he

⁴⁷² I, 15, 3.

⁴⁷³ O. S. I, 37.

⁴⁷⁴ I, 15, 4.

attained no common life, but one joined with the light of understanding.”⁴⁷⁵ Yet in this assertion, the correlation between life, light, the word of God and God’s grace remains unclear.

Calvin interprets this passage in his 1553 commentaries on John 1: 4, where ‘life’ in this context points to the Word of God. The Word of God signifies the second person of the Trinity who exists before the creation of the world. The world itself is created by the Word of God. In this way the Word of God is the source of life and is itself divine life. Thus, Christ together with the power of the Spirit is the source of creation. Yet the Spirit is not only the source of everything in creation, but also the power which nourishes the life of every creature. “For were it not that his continued inspiration gives vigor to the world, every thing that *lives* would immediately decay, or be reduced to nothing. In a word, what Paul ascribes to God, that *in him we are, and move, and live* (Acts 17: 28).”⁴⁷⁶ In regards human reason in relation to the imago dei, Calvin sees human reason as possessing a higher rank than any animal intellect, and as apprehending the knowledge of God by the illumination of the Holy Spirit in Christ. In this sense, human beings possess life in God, which is ‘the light’ in this context. Human beings “were not created like the beasts, but having been endued with reason, they had obtained a higher rank. As it is not in vain that God imparts his light to their minds, it follows that the purpose for which they were created was, that they might acknowledge Him who is the Author of so excellent a blessing. And since this light, of which *the Speech* was the source, has been conveyed from him to us, it ought to serve as a mirror, in which we may clearly behold the divine power of *the*

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ *Comm John 1: 4* in 1553.

Speech.”⁴⁷⁷

Human beings are endowed with understanding and can recognize God in creation and apprehend God’s word. In this way, Calvin sees the knowledge of God as given in the creation of human beings. Yet since human understanding is severely corrupted after the fall, God provides human beings with Scripture.

4.3.5.6. Human corruption

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin inserts a paragraph describing the condition of human corruption. He does this by drawing attention to supernatural and natural gifts. With the supporting idea of ‘light’, which he picks up from John 1: 5, Calvin gives us a comprehensive explanation of human reason with a distinction between supernatural and natural gifts. First, human reason is a natural gift which can become corrupted. But even this corrupted reason can still discern good from evil.⁴⁷⁸ With the possession of this gift, human beings surpass other creatures. Nevertheless, God’s power has to enliven human understanding in order for it to apprehend the knowledge of God and to be obedient to God. The quickening or enlivening activity of God’s power expresses the *imago dei* and thus establishes it as a supernatural gift. In this way, the light, in relation to the *imago dei*, points the way toward eternal life.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. Calvin substitutes *sermo* for *verbum* because he was not satisfied with the old translation from Greek to Latin. “I wonder what induced the Latins to render ο λογος by *Verbum*, [the Word] for that would rather have been the translation of το ρημα. But granting that they had some plausible reason, still it cannot be denied that *Sermo* [the Speech] would have been far more appropriate.” *Comm John 1: 1*.

⁴⁷⁸ II, 2, 12.

4.3.6. Life and death

4.3.6.1. The 1559 description of the imago dei

Calvin infers from the restored state of the imago dei what its original, created state must have been—this is because regeneration aims at restoring the image of God in us, which conforms us then to that original state of creation. “For even though Paul ... commends the richer measure of grace in regeneration, yet he does not remove that other principal point, that the end of regeneration is that Christ should reform us to God’s image.”⁴⁷⁹ Calvin points out that the imago dei belongs together with the life in God. “Yet I now consider it sufficiently proved that whatever has to do with spiritual and eternal life is included under ‘image’.”⁴⁸⁰ While Calvin rejects the idea that the imago dei could embrace corporeal existence (as we saw above in the debate with Osiander), he tends to ignore the socio-political aspects of the imago dei as seen for example in 1 Cor 11: 7. Calvin reinforces his own viewpoint by appealing to John 1: 4, that life oriented toward God is related to the eternal Word of God which was “the light of men.”⁴⁸¹ We are reminded here that Calvin draws a relation between that promised life and the Word of God.⁴⁸² Thus Calvin thinks of the imago dei in relation to the life in God which is an anticipation of eternal life.

4.3.6.2. Human corruption

In Book II, chapter one, Calvin writes on knowledge of the self. Here the *duplex*

⁴⁷⁹ I, 15, 3.

⁴⁸⁰ I, 15, 4.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

cognitio nostri is essential. Calvin contrasts the pre-fall human state to human perversity. In the former, we find a right relationship between God and human beings. In the latter, this relationship has been disrupted. Awareness of this fact encourages human beings to be humble and leads us away from any reliance on self-assurance.

The human mind, as it was originally created, desired virtue and contemplated eternal life. Calvin unpacks what it means to contemplate eternal life by appealing to human understanding. For Calvin, the pre-lapsarian Adam participated in God's holiness and righteousness through his human intellectual capabilities. By participating in God's holiness and righteousness, human beings possessed an upright life. For Calvin, the provision of the *imago dei* was aimed at eternal life; therefore this is where Calvin sets his focus. In this sense, Calvin distinguishes the different types of life: on the one hand we have that life in God in the original creation or the life in Christ in recreation; on the other we have that eternal life which is a reality only after the resurrection and the second coming of Christ.⁴⁸³

Conversely, the fallen soul is spiritually dead.⁴⁸⁴ Calvin makes this contrast in order to display correct knowledge of the self, which was upright in humanity's creation but has now been disturbed by sin. Furthermore, the dead state of the fallen soul can only be recovered by Christ's grace. Calvin's aim here is to display the fact that human beings cannot reach virtue or heavenly happiness through their own capacities.⁴⁸⁵

Calvin addresses the death of the soul in his section on human corruption. "As it was

⁴⁸² *Comm John 1: 4.*

⁴⁸³ II, 1, 1-3.

⁴⁸⁴ II, 1, 1-5.

the spiritual life of Adam to remain united and bound to his Maker, so estrangement from him was the death of his soul.”⁴⁸⁶ After the fall, human beings lost all the benefits of divine grace. The corruption of human nature resulted in the death of the soul. In this state, human beings became blind to the knowledge of God and their character depraved. Moreover, the fallen person was subjected to the desire for earthly things.⁴⁸⁷ “Therefore, after the heavenly image was obliterated in him, he was not the only one to suffer this punishment—that, in place of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth, and justice, with which adornments he had been clad, there came forth the most filthy plagues, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice.”⁴⁸⁸

To summarize, for Calvin the death of the soul means estrangement from God and human subjection to earthly things. This stands against the original aims of the heavenly blessing. The *imago dei* signifies life in God, where human beings are motivated toward virtue and human understanding expresses knowledge of God.

4.3.7. Eternity and temporality

In several passages we find an inconsistency in Calvin’s understanding of eternity and temporality in regards the *imago dei*. In the *Institutes* of 1536, Calvin refers to the *imago dei* in relation to God’s appointment of government officers. The officers resemble the *imago dei*, because they are ministers of God, placed in their roles in order to punish evil and to protect the good. To rule for the public benefit is to preserve the security of the living. Calvin asserts that God has authorized magistrates

⁴⁸⁵ II, 1, 2.

⁴⁸⁶ II, 1, 5.

⁴⁸⁷ II, 1, 9.

according to Scripture.⁴⁸⁹ The social ordinance is constituted by God and is applied to the law in order that humanity may be preserved and religious freedom maintained. In this way human life is provided for and God's Word can be proclaimed.⁴⁹⁰

We therefore find something surprising in Calvin's interpretation of the *imago dei* in its distinction from Chrysostom's approach. Chrysostom saw the *imago dei* as signifying human dominion over other creatures. This points to the human capacity to govern, i.e. a temporal-political character. Yet Calvin rejected Chrysostom's notion in his description of the *imago dei* in the 1539 *Institutes*.⁴⁹¹ However there is a twist on this issue in his commentary on Gen 1: 26 in 1554. While commenting on Chrysostom's interpretation, Calvin writes, "Chrysostom is not more correct, who refers to the dominion which was given to man in order that he might, in a certain sense, act as God's vicegerent in the government of the world. This truly is some portion, though very small, of the image of God."⁴⁹² In his 1559 description, Calvin goes on to say: "Nor is there any probability in the opinion of those who locate God's likeness in the dominion given to man, as if in this mark alone he resembles God, that he was established as heir and possessor of all things; whereas God's image is properly to be sought within him, not outside him, indeed, it is an inner good of the soul."⁴⁹³

From the above texts, Calvin seems to point out the inseparability of the eschatological and temporal characters of the *imago dei*. When the *imago dei* is

⁴⁸⁸ II, 1, 5.

⁴⁸⁹ O. S. I, 274-275.

⁴⁹⁰ O. S. I, 260.

⁴⁹¹ C. O. 1, 308.

⁴⁹² *Comm Gen 1: 26*. This notion is already asserted in the description of the *imago dei* in the 1539 *Institutes*.

restricted to human dominion, it ignores its eschatological existence. This is intolerable for Calvin because he sees the main function of the *imago dei* as communicating with God; it is in this way that human beings ascend to God. Nevertheless, Calvin does not reject the idea that the *imago dei* embraces temporal things, such as human dominion.

Moreover, Calvin's reference to Gen 1: 26 seems to create a tension with I Cor 11: 7, where Paul writes: "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man." In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin interprets the description of the *imago dei* in Gen 1: 26 as pointing to its eschatological character in the kingdom of Christ, whereas I Cor 11 points to the character of the *imago dei* within the temporal political order. "But the statement in which man alone is called by Paul 'the image and glory of God' and woman excluded from this place of honour is clearly to be restricted, as the context shows, to the political order."⁴⁹⁴

It seems that Calvin does not think it necessary to clarify these two realms in the *Institutes* in order to understand the *imago dei*.

In his 1546 commentaries on I Cor 11: 7, Calvin relates the relationship between a man and a woman to that between God the Father and the Son. The chief concept here seems to be addressed by the word "head," which points to a temporal status of

⁴⁹³ I, 15, 4.

⁴⁹⁴ I, 15, 4. See also *the commentaries on Gen 1: 26*. Gisbert Beyerhaus, *Studien zur Staatsanschauung Calvins: mit besonderer Berücksichtigung seines Souveränitätsbegriffs* (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1910), 84-117. Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Freedom in God's Order," in: *Woman, Freedom and Calvin*, 24-41. John L. Thompson, "Creatura Ad Imaginem Dei, Licet Secundo Gradu: Woman as the Image of God According to John Calvin," *Harvard Theological Review*, 81:2 (1988), 125-143.

existence in I Cor 11: 3. Calvin draws an analogy between the word “head” in verse 3 and the word “image” in verse 7. Calvin tells us that Christ is God in divine essence, being equal to God the Father in eternity. In regards Christ’s office, he became flesh and fulfilled his work as mediator. He had to be subject to God because he was placed in the position of a human being. “Inasmuch as he has in our flesh made himself subject to the Father, for, apart from this, being of one essence with the Father, he is his equal. Let us, therefore, bear it in mind, that this is spoken of Christ as mediator. He is, I say, inferior to the Father, inasmuch as he assumed our nature.”⁴⁹⁵

In regards the eschatological orientation of the *imago dei*, the relation between man and woman is equal. This means that both male and female are created in the image of God. In other words, both male and female can communicate with God and both have independent relations to God. Calvin appeals here to the biblical statement: “in Christ there is neither male nor female.”⁴⁹⁶ This is the redemptive order of the kingdom of Christ. For Calvin, that God-oriented existence encompasses inward conscience, communion with God and no gender difference.⁴⁹⁷

For Calvin, the order of creation embraces both the civil and ecclesiastical orders. In these orders we find unequal social status.⁴⁹⁸ Building on this point, Calvin explains that the general relation between men and women can be seen in that specific relation between husband and wife. “Because [man] is subject to Christ, with this understanding, that he is to hold the first place in the government of the house—for the father of the family is like a king in his own house. Hence the glory of God shines

⁴⁹⁵ *Comm I Cor 11: 3.*

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

forth in him, in consequence of the authority with which he is invested.”⁴⁹⁹ In this way, the man as husband and the woman as wife reflect the glory of God in terms of the social ordinance. This would also suggest that social status is appointed by God. When the members of each social niveau properly exercise their function within the human community, then human beings glorify God. “The image, however, of which he is now speaking, relates to the order of marriage, and hence it belongs to the present life, and is not connected with conscience. ...the distinction, which God has conferred upon the man, so as to have superiority over the woman. In this superior order of dignity the glory of God is seen, as it shines forth in every kind of superiority.”⁵⁰⁰

To summarize, Calvin’s understanding of the temporal aspects of the *imago dei* tends to reflect the exercise of social roles which are provided by God in order to preserve the operation of the human community. The understanding of the *imago dei* in this context corresponds with his earlier reference to government officers. In other words, it points to the *imago dei* in the natural ordinance. In this sense, the *imago dei* in its eschatological orientation reflects the glory of God, with the integrity of human nature representing God’s best work. The *imago dei* as natural ordinance reflects the glory of God within the structure and power of God’s appointed order.

These issues have been examined by T. F. Torrance, who distinguishes the eschatological and temporal characters of the *imago dei* by way of the relation to God and the relation to fellow human beings—though he does not directly use these two

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ *Comm I Cor 11: 4*. See also *Comm I Cor 11: 7*.

⁵⁰⁰ *Comm I Cor 11: 7*.

terms: 'eschatological' and 'temporal'. He develops this understanding from the renewal of the imago dei. He defines the imago dei simply as the reflection of the glory of God and relieves the tension between the eschatological and temporal dimensions. Torrance concentrates on the relationship between the creator and his creatures: the human creature is sustained completely by the creator and is created to glorify the creator. In other words, the human creature is fully dependent on the creator. He argues that the imago dei has been seen with this twofold, eschatological and temporal, understanding in Calvin's theology.

Torrance goes on to argue that the cosmos also reflects the image of the invisible God in terms of the glory of his power and wisdom. This is Torrance's broad view of the imago dei.⁵⁰¹ On the other hand, he narrows the significance of that imago dei mirrored in the human soul in accordance with its renewal in Christ, which reestablishes the human relation to God.⁵⁰² In this sense, all creation, of which the human race is one part, resembles the image of God within the analogy of works (the creation) and workmanship (God's grace). From such a perspective, the human body, as well as the soul, radiates God's glory as a work of God. This workmanship has been expressed in the Word of God. Since fallen human beings cannot clearly behold the image of God in creation, it is through the Word of God that the human creature can contemplate the image of God in creation.⁵⁰³ "It is by this Word that man is really able to see the glory of God imaged in creation. ... In a particular sense, in which

⁵⁰¹ Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 37.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.* 38.

man specially is said to reflect (as a mirror) the glory of God, by an intelligible response to the Word.”⁵⁰⁴

Furthermore, Torrance refers the *imago dei* in social hierarchies, in matrimony and in governance, to the order present in the economic Trinity. He achieves this by presenting an analogy of the relationship between God the Father and the Son, and between God and human beings, both of which are temporal, not eternal. In Torrance’s reading of Calvin, the relationship between God the Father and the Son is referred both to the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage, and between government officers and the people. This points to the *imago dei*-based relation of human society. A person is a complete social being who must play various roles, so that even a man, who plays a leading role in the family, must recognize his subservient role under governors. Yet what has human social status to do with divine order in terms of the *imago dei*? In Torrance’s reading of Calvin, social ordinances become an analogy of the divine order. “There is a relation of proportionality (to borrow a word from Aquinas) between the *imago*-relation between Christ and the Father on the one hand and the *imago*-relation between the woman and man on the other hand.”⁵⁰⁵ Torrance correctly points out the temporal dimension of the *imago dei*. Here the glory of God is manifested in the order of creation and the privilege of men in marriage corresponds to the position of social governors. This would suggest that Calvin views the relation between Father and Son as pointing to the mediatory office of Christ, in which Christ is subjected to his Father, although Christ in his divine essence is equal to God the Father.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 35.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 44.

⁵⁰⁶ *Comm. 1 Cor 11: 7.*

Torrance provides a good interpretation of the establishment of the social ordinance in correspondence to human nature, which was created with a capacity for being “an imago-relation”. “The favorite expressions [Calvin] uses for this order or relation are *temperatura* and *rectitudo*. Being made in the image of God means being brought into a holy and sacred bond of order with God, to whom we are to submit ourselves obediently and thankfully, and in which the whole of our human nature receives its inner and outer temperature, and rectitude and integrity. When the image is defaced the order of nature is inverted, and decay and ruin set in.”⁵⁰⁷ In this way, Torrance binds the temporal and eschatological dimensions of the imago dei closely together within human nature. It seems clear in Calvin’s theology, in the context of the imago dei, that the mediatory office of Christ was given mainly to reconcile human beings to God. When Paul “says that there is no difference between the man and the woman, he is treating of Christ’s spiritual kingdom, in which individual distinctions are not regarded, or made any account of; for it has nothing to do with the body, and has nothing to do with the outward relationships of mankind, but has to do solely with the mind—on which account he *declares* that there is no difference, even between *bound* and *free*.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Man*, 44.

⁵⁰⁸ *Comm. 1 Cor 11: 3*.

4.3.8. The reflection of the glory of God⁵⁰⁹

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin defines the imago dei as the reflection of God's glory. He explains his understanding of the word "mirror"⁵¹⁰ in his commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 18. Here we will need to investigate the idea in the 1559 *Institutes* as well as in the commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 18.

4.3.8.1. In the context of creation in the 1559 *Institutes*

Calvin argues that God stamps his glory upon all his works in the world, both on the splendor of the natural world and on the operation of the cultural world. Such glory can be recognized by anyone.⁵¹¹ This represents what we have called **"the objective dimension" of the glory of God**, in which God's wisdom and power can be seen in nature. On the other hand, subjective human awareness of God's glory can be seen in the knowledge of God. We can call this aspect **"the subjective dimension" of God's glory**. However, human awareness of God's glory in nature is by no means sufficient for comprehending the fullness of God's glory. Even though the universe reflects the glory of God, it does not profit the knowledge of God in human beings since

⁵⁰⁹In the 1543 Catechism of the Church of Geneva, formulated to teach children the central concepts of Christian doctrine, the first question asks after the aim of the human creature. The answer given is: to know God, the creator. It then goes on to stress the fact that human beings are created and placed in the world in order to glorify God with their lives. C. O. 5, 10. Talk of God's "majesty" (*suae maiestatis*) in the 1539 *Institutes* is replaced with God's "glory" (*gloriae suae*) in the 1559 *Institutes*. This suggests the development of Calvin's understanding of the notion within his work on the knowledge of God. Moreover, in the 1559 *Institutes*, the section is arranged and enlarged into a chapter entitled: "The knowledge of God shines forth in the fashioning of the universe and the continuing government of it." In this section the word "majesty" is replaced with "glory". However, in this chapter the workmanship and the governance of God which manifest God's nature are set side by side in creation. The sovereignty of God is greatly asserted in the section on God's providence, election and predestination. C. O. 1, 286. The 1559 *Institutes*, I, 5, 1. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 35-51.

⁵¹⁰Brian A. Gerrish, "The Mirror of God's Goodness: A Key Metaphor in Calvin's View of Man," in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage*, 153-154. Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 35-37.

corrupted human nature tends to wander astray from true knowledge of God and to substitute this with idolatry.⁵¹² In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin inserts a long section on natural knowledge of God. Such knowledge replaces God with superstition, or even with philosophical understandings.⁵¹³

Human beings need to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit so that they can recognize the glory of God in creation. While fallen human beings may vaguely recognize the glory of God, either through the word of God or through nature, this points above all to the remnant of the *imago dei*. Human understanding functions improperly with this remnant and thus leads to distortion.⁵¹⁴ God's glory may shine objectively in creation but the fallen human mind does not recognize it correctly—it needs the quickening of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the subjective awareness of the human mind is necessary in order to contemplate God's glory. Such contemplation is after all the intention of the creator in creation, and the world was created to be used by human beings in this task.⁵¹⁵

To support his position Calvin cites Hebrews 11: 3. He argues that the universe is rendered with good order and thus reflects the invisible God as a mirror. God's glory as it is reflected in creation is God's revelation in general, in which even the perverse may recognize the creator.⁵¹⁶ Correspondingly, in the 1549 commentaries on Hebrews 11: 3, Calvin admits that the world reflects the divine as a mirror, because God discloses himself to the world in order that the perverse may have no excuse for

⁵¹¹ I, 5, 1.

⁵¹² I, 5, 14-15 and 6, 3.

⁵¹³ I, 5, 12-13.

⁵¹⁴ I, 6, 1.

⁵¹⁵ *The argumentum of the commentaries on Genesis* in 1554.

⁵¹⁶ I, 5, 1.

withdrawing from him. With this understanding in place, we see that the glory of God mainly functions for the purpose that human beings might become aware of it, i.e. to promote its subjective dimension.

Furthermore, Calvin sets up a cosmic parallel, namely between the natural cosmos and human beings as a microcosm. In so doing, Calvin sets up an analogy between the glory of God in nature and in human beings. The dignity of the natural world created by God is as important as the human being in displaying God's glory.⁵¹⁷ This also suggests a dual aspect in the human relation to the glory of God: objectively, human beings reflect the glory of God as one of his works; subjectively, human beings acknowledge the glory of God in the natural world as well as in the workings of human nature. In the intricacies of human activity we can search out the marvelous work that God undertook in creating human nature.

It is necessary to point out here that the human being in this context does not point to the new person as recreated in Christ. Here the human being signifies human existence in general. It is as a consequence of this general existence that Calvin can name human beings and the entire creation a mirror of God's glory. Yet as we have already noted, this knowledge of God in the cosmos can be understood fully only when knowledge of the self in recreation is achieved in faith. The glory of God in this context points to the strength of God's revelation.

⁵¹⁷ I, 5, 3.

4.3.8.2. Regeneration

In this context, Calvin introduces the idea of the gradual renewal of the *imago dei* in order to support his argument for regeneration. At the same time, this focus on the gradual death of the flesh and the blooming of new life in the Spirit is aimed against Staphylus' misunderstanding of his view. Calvin stresses the need for believers constantly to be regenerated by the inpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is in this way that human minds can receive a new understanding of life which is compatible with the righteousness of God.

Staphylus saw Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* in danger of making the renewal of the *imago dei* in this world equal to the heavenly glory to be expected in eternity. Staphylus understood Calvin's interpretation of Eph 4: 23 statically, i.e. that in regards true holiness and righteousness, that believers can simply attain the *imago dei* through human intellect, which is completely renewed and reflects the glory of God just as it will in eternal life.⁵¹⁸ Calvin argued against such a view by appealing to a continual process of regeneration affected by the grace of Christ. For Calvin, true holiness and righteousness in believers will be completed only in the second coming of Christ.⁵¹⁹ Thus in this context the glory of God is compatible with the effect of grace in Christ.

⁵¹⁸ III, 3, 9. Frederick Staphylus, *Theologiae Martini Lutheri trimembris epitome*, the latter part of the book on faith (1558).

⁵¹⁹ III, 3, 9.

4.3.8.3. The imago text

In the *Institutes* of 1559, the imago dei is first defined as the reflection of the glory of God. Calvin admits that human beings reflect the glory of God as a mirror, inasmuch as they excel in the operations of the soul, though this can best be found only after the restoration of our corrupted nature.

In the commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 18, the expression “reflecting as a mirror” is interpreted as having two possible meanings. It can be interpreted either as an offered mirror of contemplation in which, for example, we can better understand ourselves. Or it can be understood in the sense that an object, here human beings, act as the mirror, i.e. providing a reflection of something else. Calvin prefers the latter and accepts it in this context, i.e. that the human being is a mirror which reflects the image of God.⁵²⁰ But Calvin still uses the word “mirror” in the first sense. For example, the law acts as a mirror reflecting human blemishes.⁵²¹ The natural world also reflects the divine glory as a mirror in the first sense.⁵²² Human beings reflect the imago dei in the second sense, and this is achieved by living out the divine design through the knowledge of God.

According to 2 Cor 3: 6-10, Calvin understands Paul as contrasting the law to the gospel in order to address the effects of the Holy Spirit. This contrast between letter and spirit is also referred to that between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The former is temporal; the latter everlasting. Calvin argues that God did indeed give

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ II, 7, 7.

⁵²² I, 5,1.

grace in the time of the Old Testament, but the grace of the resurrection was given in Christ. The law carries promise as well as judgment and is bound to its written form. In contrast, the gospel lives and is life-giving.⁵²³ Moreover, Calvin notes that Paul's comparison between the law and the gospel is relative because "even the gospel is not always spirit."⁵²⁴ It is the Holy Spirit who quickens human minds enabling them to comprehend the gospel. But it is God's plan and desire that he should be recognized more clearly in the gospel than in the law. To recognize God's revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind.⁵²⁵

Certainly, subjective recognition of the glory of God is due to the efficacy of the Holy Spirit. But one may still ask if the law or the gospel possesses the glory of God in this context. Calvin argues that the glory of God in the law is relatively inferior to that in the gospel. While the law reflects the will of God, which the gospel also reflects, the gospel contains much more of God's grace, thus accentuating even more the divine glory. And in addition to this contrast between law and gospel, between letter and spirit, Calvin states that the gospel declares regeneration and the means of reconciliation with God. In contrast, the law posits only the regulations of a God-oriented life and condemns the transgressor to death. In other words, the gospel brings human beings hope and opens the door toward salvation while the law displays the judgment of God and his punishment of iniquity.⁵²⁶ Certainly the glory of God is in the gospel itself in terms of God's activity in the Christ event. But in which way does Calvin think of the law as possessing glory? Calvin refers to the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, which is more powerful in the gospel than in the law. The gospel

⁵²³ *Comm 2 Cor 3: 6.*

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*

substitutes the law and fulfils the law, after all “so great was the splendor of the law, that the Jews could not endure it.”⁵²⁷

At this point one may well ask how human beings reflect the glory of God. In the commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 12-17, Calvin tells us that human beings fail to achieve a correct understanding of God from the law, which in itself is splendid. This failure is due to a human heart which has not been enlivened in Christ. Human minds can only see the glory of God in the law through Christ who is the life of the law.⁵²⁸ Calvin correlates Christ to the Spirit in order to explain how believers are liberated from the bondage of blindness. “Christ, however, by regenerating us, gives life to the law, and shows himself to be the fountain of life, as all vital functions proceed from man’s soul. ... Christ is the Spirit, because he quickens us by the life-giving influence of his Spirit.”⁵²⁹ The work of the Holy Spirit in liberation consists, on the one hand, of the emancipation from our subjection to sin and from all allurements of the flesh. On the other hand, it also embraces the assurance of God’s adoption in Christ.⁵³⁰ Thereby human nature is renewed, becoming upright, and the gifts of divine grace are endowed once more—pointing to the *imago dei*.

It is in the Spirit that human beings are freed from the fear of God and can pursue the knowledge of God by receiving the gospel. In this way, the invisible things of God contained in the gospel become visible because believers now freely behold the gospel. The measures of the glory of God are identified with how far human beings understand the gospel and to what degree they live out the principles expressed in it.

⁵²⁶ *Comm 2 Cor 3: 9.*

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.* A similar comparison is found in the 1548 commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 39-45.

⁵²⁸ *Comm 2 Cor 3: 12-16.*

The advancement of this transformation is described as going “from glory to glory.” Calvin addresses three things in regards to this gradual process. First, believers should be encouraged to grasp the gospel, because it is God’s intention to be known in it. Secondly, to know God in the gospel is a dynamic activity, resulting in the transformation of believers into God’s image. Thirdly, to pursue the knowledge of God and to conform to his image is a life-long process. In this way, the more believers comprehend the gospel, the more they reflect the glory of God.⁵³¹ At the same time, the renewal of the *imago dei* shows God’s intention in creation, as human beings were created in order to glorify their maker.⁵³²

In conclusion, all works of God objectively reflect the glory of God since they display his workmanship in various degrees. The glory of God is the strength and wisdom of this workmanship, which is manifested by the Holy Spirit. Human beings, in being adorned with reason and by reflecting the *imago dei*, point to a greater glory of God than the rest of creation when considered in terms of God’s craftsmanship. Yet God’s work in Jesus Christ brings us God’s righteousness, and this glorifies God even more. This is the special work of God in Christ and in this the Holy Spirit renews the human soul. This all points to the glory of God in an objective way and can be seen objectively through the gospel in human salvation, i.e. by displaying the power of God in salvation. Moreover, human nature is restored to what it was at creation and reflects once again the glory of God. Subjectively, the Holy Spirit illuminates the human mind, enabling it to behold the glory of God in the gospel as well as in the renewal of human nature. In this way we honor God by acknowledging him with our

⁵²⁹ *Comm 2 Cor 3: 17.*

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ *Comm 2 Cor 3: 18.*

renewed nature. In this sense, the glory of God points to God's strength in salvation, to the integrity of human nature and to the power of God's revelation.

4.3.9. Supernatural gift or natural gift?⁵³³

In the imago-text of the 1559 *Institutes*,⁵³⁴ Calvin admits that the imago dei is not totally effaced in Adam's fall. He speaks of a remnant of the imago dei in terms of conscience and corrupted reason throughout all editions of the *Institutes*. This differentiation of the created imago dei from the remnant of the imago dei corresponds to Calvin's understanding of supernatural gifts and natural gifts which, in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*,⁵³⁵ coincides with the diversity of human understanding in the heavenly and earthly states of existence.

In his discussion of human corruption in 1559, Calvin adds a section on supernatural gifts and natural gifts in order to describe this comparison between the state of human corruption and that of faith. Because the imago dei is a supernatural gift, Calvin identifies it with the integrity of human nature as it was given in creation—a state in which heavenly things such as the benevolence of God, righteousness, and the attainment of eternal life are expressed.⁵³⁶ After the fall, this supernatural gift is extinguished. Calvin argues that this supernatural gift is regained through the grace of Christ. The re-acquisition of this spiritual gift points to its adventitious and freely-

⁵³² I, 16, 1.

⁵³³ For more detailed information on the discussion of supernatural and natural gifts, see Luke Anderson, "The Imago Dei Theme in John Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 178-198.

⁵³⁴ I, 15, 4.

⁵³⁵ II, 2, 12.

⁵³⁶ II, 2, 12.

given character. In its re-acquisition, it is found to embrace “faith, love of God, charity toward neighbor, zeal for holiness and for righteousness.”⁵³⁷ Calvin describes the acceptance of the *imago dei* onto human nature as an endowment, an imprinting, engrafting, or as a clothing or reflecting.⁵³⁸ These terms express the gratuitous nature of the gift.

Calvin then contrasts natural gifts to this supernatural one. He names human reason and will as such natural gifts which have been corrupted after the fall. In support Calvin appeals to John 1: 5; he sees human reason as corrupted and this remnant functionality can be seen in the corruption of human understanding. “Since reason, therefore, by which man distinguishes good and evil, ... is a natural gift, it could not be completely wiped out, but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted. ... In man’s perverted and degenerate nature some sparks still gleam. These show him to be a rational being, differing from brute beasts.”⁵³⁹ For Calvin, the human will is so bound to wicked desire that it cannot follow what the light reveals. In this sense, the natural, but corrupted, gift of human nature is isolated from God’s truth.⁵⁴⁰

Hence human nature cannot be viewed as a neutral existence. It either expresses the *imago dei* through the grace of Christ or it weakly radiates a remnant of the *imago dei* through human capacities. Yet human beings are God’s creatures; and the creator in his sovereign provision sustains his creation of the natural and cultural worlds. Required here is a detailed investigation of Calvin’s understanding of God’s grace in relation to the *imago dei*, in which two human existences—the *imago dei* and the

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ I, 15, 3-4.

⁵³⁹ II, 2, 12.

residue of the *imago dei*—are sustained by two various graces of God. This investigation will be presented under 4.4 below.

4.3.10. The *imago dei* as the basis of ethics

Calvin's work on this topic remains unchanged from the 1539 *Institutes*. Yet his exposition of the sixth commandment in the 1539 *Institutes* can be fully comprehended only through his comments in the 1554 commentaries on Gen 9: 6. In this context, Calvin directly mentions the remnant of the *imago dei*. "Should any one object, that this divine image has been obliterated, the solution is easy; first, there yet exists some remnant of it, so that man is possessed of no small dignity."⁵⁴¹ Calvin sees this precept pointing to political law, i.e. with the intention of punishing homicide within the social group, rather than pointing to God's intention for his human creatures. Yet Calvin observes the way in which God can punish evil through the workings of the political order, though God is not limited to this field alone. God can also carry out his penalties in various other ways, for instance through war and accidents. Grounded on the relation between the creator and his best creature, this prohibition against murder has its profoundest meaning in reminding us that human beings carry the mark of God's family.

For Calvin, since each person possesses the *imago dei*, violence upon any individual is counted by God as an injury upon himself: it defaces God's image within that person. Calvin stresses that fallen human beings are indeed unworthy of God's love. Yet God considers the *imago dei* as his own gift and this motivates him to embrace

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

human beings.⁵⁴² As we have already seen, human beings possess the characteristics of God which differentiate them from other creatures. Inasmuch as the characteristics of God are aimed toward heaven and toward God, they point to the representing mark of God's kingdom. Moreover, Calvin tells us that God observes and supports his creation to the end. We must bear in mind that human beings are created according to God's image in order to enjoy eternal life, and it is this which places them above the rest of creation.⁵⁴³

In summation, the *imago dei*, be it in its renewed or remnant form, points in this context to its eschatological orientation. Furthermore, the stress falls upon the way in which God perceives his own heavenly gifts and those carriers of his image. Calvin wants to affirm here that despite our fallen state, God still perceives the carriers of the *imago dei* as that which they were created. In this way, every human being deserves protection from violence because of God's care for those God-oriented gifts within us. Conversely, God is also wounded in those who are violated.

4.3.11. Human responsibility for the loss of the *imago dei*

Calvin's work on human responsibility in 1539 is re-edited and placed into Book II, chapter eight of the 1559 edition, where he discusses the law. Yet in his discussion on human nature in chapter fifteen, Calvin inserts a new illustration of human responsibility for the loss of the *imago dei*. Calvin writes that while philosophers recognize the diverse faculties of the soul, they do not appropriately recognize the

⁵⁴¹ *Comm Gen 9: 6.*

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

impact of sin upon human nature after the fall. He gives his own interpretation of human nature based on biblical perspectives and divides the human soul into the two basic faculties of reason and will. He then goes on to explain how reason and will correlate to one another and brings this into parallel with Aristotle's philosophical work.

The difficulty of such philosophical thought, in Calvin's view, is that it can neither appropriately differentiate the will from inordinate desires and lust nor reason from pleasure.⁵⁴⁴ For Calvin reason and will actively exercise their own strengths and correspond to one another in the state of the original creation. Reason judges something to be good, and the human will follows this affirmation: "the understanding is, as it were, the leader and governor of the soul; and that the will is always mindful of the bidding of the understanding, and in its own desires awaits the judgment of the understanding."⁵⁴⁵ Calvin argues that the members of the soul cooperate in carrying out the function of the soul as a whole: "no power can be found in the soul that does not duly have reference to one or the other of these members."⁵⁴⁶ Hence, he can place the senses under reason and substitute appetite—which Aristotle thinks of as a mental process of approval or rejection—with the will.⁵⁴⁷ The human mind, endowed with reason, is able to lead an earthly life. And at the same time it can also achieve heavenly joy. Yet for Calvin, this situation and this correspondence of the faculties of the soul is disturbed because of sin.

⁵⁴⁴ I, 15, 7. Calvin understood the philosophical explanation of the correlation between sense, pleasure and understanding in such a way that human sense perception tends to adhere to pleasure even though reason wants to follow the good.

⁵⁴⁵ I, 15, 7.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. Calvin's understanding of the operations of the soul corresponds to his understanding of the functions of the body. See the *Commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 47*.

In our original state, human beings are able to choose to “direct the appetites and control all the organic motions, and thus make the will completely amenable to the guidance of the reason.”⁵⁴⁸ With this understanding of the integrity of human nature, Calvin can now move on to address human responsibility for the fall. Adam’s will possessed the strength to reach eternal life, but Adam failed to stand firm. In this way, Calvin admits that the perfect work of God did in fact possess a weakness, i.e. its deficiency in constancy.⁵⁴⁹ To *possess* the strength to use the perfect gift that was given us is one thing; whether Adam *wanted* to use the gift as it was intended is quite another. In this way, Calvin highlights Adam’s responsibility for the loss of the *imago dei*.⁵⁵⁰ Through God’s grace Adam was given the perfect gift and the power to use it and in this way he excelled above the rest of creation. Yet to support Adam to be constant in the use of this gift cannot be confused with the giving of this gift.⁵⁵¹

For Calvin, the pre-fall Adam was given human nature in its excellence, consisting of natural gifts and supernatural gifts as a whole. With this endowment, humanity could have managed life in this world and even attained eternal life. Yet Adam failed to stand firm and because of this all human beings are now responsible for the choice to betray God and to be isolated from him.

⁵⁴⁷ I, 15, 7.

⁵⁴⁸ I, 15, 8. Calvin sees the *imago dei* expressed through the faculties of the soul as a whole, although each aspect of the soul or each action of functioning human existence is diverse and aims at achieving the *imago dei*.

⁵⁴⁹ This corresponds to Calvin’s interpretation of free will. Human will is ‘free’ only before the fall because it stayed with God’s righteousness and matched its own constancy. After the fall, the human will lost any freedom or constancy and has been subjected to depravity. II, 2, 4; 7-8. Cf. Oberman, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” 264. However, it should be noted that the constancy of the will relies on divine grace alone. II, 3, 11-14.

⁵⁵⁰ I, 15, 8. *De Aeterna Praedestinatione Dei*. C. O. 8, 292-295.

⁵⁵¹ *Defensio sanae et Orthodoxae Doctrinae: De Servitute et Liberatione Humani Arbitrii Adversus Calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis*. C. O. 6, 352-356.

However, one may well think that if God is indeed the sovereign Lord and governs each occurrence in creation, then in his eternal predestination God also assigns evil to the human creature.⁵⁵² Such concerns are addressed in the 1559 *Institutes*. For Calvin, this cannot be attributed to God since human beings are created pure. Human perversity is the degeneration of human nature. First, Calvin argues that human beings are created through God's providence. Yet it does not necessary follow from this that human beings will obey God, even before the fall. Calvin cites Prov 16: 4, "The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." He introduces us to an almighty God who determines the disposition of all things and has power to appoint salvation or death, inasmuch as he can be glorified through the condemnation of evil beings.⁵⁵³ On the basis of this assertion, Calvin confronts the allegation that the reprobate can be excused of their iniquity because God ordains the evil upon them. Calvin refutes the notion by appealing to God's hidden will,⁵⁵⁴ which predestines all events and is always righteous. The reprobate are condemned by God's righteous judgment and this is even testified to by the consciences of those reprobate people.⁵⁵⁵ This must be so because they degenerated

⁵⁵² C. O. 1, 872-873. See also the 1559 edition. III, 23, 6.

⁵⁵³ III, 23, 6. Cf. Paul Jakobs, "Election und Verantwortlichkeit in 'Determinismus' Calvins," in *Prädestination und Verantwortlichkeit bei Calvin* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 133-140. Wilhem A. Hauck, "Vorsehung und Schuld," in *Die Erwählten: Prädestination und Heilsgewißheit nach Calvin* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1968), 73-75. Wilhelm A. Hauck, "Die Verantwortlichkeit des heutigen Menschen für den 'Fall' und dessen Folgen," in "*Sünde*" und "*Erbsünde*" nach Calvin (Heidelberg: Evangelischer Verlag Jakob Comtesse, 1939), 103-110. J. K. S. Reid, "Introduction," in *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1961/1997), 22-25.

⁵⁵⁴ Calvin's understanding of God's hidden will in his eternal counsel is asserted prior to the above refutation. III, 22, 1-2; III, 24, 4-5. Cf. Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 166-167. The relation of God's will in election and human existence in Calvin's understanding is surveyed by David Steinmetz, who compares Calvin's commentaries on Rom 9 to Thomas' and Bucer's. David Steinmetz, "Calvin among the Thomists," in *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 141-156.

⁵⁵⁵ God cannot compromise with unrighteousness because he does not waver in his righteous nature. This is one of the main differences between God and human beings. Therefore, God punishes the unrighteous according to their wickedness. Yet the reason why some are given grace and some are rejected still remains incomprehensible to us. III, 23, 8. Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 181. God accepts believers not because they are righteous and good; but because God views them as righteous under the grace of Christ. Moreover, the Holy Spirit gradually conforms them to God's righteousness, which is

from God's pure creation into impure perversity. Calvin can do nothing but affirm that God in his eternal providence must have created human beings innocent.⁵⁵⁶

4.4. The grace of God

In the 1559 edition, Calvin highlights human consciousness of God's power in his work in creation and redemption. In this way, the grace of God is God's own revelation through faith upon the minds of believers, who recognize God's fatherly care in creation as well as God's special care toward his church through Christ. In this way, God's sustenance of the expression of the *imago dei* both in the pre-fall Adam and in Jesus Christ—the second Adam—is in both cases called God's grace, although the degree of God's strength in them varies. To support his understanding of the diversity of God's energy in his works, Calvin appeals to 1 Cor 15: 45.

4.4.1. Terminology

In his chapter on human corruption in the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin inserts a paragraph to conclude the section on corrupted human reason. He uses the expression “the grace of God” to express the power of the Holy Spirit. This power gives us the energy to sustain the use of the gifts we were given, gifts which improve the common good. Calvin provides the example of the strength of Saul and David in government as a strength which comes from God. He even appeals to Homer in order to assert that that

given in the grace of Christ in God's eternal election. III, 22, 3; III, 24, 4. Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 274-275.

⁵⁵⁶ III, 23, 9. This section is inserted into the 1559 edition.

which is expressed in the human mind is under the government of the divine.⁵⁵⁷ This is aptly called the grace of God because such endowments are gifts of God: “In this variety God commends his grace to us, lest anyone should claim as his own what flowed from the sheer bounty of God.”⁵⁵⁸

The grace of God can also point to the power of the Holy Spirit upon Christ, which is transmitted in turn to believers. Calvin stresses that the power of the Holy Spirit upon Christ is different from that upon Adam. The former is communicated to God’s children through faith.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, when describing the gifts of believers which are given in Christ, Calvin speaks of “the grace of Christ” in order to differentiate it from God’s general provision.⁵⁶⁰ In his chapter on God’s providence, Calvin admits that the power of God, in terms of God’s sustenance and government of his creation, can be recognized by the fallen human mind as a divine energy which supports the world. Yet believers have a sharpened view through faith and can acknowledge God as governor and preserver, the one who guides his creation with his strength and will.⁵⁶¹ Furthermore, it is in faith that God’s special care toward us is disclosed as his grace. “Indeed, although they subscribe to Paul’s statement that we have our being and move and live in God (Acts 17: 28), yet they are far from that earnest feeling of grace which he commends, because they do not at all taste God’s special care, by which alone his fatherly favor is known.”⁵⁶²

The grace of God in relation to the *imago dei* points to God’s provision in two ways.

⁵⁵⁷ II, 2, 17.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁹ III, 2, 30-31.

⁵⁶⁰ III, 2, 7.

⁵⁶¹ I, 16, 1.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

On the one hand, the grace of God supports the workings of the remnant of the *imago dei* in the fallen mind; this can be seen in the human capacity for the arts and general dominion. “We see in this diversity some remaining traces of the image of God.”⁵⁶³ On the other hand, God’s special grace in Christ restores the *imago dei*. In this sense, the grace of Christ not only sustains the life of the believer, but also strengthens the transformation into new life. These are not at all human merits. It is in this comparison between creation and recreation that Calvin stresses the grace of God in Christ.⁵⁶⁴

4.4.2. The *imago* text

Calvin shows his consistency by citing 1 Cor 15: 45 in his discussion of the *imago dei* in Book I, chapter 15. “Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”⁵⁶⁵ Calvin differentiates here the general grace of God in creation from the grace of Christ in salvation. This citation strengthens his understanding of the *imago dei* in relation to God’s grace. The grace upon Adam before the fall is God’s work through the power of the Holy Spirit in order to provide common sustenance.⁵⁶⁶ The grace that falls upon the second Adam is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the true God himself. In our union with Christ, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are communicated to believers. It is in this way that believers are transformed and called the temple of God. Yet these two forms of grace are not the same: “[Paul] commends the richer measure of grace in regeneration.”⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ II, 2, 17.

⁵⁶⁴ Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 121.

⁵⁶⁵ I, 15, 4.

4.4.3. The 1548 commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 45

Calvin discusses this biblical passage under the topic of bodily resurrection. In verse 45, Calvin compares the state of the pre-fall Adam with that of Christ. Calvin points out that Adam's body was quickened by the soul which he had received in his creation. This animated the movements and workings of human existence. The soul signifies the essence of life.⁵⁶⁸ In this sense, the power of the soul is natural and its aim is to enable the body to act and to live.

Yet the enlivening ability of the soul is given to the rest of creation as well. This suggests that the remaining creatures are also bestowed with a soul. In this way, human beings share a common ground with all other creatures.⁵⁶⁹ But on the one hand the soul of human beings, which can ascend to God, must be differentiated from the rest of creation. On the other hand, all creatures will be judged by God according to their souls.⁵⁷⁰

This was Adam's state before the fall. The case of Christ is different. He was bestowed with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, while the soul of Christ quickens his body, at the same time the Holy Spirit was poured out upon him enabling him to be raised from the dead. Moreover, he can also raise others through this power.⁵⁷¹ This suggests that to display the power to raise the dead is to show the work of the Holy Spirit which embraces both soul and body, i.e. the human being as a whole. This also

⁵⁶⁶ I, 1, 1.

⁵⁶⁷ I, 15, 4.

⁵⁶⁸ *Comm 1 Cor 15: 45*. For this notion, see also *Comm Rom 5: 15*.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ *Comm 1 Cor 15: 45*.

corresponds to the creation of human beings, namely that the human being was created as a whole. Moreover, this ability to raise the dead points to the life-giving nature of the Spirit. The Spirit is the *fountain* of life, it is not just life.⁵⁷²

Therefore, through Christ believers receive the Holy Spirit, the power and source of life, which raises up the dead, and restores the soul's *imago dei* while still in this world. It is here in the contrast of power between life and the fountain of life, between living and raising up the dead that we see the different amounts of grace which are received from God.

With this understanding of God's grace, one may well ask how Calvin correlates the workings of human nature and God's grace as we find it in the Christian life. Calvin's explanation of this idea is found in 1 Cor 15: 10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." In the commentaries, Calvin at first refutes the scholastic interpretation of the correlation between God's grace and the achievements of the will. The good works of believers do not proceed from any cooperation of God's grace and human abilities, but are rather to be ascribed completely to God's grace—God alone deserves admiration and honor,⁵⁷³ and this is how Calvin interprets Paul's statement in the above verse. Therefore, there is no praise for human merits. Consequently, Calvin argues that Paul's achievement is entirely God's work through his grace in Paul, "for what he had said was his own, he afterwards, correcting himself, ascribes wholly to the grace of

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ The details of Calvin's refutation of the scholastic understanding of this notion is found in his chapters on human corruption. II, 2, 5-6; II, 3, 12-14.

God—*wholly*, I say, not in part, for whatever he might have seemed to do, was *wholly*, he declares, the work of grace.”⁵⁷⁴

The foregoing illustration corresponds with Calvin’s view of human nature in the 1559 *imago* text. In other words, Calvin sees the fruitful workings of renewed human nature in believers as being sustained by God’s grace alone. Calvin then immediately turns to the knowledge of the self and explains that believers will be humble while recognizing that whatever achievements might be found in them are the works of God’s grace.⁵⁷⁵ This stresses the importance of the subjective human awareness of God’s grace in Calvin’s theology, which also points to human consciousness of the correlation between God’s providence and human existence.

⁵⁷⁴ *Comm 1 Cor 15: 45.*

⁵⁷⁵ *Comm 1 Cor 15: 10.*

PART II

Thematic Analysis of the Development of Calvin's Work on the Imago Dei

CHAPTER FIVE

Thematic Analysis of Calvin's Understanding of the Imago Dei across the 1536, 1539, 1543, 1550 and 1559 *Institutes*

5.1. The *cognitio dei et hominis*

Knowledge of God and knowledge of the self are important to our topic of interest for several reasons: first, because knowledge functions as a part of human intellect; secondly, because the *imago dei* has its seat in the soul and, finally, because comparison of the way in which the *cognitio dei et hominis* both function elicits certain variations within the *imago dei* itself. In his discussions on Christian doctrine from the 1536 *Institutes* on, Calvin has maintained that knowledge of God and knowledge of the self cannot be separated. Little did he seem to know that his concept of the *cognitio dei et hominis* in the 1536 *Institutes* would end up being the main thread linking the entire 1559 edition. We have now seen this in the development of the notion through these various editions.

5.1.1. Shift in the arrangement of the *Institutes* from 1536 through to 1559

Calvin's understanding of the *cognitio dei et hominis* constantly evolved from 1536 through to 1559 and it must be said that in this time it changed radically. In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin briefly discussed the *cognitio dei et hominis* in a mere four and a

half pages as an introduction to his exposition of the Decalogue.⁵⁷⁶ In that succinct passage, the objectivity and the subjectivity of his theological epistemology were still unclear. In other words, it remained unclear how such knowledge functioned. In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin acknowledged the inseparable relation between the knowledge of God and the self. He added a new chapter on the knowledge of God and yet another on the knowledge of the self. Although the objectivity and subjectivity of this knowledge is asserted,⁵⁷⁷ the *cognitio dei et hominis* does not quite correlate with his remaining doctrines. While the structure of this notion remains unchanged until the 1559 *Institutes*, he continually expanded upon the content of this idea. In the 1559 *Institutes*, the *cognitio dei et hominis* are bound together as the presupposition for understanding Christian dogma which, for Calvin, consists of the doctrine of the creator, the doctrine of the redeemer and the effect of the Holy Spirit in Christ.⁵⁷⁸ Consequently, the radical shift in the arrangement of the 1559 *Institutes* suggests that the “God” who appears within ‘the knowledge of God’ embraces now both the creator and the redeemer. Prior to 1559, the “God” of the knowledge of God had pointed to the creator God alone.

5.1.2. The “God” of the knowledge of God

In the 1536 *Institutes*, the “God” of the knowledge of God pointed to God the creator.⁵⁷⁹ This is seen most clearly in Calvin’s section on the knowledge of God. One notes that Calvin gives here two descriptions of “God”: the first is found in his discussion on the knowledge of God, as creator, and the second is found in his

⁵⁷⁶ O. S. I, 37.

⁵⁷⁷ C. O. 1, 279-280; 687-689.

⁵⁷⁸ The contents to the 1559 *Institutes*.

analysis of the first part of the creed, where he presents his understanding of the doctrine of God.⁵⁸⁰ In the 1539 *Institutes*, the knowledge of ‘God as the creator’ is enlarged into a whole new chapter.⁵⁸¹ In this new text, both the objectivity and the subjectivity of this knowledge are asserted, although a full description is still missing. Furthermore, Calvin expands his section on the first part of the creed, which we find in his chapter on faith. And in a new chapter on providence and predestination the discussion of God’s providence is extended and separated from his assertions on the creed.

At this point one finds a tension in Calvin’s arrangement in describing the doctrine of God: the numerous descriptions of the doctrine of God as creator are not found where one would expect them, namely under such titles as ‘creation’ or ‘the doctrine of God as creator’. The arrangement of the 1539 *Institutes* through to 1550 shows that in the knowledge of God, ‘God the creator’ is alone the object of this knowledge, which cannot be directly related to the rest of the doctrine of God. Furthermore, this “God” of the knowledge of God is not quite compatible with the “God” of Scripture. Scripture tends to present us with the objectivity of such knowledge and mainly to describe human salvation in relation to the redeemer. It would seem that Calvin’s stress solely on “God the creator” in the knowledge of God displays more the extent to which Calvin’s understanding of “God” in this regard had not yet developed sufficiently. Prior to 1559, Calvin tended in his discussions on the knowledge of God to point only to the sovereign “God” who created, sustains and governs the world. This God then sent Jesus Christ for the salvation of human beings. In this way, the

⁵⁷⁹ O. S. I, 37.

⁵⁸⁰ O. S. I, 75-76.

⁵⁸¹ The Knowledge of God is the first chapter of the 1539 *Institutes*.

second person of the Trinity is perceived in a more functional way and reduced to the role of mediator.

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin undergoes a radical change of mind in regards his understanding of “God” in the knowledge of God. This “God” now embraces both God the creator and the redeemer. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit also affects believers in the redeemer. In this way, Christians believe in Jesus Christ yet also confess the creator as the Father. One may well ask here why Calvin did not simply set up “the Trinity” as that “God” of the knowledge of God. In response, one could say that Calvin seems to stress “the knowledge” of the human mind which is quickened both by the Holy Spirit as well as by the works of God in revelation. In other words, Calvin’s “God” of the knowledge of God is indeed a triune God. The knowledge of God highlights human understanding of the works of the threefold God in revelation. In this way, Calvin’s knowledge of God corresponds with Christian doctrine as a whole.

5.1.3. The “God” of the imago dei

In his discussions on the knowledge of the self from the 1536 *Institutes* through to 1550, Calvin consistently refers to the imago dei as that which has been the characteristic of humankind since their first creation. In this way, even though Calvin admits that the threefold God participates in the creation of human beings, the “God” of the imago dei points primarily to the creator God, which in turn corresponds to the “God” of the knowledge of God. This was also expressed in Calvin’s parallel between God’s nature and human nature in his discussion of the characteristics of God in the

1536 *Institutes*.⁵⁸² From 1539 through to 1550, Calvin presented, in a very subtle way, a dynamic description of the imago dei based on human participation in the characteristics of God as creator. These characteristics embraced wisdom, righteousness, power, uprightness, truth and purity.⁵⁸³ In this way human beings were seen as representing through the imago dei the characteristics of the creator. In his section on the knowledge of God in creation in the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin discusses the creation of human beings and asserts that human beings consist of a created body and a created soul. The imago dei is then placed upon that soul.⁵⁸⁴ Calvin goes on to give a full description of the contrast of human nature, i.e. between its created and fallen states, in order to differentiate his understanding of Christian teaching from philosophical speculations. The philosophers attempted to explain human nature but, in Calvin's view, they failed to distinguish between human nature as it was created and the current fallen state of human beings.⁵⁸⁵ In short, philosophy remained unaware of the effects of sin and so those who claimed that the entirety of human nature was directed toward the divine were essentially misdirected. For Calvin, the only aspect of human nature which is still directed toward God is the imago dei. Finally, the restoration of the imago dei occurs in order to re-establish that state in which human beings were created.⁵⁸⁶ Despite the expansions here, Calvin's "God" of the imago dei remains unchanged.

⁵⁸² O. S. I, 38-39.

⁵⁸³ C. O. 1, 307.

⁵⁸⁴ I, 15, 1-3.

5.1.4. The functioning of the *cognitio dei ac nostri*

Calvin's assertion regarding the objectivity and subjectivity of knowledge remains unclear in the 1536 *Institutes*. In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin tells us that both dimensions of knowledge are the work of the Holy Spirit. Hence not only is the authority of Scripture affirmed by the Holy Spirit but human understanding of Scripture is also illuminated by it.⁵⁸⁷ In this sense, Calvin's theological epistemology can be seen as grounded on the work of the Holy Spirit (see Section 2.1.⁵⁸⁸).

The subjective understanding of the knowledge of God is unfolded within two contexts, initially within the 1539 *Institutes*, but extending through the later editions as well. First, Calvin presents the *duplex cognitio nostri* where he highlights the integrity of human nature as it was given at creation. With this 'healthy nature' human beings are able to participate in God's characteristics, characteristics which represent a copy of God's nature.⁵⁸⁹ Furthermore, in his description of the *cognitio dei ac nostri* Calvin places God's nature and corrupted human nature side by side, emphasizing the close relation between knowledge and human nature.⁵⁹⁰ In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin pictured the *imago dei* as the integrity of human nature, pointing to the characteristics of God.⁵⁹¹ In the 1539 *Institutes*, God's characteristics are expressed in human beings through their participation in God.⁵⁹² We see that Calvin's

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 15, 6-7.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 15, 4.

⁵⁸⁷ C. O. 1, 289-295.

⁵⁸⁸ As an aid to the reader, section numbers (i.e. in reference to above sections in this thesis) will be provided in parentheses within the next two chapters. This will assist the reader to find the appropriate section of analysis dealing with the topic at hand.

⁵⁸⁹ C. O. 1, 279-280; 307.

⁵⁹⁰ C. O. 1, 279-280; 306.

⁵⁹¹ O. S. I, 38.

⁵⁹² C. O. 1, 307.

understanding of knowledge relies on a ‘healthy’ human nature which can then express that knowledge. In contrast, fallen human beings cannot possess proper knowledge due to the corruption of their nature.⁵⁹³ Thus the question of innate knowledge of God does not arise for Calvin. Rather the central point is that human beings are created with the integrity of human nature which can partake in the characteristics of God. In this way, human creatures can respond to God and recognize God as the creator. Calvin pursues this idea through the twofold knowledge of the self which parallels the knowledge of God. We see this thought slowly evolving in Calvin’s work from the 1539 *Institutes* on, finally being reinforced in the 1559 edition. There we find the expression of the interrelated model of the knowledge of God and of the self, in short, that the more humility human beings learn through the *duplex cognitio nostri*, the more human beings can partake in God and possess knowledge of him.⁵⁹⁴ Only in this way can the *imago dei* as the characteristics of God be represented adequately.

Secondly, the way “knowledge” functions in the mind is reflected in the shift of the argument’s arrangement from 1539 to that of 1559. The third and fourth books of the 1559 edition examine both the way in which we receive the grace of Christ, and the external ways in which God assists us. In short, these two books point to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is important to recognize the role the Holy Spirit plays in the last edition of the *Institutes*: the quickening of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind is decisive, because the human mind can receive the knowledge of the redeemer and recognize the creator as the Father only through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In this way, knowledge of God as creator is separated from that of the redeemer—fallen

⁵⁹³ C. O. 1, 288-290.

human beings possess only a remnant of the knowledge of God as creator, and do not yet apprehend the knowledge of the redeemer. In contrast, believers in Christ are quickened by the Holy Spirit—they receive benefits in the redeemer and recognize the creator as the Father. The creator Father has a particular role of guiding his church as well as governing the world and his creation. God created human beings in order that they might attain eternal life. In this world, the remnant of the *imago dei* reminds us of this divine intention in creating human beings.

5.1.5. Knowledge is the ground of the diverse orientations of human existence

Calvin constantly stresses the inseparable relation between the knowledge of God and that of the self. This would appear to present his understanding of knowledge in an existential way because the interrelated model of the *cognitio dei ac nostri* exists neither in the pre-fall state nor in eternal life. We could call it ‘existential’ here because this knowledge points to the spirituality of human existence. For Calvin, knowledge is the ground of faith, and this consists of the knowledge of Christ by God the Father and of the assurance of God’s goodness in Christ.⁵⁹⁵ It is important to note that Calvin views repentance as proceeding from faith. In other words, the renewal of human nature is based on the certainty of the knowledge of Christ which is provided by God. Furthermore, Calvin asserts that the law acts as a mirror, reflecting the human inability to obey God’s will even in Christian existence. Believers also confront the fear of God; it compels them to surrender their moral lethargy and to return to God. Awareness of the iniquity that exists within the self, and of God’s

⁵⁹⁴ I, 1.

⁵⁹⁵ C. O. 1, 456-457.

judgment of it, motivates our search for God's mercy in the redeemer.⁵⁹⁶ In this way, knowledge is also the foundation of human conscience, which consists of the law as the natural knowledge of God and the fear of God's judgment. The above two human states, i.e. corruption and renewal, correspond to the remnant of the imago dei and the renewal of the imago dei respectively. In this way, the knowledge of God, be it that of the creator, of the redeemer or of the law, is existential and experiential.

5.2. The human relation to God

5.2.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin argues that the imago dei is grounded on a human relation to God, i.e. in subsisting in God. Such subsistence occurs both in the first creation and through participation in Christ in recreation. In contrast, the loss of the imago dei corresponds to alienation from God.⁵⁹⁷ Calvin asserts the human relation to God in two ways. First, Calvin speaks of the relation between the Father and his children. We find this in his chapters on prayer and faith. Christians recognize the creator as the Father, the one who created the world and nourishes it for his human children. Particularly in sustaining the world and in sending Christ we see God's fatherly love.⁵⁹⁸ Second, Calvin mentions the relationship between Christ and God's children. Calvin asserts that God adopts human beings as children through Christ. In Christ God's benevolence is communicated to us and human nature is restored. This presents us with a two-way relation between God and human beings: God, i.e. the

⁵⁹⁶ III, 3, 1-8.

⁵⁹⁷ O. S. I, 38-40.

⁵⁹⁸ O. S. I, 105-106; 75-76; 39-40.

threefold God, participates in the first creation of human beings and in the continuation of human life through his sustenance both of the world and of human existence. Human beings participate in God by living in him. In the recreation, God sent Jesus Christ for human salvation and believers participate in Christ and communicate with God in Christ⁵⁹⁹ (1.2).

In the 1539 *Institutes*, this idea of the reciprocal relationship between God and human beings remains unchanged. Yet Calvin deepens this insight, particularly as it relates to human participation in God's characteristics, which gives rise to the human relation to God.⁶⁰⁰ Furthermore, this act of reciprocal participation between God and human beings is reinforced by Calvin's enlargement of his understanding of the covenant. By appealing to God's promise in the Old Testament, Calvin agrees that the fathers in the Old Testament were reconciled to God and were adopted into the preparations for eternal life. This promise was to become a reality in Jesus Christ. Hence it appears here that the human relation to God is constituted by God, who fulfilled his promise on account of his love.⁶⁰¹ Human participation in God occurs through our participation in Christ, by way of our regeneration. When believers partake in Christ, they are involved in a twofold process: crucifying the old person and moving through resurrection into new life⁶⁰² (2.2).

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin's understanding of the reciprocal participation between God and human beings is found in several contexts along with a radical shift in the arrangement of the text's structure. Consequently, the relationship between God and

⁵⁹⁹ O. S, I, 40-41; 239.

⁶⁰⁰ C. O. 1, 307.

⁶⁰¹ C. O. 1, 802-803.

human beings is best discussed within these contexts, namely in creation, human corruption and redemption (4.2). One notes that in principle Calvin's view of God's participation in the creation both of the world and of human beings remains unchanged since the 1536 *Institutes*. Yet Calvin does edit the doctrine of God's providence and adds the creation of human beings under the topic of creation.⁶⁰³ Here he highlights both God's sovereign provision as well as human nobility, which arises from the ability to discern good from evil—and which also encompasses the ability to make decisions on whether or not to obey God.⁶⁰⁴ However, in the movement of reciprocal participation between God and human beings in creation we notice a tension between God's authority and imperfect human autonomy, which makes it in fact necessary for human beings to depend on God. Calvin releases this tension by referring to God's fatherly love which is further expressed in a specific sphere, namely the church. God liberates his people from the dilemma of sin and brings them back to his kingdom⁶⁰⁵ (4.2.1).

In the state of human corruption, the stress of the relationship between God and human beings falls upon human disobedience to God. This disobedience is caused by unbelief. For Calvin, human perversity disrupts the above order and sets the creator and human beings over against each other.⁶⁰⁶ In this way human beings are estranged from God, and since this interrupts the flow of God's sustenance this means the death of the soul. Hence this movement of reciprocal participation is suspended (4.2.2).

⁶⁰² C. O. 1,687.

⁶⁰³ I, 14-16.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., I, 15, 8.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., I, 5, 10; I, 17, 1 and 6.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., II, 1, 4-5.

In redemption, God's participation in human beings is achieved through his covenantal love. This can be seen both in the Old Testament and in the regeneration that comes with Jesus Christ. With this idea, Calvin stays true to his work in the 1539 *Institutes*, although, once again, he deepens his understanding here. For instance, he appeals to the Holy Spirit as the one who regenerates believers and renews the *imago dei*.⁶⁰⁷ Moreover, Calvin inserts several passages in the 1559 *Institutes* which explain that God cannot forsake the *imago dei* in human beings and that God works through Christ in order to renew the corrupted *imago dei*.⁶⁰⁸ Finally, Calvin's discussion of God's participation in human beings as believers is found under the topics of predestination and election. This also requires us to confront the tension between God's sovereign will and the human will, be it in the state of the original creation or in redemption. One may well ask why, if God is sovereign and manages each happening within the world, Adam failed to keep God's precepts and lost the *imago dei*. If God is indeed sovereign, why are some people predestined to be restored into communication with him and others not (4.2.3)?

5.2.2. Conclusion

At this point we see that the reciprocal participation between God and human beings is initiated and cultivated by God. Human beings participate in God on the basis of God's active provision and love. In this sense, human participation in God can be viewed as passive and determined. For Calvin, it is a general principle that all reality has to be understood from its origin. This means here that God is the creator and that humankind is created in order to communicate with God and partake in God. Human

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 15, 4. Comm 1 Cor 15: 45.

beings can only become human by living out the reality for which they were created. In Calvin's theology, Jesus Christ, in addition to his role and function as mediator, was the complete human being who participated in God and fully obeyed him. In other words, to participate in God is to become the image of God.

5.3. What is the imago dei in human beings?

5.3.1. The imago dei as the integrity of human nature

5.3.1.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin argues that Adam represents humanity—i.e. incorporating both male and female—and was created with the integrity of human nature. This integrity is best expressed as characteristics of God, consisting in particular of wisdom, righteousness and holiness.⁶⁰⁹ However, the implication is that the integrity of human nature can apprehend God inherently. In other words, the human being in possession of the integrity of human nature is a copy of God. However, Calvin understands 'being a copy of God' as pointing to a quality of human nature, in which human beings are existential portraits of God. In short, this means that they can respond to God and obey God (1.3.1).⁶¹⁰ Yet as portraits of God, this is not to imply that human beings possess divine essence. As for fallen human beings, they are left with a corrupt nature and can neither respond to God nor obey God. This

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., I, 13, 9; II, 6, 4; II, 16, 4.

⁶⁰⁹ O. S. I, 38.

⁶¹⁰ O. S. I, 37.

contrast is seen in the important opposition between the first Adam and the second Adam (1.3.2).⁶¹¹

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin adds several passages to his discussions on creation, the imago dei, human corruption and regeneration. These passages excellently display Calvin's understanding of the imago dei as the integrity of human nature. Three points should be mentioned here. First, human beings as they were created—i.e. endowed with life, wisdom and power—are considered the best work of God in creation. As masterpieces in this way, human beings reflect the glory of God simply by expressing the quality of God's craftsmanship (2.3.1).⁶¹² Second, the renewal of the imago dei also relies upon the restoration of the human mind, although the relationship between the human mind and human nature still requires clarification (2.3.2).⁶¹³ Third, the integrity of human nature functions under the condition of divine grace.⁶¹⁴ Nevertheless, this integrity is imprinted upon Adam at creation (2.3.3); it is a substantial quality of human beings.⁶¹⁵ For this reason, Calvin can declare perverse human nature to be an accidental quality, not stemming from that initial nature as it was given by the creator.

In this edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin understands the imago dei—as the integrity of human nature—as a substantial property of human beings which is consonant with the best work of God in creation. However, how the restoration of the imago dei corresponds to the restoration of human nature is explained in Calvin's understanding of the process of mortification and vivification. Furthermore, Calvin reminds us that

⁶¹¹ O. S. I, 38.

⁶¹² C. O. 1, 289-290.

⁶¹³ C. O. 1, 308.

the restoration of the imago dei is to be understood as a life-long process. This point remains unchanged up to the 1559 *Institutes*.

In the last edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin highlights the workings of the faculties of the soul; these represent the workings of human nature as a whole.⁶¹⁶ Calvin may use in this context the words “mind”—citing Eph 4: 23—and “heart” but these should be understood in a synecdochal way, i.e. representing the entirety of human nature.⁶¹⁷ The vital point to appreciate here is that Calvin contrasts the integrity of human nature as wholeness with the total corruption of human nature after the fall. Therefore, any attempt to understand the imago dei in Calvin’s work must appreciate that there are only two options: either the integrity of human nature or its total corruption.⁶¹⁸ Calvin’s understanding of the imago dei as the integrity of human nature can be reduced in essence to a view on human existence, in which human beings either bare the imago dei or the remnant of the imago dei. Calvin is aware of this existential tendency in his interpretation and of its potential dangers in syncretizing a range of other understandings. For this reason he differentiates his view from other philosophical⁶¹⁹ and, in particular, Manichean understandings.⁶²⁰ For Calvin, the former is ignorant of the effects of sin, while the latter thinks of the imago dei as giving to humanity a portion of divinity. Calvin believes human nature to be endowed with a divine gift, the gift of the imago dei which is sustained by divine grace, but it is due to the disturbance of sin that human nature becomes corrupted and

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ C. O. 1, 312.

⁶¹⁶ I, 15, 8.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, I, 15, 3-4.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., I, 15, 8; II, 2, 12.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., I, 15, 6-7.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., I, 15, 5.

the gift effaced.⁶²¹ Therefore, the renewal of the *imago dei* is indeed the restoration of human nature to that integrity, with which human beings can apprehend God both in the gospel and in the revelation of Jesus Christ. In his discussion of human restoration in relation to the renewal of the *imago dei*, Calvin highlights the life-long process of such renewal, inasmuch as there is a remnant of sin in human beings. It is the strength of the Holy Spirit which must wipe out human impurity and compels human beings to repent (2.3).⁶²²

5.3.1.2. Conclusion

Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* as the integrity of human nature has obviously benefited from his work on the biblical commentaries and his interaction with and understanding of various competing views. His antithesis between the integrity of human nature and the total corruption of human nature corresponds both to that antithesis between the *imago dei* and its loss (i.e. to the remnant of the *imago dei*), as well as to that between being in relation to God and being alienated from God. At the same time, we also detect here an echo of that antithesis between the grace of God and human capacities. However, in Calvin's understanding of the integrity of human nature the *imago dei* operates through human nature as a whole and is sustained by divine grace alone. In referring to the continual restoration of the *imago dei* in regeneration, it is necessary to clarify how it is possible for the *imago dei* as the integrity of human nature to express in a gradual way its renewal in the grace of Christ.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, I, 15, 8.

5.3.2. The imago dei as the excellence of the human creature

5.3.2.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

The idea that the imago dei signifies the excellence of the human creature can be found in the *Institutes* from 1539 on. Calvin describes the idea in a comparative way, i.e. he compares human nature to the nature of other creatures. Calvin admits in the 1539 *Institutes* that a small portion of this characteristic excellence is left within our corrupted nature after the fall. We see it expressed in the longing for truth, even though this pursuit is now in vain. For Calvin, even this remnant of the original character of humankind differentiates human beings from the rest of creation⁶²³ (2.4.3).

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin understands the excellence of human nature to be the imago dei. This special gift within human beings enables them to attain eternal life. This points to the advantage that human beings possess. This idea can also be found in Calvin's 1554 commentaries on Gen 2: 7. Calvin outlines the way in which God created human beings from clay, how he placed a soul within them and endowed this soul with the imago dei.⁶²⁴ In the 1559 *Institutes* Calvin sees the creation of human beings as the pinnacle of the entire act of creation. Human beings were engraved with reason, and with this reason they are not restricted to a merely temporal life but may indeed ascend to God.⁶²⁵ For Calvin, to ascend God means to know God and to approach eternal life. This viewpoint can also be found in the *argumentum* of the

⁶²² Ibid., III, 3, 9 -12.

⁶²³ C. O. 1, 324.

⁶²⁴ *Comm Gen 2: 7*.

commentaries on Genesis. In his discussion of this human advantage in the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin reinforces his reference to human intellect by appealing to John 1: 4.⁶²⁶

If we refer to Calvin's 1553 commentaries on John 1: 4, we see that he argues that human beings are endowed with reason at their creation, and that through this reason life in God is conveyed to us.⁶²⁷ In other words, human reason plays a role in allowing human beings to communicate with God and to apprehend the knowledge of God. However, that said, Calvin believes that it was not necessary to search for God in the external world because God is in us.⁶²⁸ This is the *primo conditio creationis*. In the renewing of human nature, the Holy Spirit quickens the mind so that through their understanding human beings can acknowledge God and God's benevolence in Christ, i.e. they can apprehend the knowledge of God in Scripture. In this way, believers join once more in the life in God. For Calvin, this means that human nature is restored to that state in which it was created.

At this point we see that human beings excel as creatures in that they perceive the knowledge of God and can move toward eternal life.⁶²⁹ Yet even if we consider unrestored human nature, we see that the remnant of the knowledge of God still shines within this corrupted reason after the fall. This remnant spark still displays the nobility of human beings above the brute beasts⁶³⁰ (4.3.5). Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* as the excellence of the human creature develops throughout the

⁶²⁵ I, 15, 3-4.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 15, 4.

⁶²⁷ *Comm John 1: 4*.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁹ I, 15, 4.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 15, 3. II, 2, 12 and 17.

various enlargements of the *Institutes*. The citation from John 1: 4 displays this maturity in particular, especially the way in which he connects here human nature, the life in God and the knowledge of God. At this point we can say that the degree of understanding of the knowledge of God is reflected in the various states of human nature, which in turn reflect the varying conditions of the imago dei, namely in its created perfection, in its remnant form and with its restoration.

5.3.2.2. Conclusion

The imago dei points to the excellence of the human creature, and this is identified with the integrity and excellence of human nature as it was first created. Calvin reinforces this notion with the concept of human understanding, through which human beings perceive the knowledge of God and receive God's benevolence. Yet this human advantage is also found in our corrupted nature, albeit only in remnant form. Calvin has in mind primarily the pre-fall human state which was adorned with understanding in correspondence to divine wisdom and the divine life. The aim of regeneration is therefore to bring human beings back to that which they once were, and to direct them toward eternal life.

5.3.3. The imago dei signifies life against death

5.3.3.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In addition to the stress on the excellence of human nature, one of the characteristics of the imago dei is its movement toward eternal life. In his section on the creation of

human beings in the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin points out that the *imago dei* signifies a way toward eternal life that arises by living in God.⁶³¹ This notion is understood better through the life in Christ, which represents the newness of the life of believers in Christ.⁶³² Yet it must be made clear here that neither the life in Adam before the fall nor our life in Christ are to be understood as eternal life. Calvin understands eternal life as referring to the resurrected body with the renewed life of the soul in Christ, together in the eternal glory of God. In this way, the *imago dei* or the renewal of the *imago dei* is not to be identified completely with eternal life. Yet eternal life is manifested in this world in the activities of the soul, since it has a connection to Christ. Moreover, in contrast to this life is the death of the soul after the fall—in this instance the soul is under God’s judgment through the law and its death stands in a negative connection to Christ: in Christ’s second coming, the dead soul will be placed into a resurrected body and then together they will be condemned to eternal perdition⁶³³ (1.5).

In Calvin’s description of the *imago dei* in the 1539 *Institutes*, we note that he omits his previous assertion that the *imago dei* is a way toward eternal life. Instead, he develops here his understanding of life within the framework of the similarities and differences between the two Testaments as well as in the Christian life.

In his chapter on the similarities and differences between the two Testaments, Calvin asserts that life is indeed given to the fathers in the Old Testament through the word of God. God’s word is life and the source of life and it signifies the second person of

⁶³¹ O. S. I, 37.

⁶³² O. S. I, 40.

⁶³³ O. S. I, 39-40 and 93.

the Trinity. It is through the word of God that God sets the Jews apart from the world, and it is his word that delivers them out of death into the blessings of eternal life.⁶³⁴ In this way, life in Christ was given by God in the Old Testament through his word. This life is to be differentiated from earthly life and points to the everlasting joy of spiritual existence. In his chapter on the Christian life, Calvin instructs those believers confronting the temptations of the world to overcome their dilemma by contemplating eternal life.⁶³⁵ By meditation on eternal life, Calvin means here practicing the teachings of the kingdom of God. In this way the reality of God's kingdom is expressed in the world. And this also reminds believers that they, like all human beings, are beyond temporal limitations; they were created for more than simple earthly pleasures—they are to ascend to God to enjoy everlasting blessings (2.7.1).

A lengthy exposition of Calvin's understanding of the death of the soul can be found both in his chapter on the knowledge of the self and in his chapter on faith. The contrast between this fallen condition and the state of the second Adam provides the best illustration of the death of the soul. For Calvin, the fallen soul points to earthly filth and consists, among other things, of blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity and injustice.⁶³⁶ In his chapter on faith, the dynamic operation of a God-oriented life in human existence is described as the contrast to that sluggishness of the flesh, where the fallen soul is disconnected from the root of life and indulges itself in vanity.⁶³⁷ This suggests just how ineffectual the workings of human nature are in attempting to live out the characteristics of God. The fallen soul succumbs to an indifferent inertia;

⁶³⁴ C. O. 1, 806-807.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ C. O. 1, 308.

⁶³⁷ C. O. 1, 461.

in other words, the fallen soul is dead and not able to involve itself in God, i.e. not able to participate in the characteristics of God which are rooted in Christ (2.7.2).

In Calvin's rearrangement of the 1559 *Institutes*, the idea that the imago dei signifies life against death is found in his description of the imago dei as well as in his teaching on human corruption. Despite the changes, his assertions of life in relation to the imago dei from the 1539 *Institutes* still remain. One notes that Calvin's understanding of the imago dei has undergone a strong shift toward a more spiritual and eternal orientation, and that he highlights the imago dei as that life in God. Calvin cites 1 Cor 11: 7 in order to repudiate Osiander's view. He differentiates that view which would see the imago dei represented in natural ordinances from his own focus on the eschatological orientation of the imago dei.⁶³⁸ By appealing to John 1: 4, he closely correlates the life in God as the imago dei to the Word of God in order to promote the imago dei's eternal dimensions. In this way he outlines the principle behind the creation of human beings: God adorns human beings with the imago dei in order that they may anticipate eternal life.⁶³⁹ Hence it appears that despite his exposition of the biblical commentaries and his positive evaluation of the function of corrupted human nature—which we have found in the *Institutes* since 1539—Calvin's doctrine of the imago dei in its relation to life returns to that succinct viewpoint expressed in the 1536 *Institutes* (4.3.6.1).

Furthermore, this idea on the imago dei as the way toward eternal life is asserted in his discussion of the knowledge of the self, where the *duplex cognitio nostri* is stressed. Calvin adds a new section which argues that the happiness of life is the

⁶³⁸ I, 15, 4.

pursuit of virtue and the meditation on eternity.⁶⁴⁰ And he tells us that this is performed through human reason. To be precise, to contemplate eternal life means to perceive the knowledge of God and to live out the characteristics of God. In contrast, fallen human beings follow their desire for earthly things. For this reason they bear the fruits of sin⁶⁴¹ (4.3.6.2).

5.3.3.2. Conclusion

Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* as a way toward eternal life remains through all editions of the *Institutes*. Yet his affirmation of this idea is somewhat ambivalent in the enlargement of his work on the *imago dei*. In the 1536 *Institutes*, the *imago dei* is stressed as a way toward eternal life in that state before the fall. In the 1539 *Institutes*, this idea is omitted altogether in the *imago*-text. Calvin seems to wonder where he can best place this idea and cannot settle either on the pre-lapsarian state or on the state of renewal. We saw that he asserted both the eternal dimension of the *imago dei* as participation in God before the fall, and the renewal of the human mind in recreation. His intentions become ambiguous through his positive evaluation of the function of corrupted reason and the contrast he presents between heavenly and earthly things. For Calvin, corrupted reason points to a remnant of the *imago dei*, which is able to preserve the order of creation and promote the common good of humanity. His differentiation of heavenly and earthly things points to the parallel differentiation of a God-oriented life from an earthly one. This tension is left in place through to 1550.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., II, 1, 1-3.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

In his 1559 description of the *imago dei*, Calvin stresses on the one hand the eternal dimension of the *imago dei*, again through his repudiation of Osiander's view. He highlights the immortality of the soul in order to reduce the temporal value of the *imago dei*. The temporal value of the *imago dei* is understood as the glory of God which shines through the natural world including the human body. On the other hand, he argues that the pre-fall state can best be understood in the restoration of human nature. Here Calvin radically changes his understanding of the *imago dei* in relation to the human condition and to eternal life. In the 1536 *imago*-text, a restoration of human nature in relation to eternal life is not mentioned at all. In the 1539 *imago*-text, Calvin omits the description of the *imago dei* as a way toward eternal life and adds rather the restoration of human nature, citing Col 3: 10 and Eph 4: 23. This promotes a correlation between the knowledge of God and the restoration of human nature. He intensifies the idea in the 1543 *Institutes* by appealing to 2 Cor 3: 18, arguing that the gospel, as the knowledge of God, has a close relation to the renewal of the human mind.

Finally, Calvin increases the focus on the eternal dimension by relating human understanding to the Word of God as life, citing John 1: 4. By 1553, Calvin had completed his expositions of the above biblical commentaries and the commentary on John (which was published in 1553).⁶⁴² The shift is completed in the 1559 *Institutes*. Here Calvin assures us that the *imago dei* as the integrity of human nature in the pre-lapse state can best be apprehended through the restoration of human nature. For Calvin, the restoration of human nature aims at reinstating that principle for which

human beings were first created, namely to anticipate eternal life. In this way, Calvin can reason back to what the human condition must have been like before the fall.

In the above investigation of Calvin's work on the *imago dei*, it becomes clear that Calvin perceives the *imago dei* as the integrity of human nature, that which enables human beings to communicate with God and to live out the knowledge of God. To communicate with God is to live in God and to anticipate eternal life, which while beyond the life in this world still maintains continuity from this life into eternity. This communication with God functions through human understanding and shows the created, qualitatively higher rank of human beings.

With this understanding in place, Calvin's conception of the *imago dei* as a reflection of the glory of God, as described in the 1559 *Institutes*, can now be better unpacked, although the development of this idea is also dramatic.

5.3.4 The *imago dei* as the reflection of the glory of God

5.3.4.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, it appears that Calvin does not yet picture the *imago dei* as the reflection of God's glory. Yet he does assert that humankind, as creatures of the creator, glorify God in obedience to him and in their service to him as Lord and king of creation. In contrast, corrupt human beings do not glorify God; rather they betray

⁶⁴² Thomas, H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Kentucky: John Knox, 1971/1993), 30, esp. 16-24 for the Pauline Epistles.

him, they failed to preserve that which God had given them, i.e. the excellence of their nature⁶⁴³ (1.4).

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin argues that the knowledge of God is imprinted upon the human heart, and that through this human beings can recognize to varying degrees the glory of God. The knowledge of God that we glean from creation points to that knowledge of God which remains after the fall. In this context, the glory of God points to God's wisdom and power; this is expressed in his work, which embraces both the natural world and human beings (2.9.1).⁶⁴⁴ In the context of justification, Calvin understands the glory of God as the strength of God; this is expressed in believers, who are justified and express within them the gifts of Christ. Moreover, Calvin contrasts the gifts of Christ in believers with the merits of human beings in order to show God's greater work in the act of redemption (2.9.2).⁶⁴⁵ In this sense, God's glory is greater in accomplishing and sustaining human salvation than it is in creation. In the context of faith, Calvin points to the power of the Holy Spirit, which quickens the human mind so that it may apprehend the gospel. In this sense, the glory of God points to God's strength in revelation (2.9.3).⁶⁴⁶

In the 1543 *Institutes*, Calvin inserts a small paragraph into his description of the *imago dei*, adding a reference to 2 Cor 3: 18 after those to Eph 4: 23 and Col 3: 10. In this succinct statement, Calvin does not define the *imago dei* as the reflection of the glory of God. Rather Calvin sets up a parallel: on one side we have God's revelation in the gospel, where the invisible God becomes visible in Jesus Christ; on the other

⁶⁴³ O. S. I, 37-39.

⁶⁴⁴ C. O. 1, 287-290.

⁶⁴⁵ C. O. 1, 752-753;765-766.

side we have the power of the Holy Spirit in the act of regeneration, where human beings are transformed into the image of Christ. Calvin follows this with a brief statement describing the *imago dei* as the soundness of the soul. Yet in this additional passage, the correlation between the restoration of the human mind, the gospel as the knowledge of God and the *imago dei* remains unclear (3.2).⁶⁴⁷

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin defines the *imago dei* as the reflection of God's glory. He asserts that the glory of God is reflected in the excellence of human nature. This can best be found in the restoration of our corrupt nature. As far as his discussion of creation goes, this idea follows the 1539 *Institutes*. In the context of regeneration, Calvin also states that the *imago dei* reflects the glory of God, and this finds its perfection in eternal life.⁶⁴⁸ In his description of the *imago dei*, which his 1548 commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 18 help us to understand, Calvin's view of the *imago dei* is seen to have a twofold meaning: (1) an objective and (2) subjective meaning in terms of the glory of God. This is because God's glory stands in close relation to God's revelation. In God's revelation, human beings can recognize God's glory, and this is achieved through the knowledge of God which is made manifest to the human mind. Human beings as the best works of God reflect his glory by representing divine wisdom, righteousness and holiness. Their outstanding rational capabilities, which appears to be the excellence of the human creature, displays an objective dimension of God's glory in creation. This objective dimension is also found in the effect of the Holy Spirit upon believers.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ C. O. 1, 536.

⁶⁴⁷ C. O. 1, 308.

⁶⁴⁸ III, 3, 9.

The subjectivity of the glory of God is found within the human mind, which is quickened by the Holy Spirit. Through the work of the Spirit human beings become aware of the *duplex cognitio hominis* and learn to be humble. The renewed person possesses knowledge of God, recognizing him as Lord, honoring him in obedience to his rule and praising him for his deeds. The glory of God points here to God's craftsmanship, expressed in the structure of human nature, and to God's goodness in Christ, manifested in the effect of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind (4.3.8).⁶⁵⁰

5.3.4.2. Conclusion

Within the development of this idea in the *Institutes*, we can identify three steps in Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* as the reflection of the glory of God. First, in order to assert the authorship of God, in the 1539 *Institutes* Calvin contrasts human creatures to the natural world. Humankind alone can recognize the glory of God both in themselves and in the world. The glory of God as it is expressed through the beauty of the world points to human blindness regarding the knowledge of God. Second, in the 1543 *Institutes*, Calvin deepens his understanding of this concept by citing 2 Cor 3: 18. This shifts the notion of the glory of God in relation to the *imago dei* to the context of redemption. Calvin writes that the glory of God is revealed and made visible in the gospel (by which he means Jesus Christ). And human nature is transformed into the image of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet in this description the glory of God as displayed in the gospel is not differentiated from that glory displayed in the renewal of human nature. Third, the restoration of human

⁶⁴⁹ *Comm 2 Cor 3: 9-18.*

⁶⁵⁰ *Comm 2 Cor 3: 18.*

nature aims at returning it to its original state which radiated the glory of God. In this context, Calvin parallels human nature before the fall to that in recreation.

The issue of the various degrees of God's glory in his diverse works is clarified in the 1548 commentaries on 2 Cor 3: 6-18. With this move, Calvin is now able in the 1559 imago-text to integrate the original state of human nature, the renewal of human nature, the glory of God, and the grace of Christ as the effect of the Holy Spirit. Calvin thinks of the imago dei in terms of the states of human nature and the corresponding knowledge of God within each state: the pre-fall state of human nature achieves this knowledge of God and beholds the glory of God in creation; the state of the renewal mirrors that of the first state, yet is sustained by a greater power of the Holy Spirit in Christ. It is in this way that Calvin can define the imago dei as the reflection of God's glory.

5.3.5 Human responsibility for the loss of the imago dei

5.3.5.1. The development of the idea in the *Institutes*

Calvin's understanding of human responsibility for the loss of the imago dei matures over time. In particular, his focus on the foundations of this idea shifts. In the 1536 *Institutes*, his description is succinct and it is presented within the context of the law. He stresses there the relation between God and human beings, namely that human creatures by nature must serve God. As a consequence, human betrayal deserves God's penalty (1.1.4).⁶⁵¹ In his 1537 *Instruction in Faith*, Calvin stresses this human

⁶⁵¹ O. S. I, 38-39.

decision against God. Human transgressions disrupted the relation between God and human beings in the original creation.⁶⁵² In this way, human beings are responsible for the loss of the *imago dei* because they ignored God, on whom they depend. In deciding to lift themselves up, they lost the noble gifts they had been given (2.4.4.1).

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin discusses human responsibility for the loss of the *imago dei* under the topic of the law. He stresses that God the creator has a right to request human obedience. And because God's character is always constant, he will never stop seeking righteousness. Human beings can hope neither for an exemption nor for a divine change in disposition. Calvin urges believers to follow God's will, which is only compatible with righteousness and the good. Calvin supports his argument with an understanding of human corruption as initiated by the soul, a thesis he had asserted in his previous chapter. In short, human beings have no excuse for the loss of the *imago dei*, not only because of their distortion of the divine-human relation but also because of the corruption of their nature (2.4.4).⁶⁵³

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin adds the idea of human responsibility for the loss of the *imago dei* to his discussion on human nature as it was created. His interest is to display as clearly as possible the excellence of human nature as God had made it. In that original situation, the operations of human understanding and the will could assist human beings to attain eternal life. Yet Adam failed in keeping these noble gifts and betrayed God. Because of the autonomy God had placed within his human creature, as he originally created it, human beings are responsible for the loss of the

⁶⁵² *Instruction in Faith* (1537), 24-25.

⁶⁵³ C. O. 1, 371-373.

imago dei (4.3.11).⁶⁵⁴ In his chapter on election, Calvin appeals to the original excellence of human nature, from which human beings have degenerated, in order to assert that God cannot be reproached for the unrighteousness of human beings. And, indeed, God has a right to choose out of these unrighteous people whoever he pleases, and lead them into salvation (4.3.11).⁶⁵⁵

5.3.5.2. Conclusion

Calvin's assertion of human responsibility for the loss of the imago dei is intensified in the *Institutes* through his growing understanding of both the relation between God and human beings and of human nature.⁶⁵⁶ In short, the effacement of the imago dei points both to the disturbance of the relation between God and human beings and to the depravity of human nature. Human beings are responsible for this situation because they are autonomous creatures who can choose to obey God or turn away from him. Hence one notes the weight which Calvin attributes to human autonomy in asserting such responsibility in the 1559 *Institutes*. For Calvin, while human beings were created with autonomy, it did not originally possess a great deal of constancy.⁶⁵⁷ Yet its function was sufficient to respond correctly to God's word and to lead human beings toward attaining eternal life.

⁶⁵⁴ I, 15, 8.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., III, 23, 6.

⁶⁵⁶ In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin inserts a new chapter on the knowledge of the self. In this chapter he discusses at length the corruption of human nature. In his defense against Pighius' view of free will in 1543, Calvin's understanding of the state *pre lapsum* is heightened through his survey of the church fathers. In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin systematically asserts that the operation of the faculties of the soul act as the integrity of human nature before the fall.

⁶⁵⁷ I, 15, 8.

5.4. The imago dei is sustained by the grace of God

5.4.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin points out two kinds, or movements of grace in relation to the imago dei. First, the grace of God sustains the divine gift, the imago dei, which in the first creation can only function through the provision of grace. In contrast, fallen human beings cannot express this gift through their own abilities because they withdraw themselves from God and lack in their corruption the deliverance of grace. In other words, the grace of God coincides with a relation to him.⁶⁵⁸ Second, Calvin argues that the renewal of the imago dei, where believers receive the benefits of Christ, points to our participation in Christ. In this way, the grace of Christ supports the reformed imago dei.⁶⁵⁹ One notes that Calvin understands God's grace in a Trinitarian way because it is "the power and action of the Spirit: through grace God the Father, in the Son, accomplishes whatever good there is."⁶⁶⁰ It is the Triune God who participates in the creation of human beings and who continues to sustain humankind (1.6). However, in the 1536 edition Calvin does not yet clearly differentiate the grace of creation from the grace of redemption.

In the 1539 *Institutes*, in his section on election, Calvin appeals to the grace of God in eternity in order to explain how grace is given to the elect by Christ before creation. Calvin then states that believers receive the grace of Christ, and that this grace supports human redemption. However, believers in faith also receive the benefits of

⁶⁵⁸ O. S. I, 38.

⁶⁵⁹ O. S. I, 40.

⁶⁶⁰ O. S. I, 85.

Christ (2.8.4). To point out that election occurs before time is to stress the free grace of God. In this way, the grace of God is contrasted to human merits or indeed anything good which could come from human beings. In his chapter on faith, in the section on the third part of the creed, Calvin highlights the grace of Christ which is transmitted to believers.⁶⁶¹ That this power of God can be appreciated as grace displays the subjective awareness in believers of this fact. One notes that Calvin understands the grace of Christ as pointing to God's mercy, achieved in his Son and given to us through the Holy Spirit. This highlights once again Calvin's Trinitarian perspective in this context.

In several additional passages in his section on human corruption, Calvin states that the power of the Holy Spirit supports human reason in its occupation with the arts and sciences, i.e. in the achievements of the cultural world. The natural sustenance of the Holy Spirit is also seen in the operation of the innate natural law in human existence.⁶⁶² Yet this raises the question of how Calvin differentiates between the grace of God in creation and in recreation. For Calvin, it is clear that God is the creator of the world. God provides us with natural human gifts in order to preserve the common good. The power of the Holy Spirit supports the operation of natural ordinances and all cultural events.⁶⁶³ However, this natural operation points to temporal and changeable things in life (2.8.2).

The assistance of God's grace in regards the transitory and non-transitory activities of existence is best expressed in the operation of human will. In his section on the

⁶⁶¹ O. S. I, 865.

⁶⁶² C. O. 1. 327.

⁶⁶³ C. O. 1, 324-327.

restoration of the human will, Calvin tells us that the restored will is helped to be stable in its pursuit of the knowledge of God. This implies that the power of the Holy Spirit as the grace of God in redemption is greater than that which was first given in creation, because Adam failed to preserve his original state (2.8.3).⁶⁶⁴ In addition to this tension between the grace which affects the order of creation and that which affects recreation, Calvin's focus on grace in salvation in contrast to human merits requires explanation.

In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin highlights human consciousness which is quickened by the Holy Spirit in faith. In this way, believers recognize that God's grace sustains both creation as well as the new creation. God's participation in creation and in recreation is recognized as God's grace.⁶⁶⁵ Furthermore, Calvin deepens his understanding of this idea regarding varying degrees of God's grace in creation and recreation by citing 1 Cor 15: 45 in his imago-text. He stresses that the grace conferred upon Adam is to be differentiated from that conferred upon Christ.⁶⁶⁶ This differentiation is also extended between Adam and believers because believers are affected by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit which affected Christ. Thus Calvin can stress that the power of the Holy Spirit upon believers is greater than that upon the first Adam. According to his 1546 commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 45, Calvin believes that the power of the Holy Spirit, which affected the life of Jesus Christ in this world and raised him from the dead, is transmitted also to believers. With this power, believers will not stray from God and can constantly pursue God's truth in the

⁶⁶⁴ C. O. 1, 342-345.

⁶⁶⁵ I, 16, 1.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 15, 4.

knowledge of God.⁶⁶⁷ However, the stress falls on the eternal dimension of the imago dei, which must be buttressed up with the grace of God in Christ (4.4).

5.4.2. Conclusion

Calvin remains consistent on the issue of God's grace in regards to the imago dei. He strongly discriminates against human merits in order to promote the special nature of grace: it is God himself in his Son who achieves the work of human salvation. Furthermore, the grace of God is to be recognized by believers in faith. This differentiates natural knowledge of God from Christian faith which acknowledges God's power at work in and on the world.

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin turns to describe the functioning of the fallen soul in a positive way: it can improve the common life in proportion to the degree of understanding remaining in the remnant of the imago dei. It is the power of the Holy Spirit which supports these human achievements. Yet Calvin carefully distinguishes the sustenance of natural human talents from the sustenance of life in God, i.e. through communion with Christ. This is not to say that Calvin abandons his stance against human merits; he maintains his position even while asserting the restoration of the human will in obedience to God. The assertion that Christians are chosen in eternity by Christ's grace has been maintained by Calvin since the 1539 *Institutes* as the basis of Christian existence. Both the imago dei and divine grace are connected to God's eternal election.

⁶⁶⁷ *Comm 1 Cor 15: 45.*

However, Calvin shows us the different degrees of strength of the Holy Spirit. Here the strength of the Holy Spirit's actions upon believers is compatible with that upon Jesus Christ. Likewise, the strength we receive in Jesus Christ is greater than that in Adam because Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead whereas Adam erred into death. At this point in the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin can assert that grace in Christ is greater than that in Adam.

5.5. The remnant of the imago dei

For Calvin, the remnant of the imago dei is a reality of human existence; yet it has never been an issue that he has wanted to focus on in any of the *Institutes*. Therefore, the notion of the remnant of the imago dei is found only in fragments in various contexts of the various editions of the *Institutes*. In his 1554 commentaries on Gen 1: 26-27 and Gen 9: 6 and in the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin admits that the imago dei is not completely obliterated. Due to the complexity of this topic, I will divide this theme up under the following topics: human conscience, the sixth commandment and social ordinances.

5.5.1. Human conscience

5.5.1.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin briefly mentions human conscience, identifying it with the natural knowledge of God as natural law. It is conscience which makes human beings inexcusable for their neglect of the knowledge of God. Calvin does not explain

the correlation between natural law, the knowledge of God and human conscience in 1536.⁶⁶⁸ He leaves this task to his readers (1.8). In two different places within the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin elaborates his views on human conscience in regards the *imago dei*. In his new chapter on the knowledge of God, Calvin points to the creator's authorship of the world as knowledge of God, and this is imprinted upon our nature. For Calvin, the marks of the creator are so obvious upon the external world that they render human beings responsible for ignoring such knowledge of God (2.4.1).⁶⁶⁹ In his chapter on the knowledge of the self, Calvin relates human conscience to natural law quite closely. Following his positive evaluation of corrupted human reason, Calvin highlights the fact that human beings are given insight with which they may know God and recognize him as the Father who prepares all good things for them and directs their lives in this world. Yet this ability, especially to know God as a Father who favors his children, is severely damaged (2.4.2).⁶⁷⁰

From another angle, Calvin illustrates how human beings are given the knowledge of God in the law, consisting of the first and second tables of the Decalogue. After the fall, human nature became corrupt and can now only function through sense perceptions. Hence the corrupt mind loses its capacity to apprehend the knowledge of the first table of the law. However, Calvin notes that the knowledge of the second table—i.e. of those laws which benefit this life—is not damaged to the same degree. Even such fragmentary knowledge of God as conscience provides is sufficient to accuse human beings and place them before God's judgment. It is for this reason that

⁶⁶⁸ O. S. I, 38-39.

⁶⁶⁹ C. O. 1, 286-287.

⁶⁷⁰ C. O. 1, 327.

human beings live without peace (2.4.2).⁶⁷¹ In this way, Calvin's understanding of human conscience is already much clearer here than in the 1536 *Institutes*. Yet the correlation between the knowledge of God and conscience still remains vague.

In the 1550 *Institutes*, Calvin outlines fully his assertions regarding human conscience in its relation to the *imago dei*. The correlation between human consciousness, conscience and the natural ordinance is also clarified. In his chapter on human tradition, Calvin discusses the nature of human conscience, illustrating the way in which human conscience encounters both divine and secular authority. First, Calvin differentiates between human awareness and conscience. Human awareness of the knowledge of God means to know God. Conscience, grounded upon this awareness, senses the wrath of God and fears God's judgment. In this way, human beings confront the wrath of God and live under the guidance of the fear of God. Calvin speaks of good conscience, i.e. Christian conscience, which has been set free from the law. He contrasts this to bad conscience, which is still under the law and reflects the state of a fallen soul.⁶⁷²

Furthermore, Calvin discusses the way in which Christian conscience confronts natural ordinances. For Calvin, God is the author of both natural ordinances and the ecclesiastical order: God ordains the officers of the state as well as the ministers of the church. Yet human beings cannot achieve salvation through obedience to any outward forum which, in the end, corresponds to human merits and the law. For Calvin, Christian conscience is liberated in Christ from the law. In this sense, Calvin stresses the degree to which human conscience refers to God alone. This means that

⁶⁷¹ C. O. 1, 331-332.

conscience stands in relation to God and is stressed on its eschatological character. Calvin's contrast between good conscience and bad conscience⁶⁷³ coincides not only with his antithesis between communion with God and alienation from God, but also to that between eternal life and eternal damnation (3.3).⁶⁷⁴

5.5.1.2. Conclusion

From the 1536 *Institutes* through to 1550, Calvin consistently portrayed human conscience as natural law and as representing the remnant of the knowledge of God. In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin explained why the remnant of the knowledge of God is to be identified with this imprinted law, which as conscience accuses fallen human beings of their neglect of God. Yet the correlation between the knowledge of God, conscience and natural law in the workings of the conscience still remain unclear. Furthermore, Calvin asserts that the engraved law—conscience—can still achieve the common good, even after the fall. Yet at the same time, the accusations of this internal law remain valid into eternal perdition. In this way, we can see that conscience works and has an effect in both temporal and eschatological dimensions.

If we wish to understand Calvin's work on conscience and its relation to the *imago dei*, then we must deal with Calvin's expanded understanding of conscience in the 1550 *Institutes*. Calvin argues that the chief characteristic of human conscience is a sense of fear of God, of standing before God's judgment. This characteristic cannot be substituted by an appeal to civil law over church law. In other words, human

⁶⁷² C. O. 1, 841.

beings must first and foremost face God, it is he who wants to communicate with human beings through Christ and who offers salvation in him.⁶⁷⁵

In contrasting the life of faith to life under conscience, Calvin displays the degree to which conscience signifies human alienation from God. Although conscience represents the remnant of the *imago dei*, it displays the extent to which human communion with God has been destroyed. This communion will only be recovered with the renewal of the *imago dei*. The emphasis on the contrasting natures of the *imago dei* coincides with Calvin's focus in the 1559 *imago*-text, where communion with God, as the mark of a God-oriented life, is the main characteristic of the *imago dei*. This displays Calvin's stress on the eschatological dimension of the *imago dei* in the *Institutes*. Consequently, we can now understand why Calvin does not pay so much attention to the *imago dei* in relation to natural ordinances, compared to the more fundamental relation to God, i.e. to the eschatological character of the *imago dei*.

5.5.2. The *imago dei* as the basis of the sixth commandment

5.5.2.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin supports his argument on the sixth commandment with two simple points: (1) do no violence to your neighbor, (2) rather love your neighbor.

⁶⁷³ In his work on conscience in the 1550 *Institutes*, Calvin directly contrasts the state produced by faith, i.e. as having peace in God, to the state produced by conscience, i.e. as existing in fear of God. C. O. 1, 841.

⁶⁷⁴ C. O. 1, 841-843.

⁶⁷⁵ Jane Douglass offers an astute observation which impacts upon the renewal of the *imago dei*: "One sees in this scheme that the order of nature is not to be set off alone but rather interrelated with the order of the church in which the kingdom is foreshadowed. In both orders the liveliness of the Spirit is at work. But in the church apparently God is no longer always subject to divine laws as God normally chooses to be in the order of nature, but is making the new order." When the *imago dei* is restored

Calvin's argument has evolved dramatically since 1537. In his exposition of the sixth commandment in his 1537 *Instruction in Faith*, Calvin appeals to the *imago dei* as the reason why killing should be forbidden. He omits here any mention of loving one's neighbors. In this way, his understanding of the sixth of commandment can be understood in a passive sense, namely in doing no harm to neighbors.

In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin puts forward the *imago dei* and our shared humanity as the two reasons in support of his argument. Calvin admits that the remnant of the *imago dei* within the fallen soul still retains an eschatological orientation in terms of the redemption and grace of Christ. Because of this remnant within them, fellow human beings deserve protection from violence. Christians prevent injuring human life out of reverence to God. Furthermore, Calvin understands the capacity to preserve the common good as being an innate human quality. In his section on self-denial, Calvin points out that the *imago dei* is the basis of the command to love one's neighbors. God the lawgiver and maker of the *imago dei* commands us to do good by loving our neighbors. We are to love our neighbors regardless of whether they are Christian or not, friend or enemy, because they are created with the *imago dei*. It is due to the *imago dei* that God's goodness is found in humankind—God bestows his blessings upon us through this special gift. To love our neighbors is to show our reverence to God. He set the *imago dei* within us as a reminder of God's favor toward all human creatures (2.6.1).⁶⁷⁶

within believers, then the natural law—which is included within the divine law in human beings—is transformed into the correct worship of God and the proper relation to one's fellow human beings.

⁶⁷⁶ C. O. 1, 409.

Furthermore, in his contrast between “heavenly things” and “earthly things”, Calvin positively asserts the existence of natural law in fallen human beings; it assists them to preserve the common good. However, Calvin sets side-by-side (1) the remnant of the *imago dei* with its eschatological orientation, the ability to discern good from evil, and (2) the remnant of the *imago dei* in government officers. While the remnant of the *imago dei* has both an eschatological and temporal dimension, Calvin stresses its eschatological dimension.⁶⁷⁷

In the 1554 commentaries on Gen 9: 6, Calvin explains the correlation between the *imago dei* and the prohibition against murder. Calvin admits that this divine precept is carried out by political law which aims at preserving the communal life in general. For Calvin, the death penalty performed under human laws does not signify murder but rather points to the political order which serves the preservation of the common good. In addition to using secular authority, Calvin believes that God may also execute his penalties through natural accidents or war; God is after all sovereign Lord and sustains and governs all occurrences in both natural and cultural worlds.⁶⁷⁸

Calvin directs us to the *imago dei* as the foundation of the precept. Calvin tells us that the *imago dei* signifies God’s characteristics, and for this reason God attributes to it the weight of his own identity. “[God] looks upon his own gifts in them, and is thereby excited to love and to care for them.”⁶⁷⁹ Yet even fallen human beings deserve respect and protection from harm because a remnant of the *imago dei* still remains within them. Calvin intensifies this assertion: God created these now-fallen

⁶⁷⁷ C. O. 1, 312.

⁶⁷⁸ *Comm Gen 9: 6*.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

human beings with the *imago dei* so that they may anticipate eternal life, and continues to see them as he had first created them.

Calvin distinguishes here the *imago dei* as divine gift from the political order. It is the divine characteristics which remain in human beings which is the reason why God cannot forsake them.⁶⁸⁰

Calvin's exposition of the sixth commandment in 1539 remains unchanged in the 1559 *Institutes*. Yet the remnant of the *imago dei* in both its eschatological and temporal orientations is found in the 1559 *imago*-text. In this description of the *imago dei*, Calvin admits that the image is seriously damaged after the fall. However, despite its deformity its extraordinary uniqueness still shines through, and this points to human reason which can apprehend the word of God and manage our communal life.

5.5.2.2. Conclusion

Within the context of prohibiting murder and general atrocities against human beings, Calvin's understanding of the remnant of the *imago dei* in its eschatological orientation evolved dramatically from 1536 through to 1554. The decisive move occurred in the 1539 *Institutes*, where he differentiated the value of the *imago dei* from the value of our common humanity. To recognize the fraternity of human life is to preserve humanity and defend those relations between fellow human beings. This points to natural ordinances, i.e. the temporal dimension of the *imago dei*. Yet to refer to the *imago dei* is to point out our relation to the creator. This is the divine

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

orientation of human beings, i.e. the eschatological dimension of the imago dei. Calvin's understanding of the remnant of the imago dei in its eschatological orientation matured in his 1554 commentaries on Gen 9: 6. The divine gift of the imago dei displays the orientation of human existence toward God and lends human beings a dignity above all other creatures since they represent the characteristics of God. This divine gift is precisely that—a gift; on their own merits it would be impossible for human beings to express within themselves the characteristics of God. Furthermore, even the remnant of the imago dei possesses a degree of dignity because God, the creator and sovereign Lord, cannot forsake his mark in human beings even after the fall. Therefore he keeps his eyes on his best creatures and views them with favor, for which they were created.

5.5.3. The remnant of the imago dei in the order of creation

5.5.3.1. The development of this idea in the *Institutes*

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin refers to that imago dei which is placed upon social structures. He does this within the context of encouraging believers to obey government officers, who he sees as ordained by God. However, it should be noted that these officers and leaders display a deformed version of the imago dei (1.8).⁶⁸¹ In the 1539 *Institutes*, Calvin rejects human dominion as the sign of the imago dei. Rather his constant contrast between 'heavenly things' and 'earthly things' gives the impression that the eschatological dimension of the imago dei is to be separated from the temporal dimension. The contrary descriptions of the state of life with the imago

⁶⁸¹ O. S. I, 233.

dei as ‘heavenly blessing’, and the state of its loss as ‘earthly filth’ heightens this tension between the imago dei and its remnant (2.5).⁶⁸² In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin softens his tone on human dominion in relation to the imago dei. He shifts his focus, arguing that the imago dei does not consist in human dominion *alone*. In other words, the imago dei is to be found in diverse dimensions, only one of which embraces human dominion. Furthermore, he understands Gen 1: 26 and 1 Cor 11: 7 as displaying a tension between the eschatological orientation of the imago dei and its temporal orientation⁶⁸³. However, he does not go further in explaining the workings of this temporal dimension because it is indeed the eschatological dimension which is central to his understanding of the imago dei in the 1559 *Institutes*.

5.5.3.2. Conclusion

We have seen that Calvin’s understanding of the imago dei in the order of creation evolves within the *Institutes* over time. Yet the development has displayed a certain amount of inner-tension. Calvin argued in all editions of the *Institutes* that the imago dei is represented in government officers, who hold this position through God’s appointment. Yet in the 1539 text, for example, he refused to accept human dominion as a sign of the imago dei in order to highlight its eschatological orientation. This tension between the eschatological orientation of the imago dei and its temporal orientation is rife throughout the 1539 *Institutes*. Up to the 1546 commentaries on 1 Cor 11: 7, Calvin had differentiated very precisely between the eschatological orientation of the imago dei and its temporal orientation which he saw as the order of creation. “The *image*, however, of which Paul is now speaking, relates to the order of

⁶⁸² C. O. 1, 308.

marriage, and hence it belongs to the present life, and is not connected with conscience. The simple solution is this—that he does not treat here of innocence and holiness, which are equally becoming in men and women, but of the distinction, which God has conferred upon the man, so as to have superiority over the woman. In this superior order of dignity the glory of God is seen, as it shines forth in every kind of superiority.”⁶⁸⁴ As we saw above, Calvin’s understanding of human conscience and its confrontation with God’s judgment points to the eschatological orientation of the remnant *imago dei*.

In the context of 1 Cor 11: 7, the male possesses an advantage over the female in terms of the *imago dei*, which signifies God’s appointment in the socio-political order of this life. It is not that this order has no continuity with eternal life. Calvin subsequently softens his understanding of human dominion in the 1554 commentaries on Gen 1: 28, admitting that human dominion does somehow represent the *imago dei*, i.e. in governing the world as God’s ministers. In order to resolve the tension between Gen 1: 26 and 1 Cor 11: 7, Calvin distinguishes the eschatological dimension of the *imago dei* from its temporal dimension in governance. “But here the question is respecting that glory of God which peculiarly shines forth in human nature, where the mind, the will, and all the senses, represent the Divine order.”⁶⁸⁵ Therefore, the *imago dei* in the order of redemption is placed in parallel to that in the order of creation. At the same time, the expression of both dimensions of the *imago dei* cannot be separated within human existence. As the ‘integrity of human nature’, the *imago dei* is expressed mainly in the order of redemption and only partly in the management of

⁶⁸³ I, 15, 4.

⁶⁸⁴ *Comm 1 Cor 11: 7 in 1546.*

⁶⁸⁵ *Comm Gen 1: 26 in 1554.*

communal life. Calvin asserts the inseparable relation between the eschatological and temporal orientations in the 1559 imago-text by highlighting its eschatological workings and admitting its temporal orientation within the political order.

5.6. Summary

Calvin's teaching on the imago dei is grounded upon his understanding of the consistency of biblical teaching, a consistency which unites Old Testament texts such as Gen 1: 26-27 and Gen 9: 6, with New Testament passages such as Col 3: 9-10, Eph 4: 23, 2 Cor 3: 18 and 1 Cor 15: 45. For Calvin, the narratives in the New Testament present the renewal of the imago dei, in correspondence to the narrative regarding the origin of the imago dei in Gen 1: 26-27. Calvin's concentration on the eschatological orientation of the imago dei can be seen in his use of these biblical citations through all the various and revised descriptions of the imago dei. Yet despite this consistency, there have been constant shifts of stress. In the 1536 imago-text, he highlighted the eschatological character in terms of a way toward eternal life, as a relation to God and as the characteristics of God. In the 1539 description, he shifted the stress toward the relation to God. And in the 1559 text, he changed his focus on the integrity of human nature. While it is true that Calvin has consistently concentrated on the eschatological dimension of the imago dei, he has not ignored its counterpart. The temporal orientation of the imago dei in the order of creation was also developed along with a deepening of his understanding of human corruption and with his work on the biblical commentaries. For Calvin, both dimensions are by nature inseparable because human beings were indeed created as a whole and endowed with the imago dei in this first state of creation.

Generally, it can be said that Calvin interprets the *imago dei* in a twofold way. On the one hand, the *imago dei* functions through human nature—which resides in the body—and shines forth through the person’s outward activities. In other words, the *imago dei* is expressed in human existence as ‘wholeness’. Believers turn their lives *completely* to God and glorify him. On the other hand, the functioning of the *imago dei* only occurs conditionally: it must be sustained by divine grace. This grace was given from God’s eternal election and is established in communion with God in this world. In this way, the history of the *imago dei* coincides with the history of God’s revelation to human beings, as it is recorded in Scripture. With the bestowal of the *imago dei*, immortal, divine characteristics are presented to and imprinted upon a mortal body; the absolute distance between divinity and humanity only serves to reinforce the extent of this miracle. And because of the creator’s favor, the advantage given to humankind continues to be seen through the remnant of the *imago dei* even after the fall.

PART III

Systematic Evaluation of Calvin's Understanding of the Reality of the Imago Dei

CHAPTER SIX

The Reality of the Imago Dei in the *Institutes*

6.1. The horizontal dimension of the imago dei

Calvin often describes the imago dei as the excellence of creaturehood or the integrity of human nature. One notes that Calvin's use of the phrase "the excellence of creaturehood" is used to compare humanity to the other creatures, in particular animals (5.3.2). This idea is found in the *Institutes* from 1539 through to 1559. He reinforces the comparison in the last edition of 1559. "It is sure that even in the several parts of the world some tracts of God's glory shine. From this we may gather that when his image is placed in man a tacit antithesis is introduced which raised man above all other creatures and, as it were, separates him from the common mass."⁶⁸⁶

Calvin assumes that his contemporaries have a general picture in mind of what animal life is, which supports his comparison between human nature and animals. Yet this is far from clear in the twenty-first century. Therefore, we must be clear on how Calvin understands the structure of animal life. The beginnings of an answer to this can be found in the commentaries on Gen 1 where we find the significance of the imago dei as the excellence of creaturehood, derived through its comparison to all other created living and non-living things. In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin asserts that God alone is

⁶⁸⁶ I, 15, 3.

creator; all others are mere creatures, including the angels. Even the devil is simply a corrupted angel, we read in chapter fourteen. In chapter fifteen, Calvin discusses human creation and explicitly compares human beings to animals and angels. Yet “we ought not to deny that angels were created according to God’s likeness, inasmuch as our highest perfection, as Christ testifies, will be to become like them (Matt 22: 30).”⁶⁸⁷ Calvin compares human nature with the nature of angels in order to assist our understanding of the integrity of human nature and to refute the Manichean understanding of human nature (4.3.4.1). Unpacking Calvin’s understanding of the creation of animals and of angels will offer us good insights into Calvin’s understanding of the *imago dei* as the excellence of creaturehood.

This comparison reflects the horizontal dimension of the *imago dei*, because it is a comparison among God’s creatures. The corresponding vertical dimension points to that relationship between God’s grace and the expression of the *imago dei* in human existence.

6.1.1. The comparison to angels

6.1.1.1. The Imago text

Calvin contrasts all other creatures to human beings and argues that human beings will become similar to angels, inasmuch as angels are created in the likeness of God.⁶⁸⁸ In support he cites Matt 22: 30. The human creature reaches the pinnacle of its existence in the resurrection where, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ, they

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

become similar to the angels. Yet it remains unclear here to what degree Calvin thinks of the human creature with the *imago dei* as being similar to the angels.

In his work against the Manichean understanding of the human soul, in which the soul is seen to possess a measure of divinity, Calvin asserts that the *imago dei* in human beings is created—it is not divine. “Indeed, if the spirit has been given by God, and in departing from the flesh returns to him, we must not forthwith say that it was plucked from his substance.”⁶⁸⁹ For Calvin, the situation is much the same with angels. In this sense, human beings and angels resemble the image of God only by way of their characteristics—the resemblance is not based on some shared essence. Because it is not an essential relation, the resemblance is open to change. Calvin goes on to stress: “For if Adam’s uprightness had not failed, he along with the angels would have been like God.”⁶⁹⁰ For more detail on this relation between human beings with the *imago dei* and angels, we need to turn to Calvin’s analysis in his commentaries on Matt 22: 30.

6.1.1.2. The 1554 commentaries on Matt 22: 30

“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” Calvin examines this statement from Matt 22: 30 in relation to its synoptic parallels—Mark 12: 18-27 and Luke 20: 27-40. In this context, Calvin argues that the elect will be similar to angels in that they will be in full communion with God in the resurrection. “He does not mean that the children of God will be, in

⁶⁸⁸ I, 15, 3.

⁶⁸⁹ I, 15, 5.

⁶⁹⁰ II, 12, 7.

all respects, *like the angels*, but only so far as they shall be free from every infirmity of the present life; thus affirming that they will no longer be exposed to the wants of a frail and perishing life.”⁶⁹¹ The elect in the resurrection cannot actually become angels because angels, unlike human beings, are created without any corporeal substance. This illustration of the similarity to angels means that the elect will be liberated from this capricious life full of death, sickness and infirmity, inasmuch as the human soul will be liberated from the influence of sin and the human body transformed into a spiritual one.⁶⁹²

6.1.1.3. Knowledge of the creator

In Book I, chapter fourteen of the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin argues that angels are God’s creatures. Their nature as angels is by no means divine but is a created nature. Calvin recognizes in this way both visible and invisible creatures in creation. Angels are represented in this latter group and are assigned to be God’s messengers. “Since the angels are God’s ministers, ordained to carry out his commands, there should be no question that they are also his creatures (Ps. 103: 20-21).”⁶⁹³ Calvin also acknowledges that angels reflect the greater glory of God because they are created in a certain sense to be God’s plenipotentiaries, to represent God’s throne and his power. He writes: “there is far greater reason why it should be conferred upon the angels, in whom the brightness of the divine glory shines forth much more richly.”⁶⁹⁴ Calvin consistently stresses the necessity for both angels and human beings to obey the word

⁶⁹¹ *Comm Matt 22: 30.*

⁶⁹² *Commentaries on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matt 22: 23-33, Mark 12: 18-27, Luke 20: 27-40.*

⁶⁹³ I, 14, 4. Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 172.

⁶⁹⁴ I, 14, 5.

of God. Furthermore, the description of angels in Scripture aims at teaching us how God, through these angels, assists us to be confident of his goodness toward us.⁶⁹⁵

With this understanding of angels in place, Calvin moves on to argue against the Manichean idea which asserts the equal might of the devil over against God.⁶⁹⁶ Calvin positions the devil side by side with the angels and asserts that the devil is nothing but a deformed angel: “they were when first created angels of God, but by degeneration they ruined themselves, and became the instruments of ruin for others.”⁶⁹⁷ In this way, it is impossible for Calvin to accept that the devil might hold a similar position to God. God alone is creator, the one who formed all from nothing, who reigns over all and deserves the glory of all. Angels, deformed or otherwise, are creatures of God; they are ministers of God and their purpose is to serve their creator.⁶⁹⁸ The devil is the product of angelic corruption, resisting God’s will and acting against God’s desires. The corruption of the devil is a reminder of human corruption, providing the dark contrast to the otherwise positive parallel between humans and angels.⁶⁹⁹ Yet the inference here is clear: God’s spiritual creatures can choose to be corrupt.

On the other hand, Calvin argues against those superstitious views which attribute the glory of God or the glory of Christ to the angels. The angelic nature may be highlighted as spiritual, but God makes angels his instruments in order to benefit his children. Despite their spiritual nature, angels are still works of God. Human

⁶⁹⁵ I, 14, 6.

⁶⁹⁶ I, 14, 3. Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 62.

⁶⁹⁷ I, 14, 16. See also *Comm Gen 3: 1*. “Wherefore, without controversy, we must conclude, that the principle of evil with which Satan was endued was not from nature, but from defection; because he had departed from God, the fountain of justice and of all rectitude.”

⁶⁹⁸ I, 14, 4-5. I, 15, 5.

superstition is in error when it substitutes angels for the divine and reflects, once again, false knowledge of God.⁷⁰⁰

Based on Matt 22: 30, Calvin can now assert the real existence of angels. This comparison between the elect in the resurrection and the angels affirms their spiritual existence; in short, they are created beings with personality and knowledge yet without temporal limitation. This presents us with Calvin's differentiation of creaturehood between spiritual and corporeal existence. One notes that Calvin also cites Heb 12: 22, in which the souls of the elect are in the company of angels in the kingdom of God while they wait for their resurrection. In this way, we see the comparison between angels and the souls of the elect: both have the *imago dei* and the knowledge of God and can respond to God.⁷⁰¹

6.1.1.4. Knowledge of the redeemer

Osiander believed that the human body was made in accordance with the body of Christ. In this way, the body has a substantial claim to the *imago dei*. The human body is valued indeed so highly by Osiander that he could rank the angels below human beings since angels do not bear a body like Christ's.⁷⁰² Calvin argues against this view by making Christ the head of both human beings and angels.⁷⁰³ Citing Col 1: 14-18, Calvin sees Christ in this context, first of all as Son of God, who is God's eternal Word, and as the first-born of creation. This points to Christ's divine essence. In this sense, the Word of God existed before creation and the creation itself

⁶⁹⁹ Wendel, *Calvin*, 173.

⁷⁰⁰ I, 14, 10-12.

⁷⁰¹ I, 14, 9. *Comm Heb 12: 22-23*.

⁷⁰² II, 12, 6.

originates from him. It is the divine Son of God who became flesh, the second Adam, and he did so in order that he might become “the first-born from the dead.”⁷⁰⁴ In other words, the divine Son became our redeemer in his becoming a human being. For Calvin, Christ possesses here a double identity as the Son of God and second Adam. A relation between Christ and the angels is established because all things are created through the Son of God, who also reigns over the creation. Angels are subordinated to the Son of God, who is called the head of all angels.⁷⁰⁵

To summarize, Calvin compares humanity to the angels within all three realms of creation, redemption and resurrection. The point around which the comparison turns is the *imago dei*, which enables both angels and human beings to respond to God’s word. In other words, in each state of existence human spiritual reality has its parallel in the angels. Calvin’s understanding of the existence of angels helps us to understand his comparison between angels and the elect. However, the comparison between angels and the state of the elect in the resurrection suggests that the function of the *imago dei* is only complete after death, when the elect are in God’s kingdom. However, the elect still remain human even in the resurrection; the substance of the human body remains the same. Yet while the substance remains the same, its characteristics are transformed: it becomes immortal and spiritual. The comparison between angels and the elect displays the God-oriented disposition of human existence.

⁷⁰³ II, 12, 6.

⁷⁰⁴ II, 12, 7.

⁷⁰⁵ II, 12, 7. *Comm Col 1:16*.

6.1.2. The comparison to animals

Calvin highlights both the excellence of human nature and the privileges bestowed upon the human body. Both these aspects place human beings in a superior position over the remaining created animals. Calvin sets up his comparison based on the elements out of which God made each creature. The notion that God created the different animals out of different substances is found in Calvin's commentaries on Genesis.⁷⁰⁶ Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* as the excellence of creaturehood in the *Institutes* corresponds to his expositions in the commentaries on Genesis.

6.1.2.1. The 1554 commentaries on Gen 1: 10-27

In the commentaries on Gen 1: 10-27, Calvin examines the way in which God created the world and human beings. In the commentaries on Gen 1: 1, Calvin stresses that God the creator created the world from nothing. He defends this *ex nihilo* stance against the idea of creation out of chaotic, primordial matter since this would imply that such matter is eternal. For Calvin, the only thing from which God created the world was God's own word. "God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing."⁷⁰⁷ "Let this, then be maintained in the first place, that the world is not eternal but was created by God."⁷⁰⁸ In other words, even the most profound component of creation, namely God's own image in human beings, is still a work of God the creator and he has authority over his creation.

⁷⁰⁶ Calvin's views on the material creation of the world and the creatures within it reflect the thought-world of the sixteenth century. It is not the intention here to judge Calvin's ideas on this topic, rather simply to examine Calvin's insights regarding the difference between human and animal souls.

⁷⁰⁷ I, 14, 22.

⁷⁰⁸ *Comm Gen 1: 1*. Wendel notes, "Indeed, in the act of creation no external means intervened: the Word of God was sufficient to call forth all things out of nothingness." Wendel, *Calvin*, 170.

Calvin goes on to explain that in Gen 1 God created the world and all its creatures out of various “materials”: out of nothing, water, earth and even God himself. First God creates through his word out of nothing; this creates the material world. From this material world God makes the remaining creatures. In his exegesis of Gen 1: 10–11; 20-21; 24-27 and Gen 2: 7, Calvin shows that sea animals and birds were created from water; the animals of the land and the human body were created from earth; and the *imago dei* was created out of God himself.⁷⁰⁹ As we have already seen in Calvin’s argument against the Manichees, this is not to suggest that human beings with the *imago dei* now possess a portion of divine substance. Rather the workings of the *imago dei* mean that God’s power affects human nature in order to make it compatible with God’s own characteristics.⁷¹⁰ Calvin compares human beings with animals because both creatures are fashioned from the earth.⁷¹¹ Moreover, animals are also living souls. Clearly we see here that the human body shares the same substance with animals and that there is even a degree of functional overlap between human and animal souls. Yet despite this overlap, the human soul is still better than an animal soul. Human beings are superior to animals because the human soul has been endowed with the image of God.⁷¹² In this way, i.e. through the *imago dei*, immortality has also been annexed to the human soul.

While Calvin does compare human beings and animals, one should note that he certainly does not bring all animals within his scope: Calvin does not compare human beings with fish, for example, since, according to Gen 1: 20, fish are formed out of

⁷⁰⁹ *Comm Gen 1: 10-26.*

⁷¹⁰ I, 15, 4 and 5. *Comm Gen 2: 7.*

⁷¹¹ *Comm Gen 1: 24- 25.*

⁷¹² *Comm Gen 2: 7.*

water thus placing them in a different class from clay-based humans. For Calvin, it is the divine will which appoints this order of creation.⁷¹³ Earth and water are the secondary materials involved in the creation of animals.⁷¹⁴ Each material possesses its own distinctive substance, which categorizes each creature according to its own kind.⁷¹⁵ Thus Calvin's differentiation of various creatures is made in accordance to the materials out of which they were made and which constitute their substances. In this sense, the substance of birds is differentiated from that of land-animals. The human case is special: here the substance of the body is formed from the earth and this coexists with a soul imprinted with the *imago dei* which comes from God. However, despite this coexistence, the two substances cannot be intermingled.

Calvin sees the human body as fashioned from the same substance as animal bodies. But the characteristics of the bodies vary. For example, Calvin argues that the human body possesses more of God's glory than do animal bodies.⁷¹⁶ However, it is the function of the human soul which mainly differentiates humankind from brute animals.

6.1.2.2. The excellence of the human creature

6.1.2.2.1. The living soul

In the commentaries on Gen 2: 7, Calvin interprets God's breath as that power which provides the vital signs of human life and movement. The expression, "living soul", is

⁷¹³ *Comm Psalm 115: 3.*

⁷¹⁴ *Comm Gen 1:11-13.*

⁷¹⁵ *Comm Gen 1: 1-27.*

⁷¹⁶ I, 15, 3.

mentioned four times in Gen 1-2—in Gen 1: 20 and 24 it is used to describe animal life and in Gen 2: 7 human life. Humankind thus shares a common ground with animals on the basis of this “living soul.” In his exposition of Gen 2: 7, Calvin explains God’s breath as that which quickens the body; an animal soul quickens an animal body and both humankind and animals are illustrated as living souls. Yet it is only upon the human soul that the *imago dei* is endowed.⁷¹⁷ It is because of the *imago dei* that the soul is immortal, and in this way the human soul is in substance immortal and thus differentiated from animal souls.⁷¹⁸

6.1.2.2.2. The immortality of the human soul⁷¹⁹

Calvin’s understanding of the immortality of the soul had been asserted since his 1534 *Psychopannychia*. In this polemical work,⁷²⁰ Calvin asserts that the soul has been given an immortal essence which cannot be destroyed by sin or death. The soul, be it of the elect or the fallen, is vividly expressed both in this life and in the

⁷¹⁷ *Comm Gen 2: 7 and 1 Cor 15: 45.*

⁷¹⁸ The differentiation that Calvin detects here between God’s breath and the soul with the *imago dei* displays his exegetical astuteness and his sensibility to context in comparing human beings to the rest of creation. Hans-Joachim Kraus, “Calvins exegetische Prinzipien,” in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 79. (1968), 329-341.

⁷¹⁹ Calvin’s use of “the immortality of the soul” has a twofold meaning: it points either to the everlasting active soul or to the soul which has its life in God. See the previous analysis of Calvin’s conception of the *imago dei* in the 1559 *Institutes*.

⁷²⁰ In the *Psychopannychia*, Calvin argues against certain Anabaptists who teach that the souls of believers sleep after death. In Calvin’s view, the souls of believers are conscious in God’s peace after death. The controversy, however, deals with the problem of continuity and discontinuity of the soul and body between life in this world and life after death. Apart from asserting the consciousness of the soul after death, Calvin separates the substance of the soul from the body, inasmuch as the soul is always awake through time because it possesses an immortal essence. In contrast, the body has a ‘fade state’ between this temporal life and the resurrection. Calvin describes this in-between situation for the body as being like a seed which waits for a new beginning. This argument is aimed against those who had claimed that the soul also had a physiological existence which vanishes after death, only to be restored again in the resurrection. Despite these polemics on the progress of the soul, one thing remains uncontended for Calvin: immortality is given to human beings alone, and this displays the dignity offered by God to humanity above the rest of creation. John Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, C. O. 5, 173-232. English translation Henry Beveridge, in *Tracts*, vol.3 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 413-521. This work was written in 1534 and published in 1541. Background to the diverse

resurrection.⁷²¹ This differentiation of the state of the soul can best be seen after death: for believers “the souls of the living, therefore, who rest in the word of the Lord, and desire not to anticipate the will of their God, but are ready to follow wherever he may invite, keep themselves under his hand, sleep,⁷²² and have peace”;⁷²³ as for unbelievers: “Although dead, they shall still feel eternal fire and the worm which dieth not. These things make it manifest that the immortality of the soul, which we assert, and which we say consists in a perception of good and evil, exists even though it is dead, and that that death is something else than the annihilation to which they would reduce it.”⁷²⁴ Both states of the soul actively remain after death either within the life of God or in perdition.

In the 1554 commentaries on Gen 2: 7, Calvin tells us that immortality is annexed to the soul because of the *imago dei*. This reflects Calvin’s consistent assertion—from the 1536 *Institutes* through to 1559—that **human beings are created with this divine gift in order that they may attain eternal life.**⁷²⁵ In the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin picks up the issue of immortality again in order to assert the substantial difference between the human body and the human soul. One notes that immortality is not only the main theme of Calvin’s understanding of the soul, but also assists his argument in refuting the claims of the Anabaptists and in differentiating the substance

understandings of the soul attributed to the Anabaptists is given by Schreiner: Schreiner, “Imago Dei: Thou Has Made Him A Little Lower Than the Angels,” in *The Theater of His Glory*, 60-62.

⁷²¹ *Psychopannychia*, C. O. 5, 184.

⁷²² In this context, Calvin tells us that the word “sleep” refers to the peace of conscience in believers, not to “sleep” as it was portrayed by the Anabaptists. *Psychopannychia*, C. O. 5, 189.

⁷²³ C. O. 5. 190. *Dormiunt igitur et pacem habent viventium animae, quae verbo Domini acquiescunt, nec praeire Dei sui voluntati cupiunt: sed quo ille vocaverit, sequi paratae, sub eius manu esse continent.*

⁷²⁴ C. O. 5, 203-204. *Si enim nullus est, ut certe fateri eos oportet: igitur illi, quantumlibet mortui, ignem tamen aeternum sentient, et vermem qui non moritur. Haec nobis clarum faciunt, suam animae immortalitarem, quam asserimus, quamque boni vel mali sensu constare dicimus, etiam tum esse, quam mortua est, mortemque illam aliud quidpiam esse quam (quod obtinere volunt) in nihilum redigi.*

⁷²⁵ O. S. I, 37; C. O. 1, 306; I, 15, 3-4.

of the body from the soul.⁷²⁶ Yet Calvin changes his meaning under ‘the immortality of the soul’ to mean now ‘the fullness of life in God in eternity’.⁷²⁷ God endowed mortal human souls with an excellent gift, namely the *imago dei*, for the purpose of attaining eternal life. The vital point here is that for Calvin immortality is a feature only of the *imago dei*, a characteristic which is then subsequently passed onto a previously mortal, human soul. It is only in this way, i.e. with the endowment of the *imago dei*, that the soul becomes immortal.

6.1.2.2.3. The excellence of the human creature is still seen in the fallen

As far as human spirituality and the worship of God is concerned, the fallen are not superior to animals. Calvin refers to Plutarch’s writings: “once religion is absent from their life, men are in no wise superior to brute beasts, but are in many respects far more miserable. . . . Therefore, it is worship of God alone that renders men higher than the brutes.”⁷²⁸ On the other hand, in his section on human corruption Calvin asserts that the place occupied by human understanding is above the animals. Once again we run up against this faint contradiction in Calvin’s rhetoric.⁷²⁹ For Calvin, human understanding in the fallen still produces scientific achievements and the arts, although he admits that they stand under the effect of the Holy Spirit.⁷³⁰ Furthermore,

⁷²⁶ III, 25, 6.

⁷²⁷ III, 9, 4. *Hanc vero, prae futurae immortalitate, et ob peccati servitutum ei renuntiare, quoties Domino placuerit, optemus.* See also I, 3, 3.

⁷²⁸ I, 3, 3. A similar illustration has been used since the *Instruction in Faith* (1537).

⁷²⁹ It is striking to note the degree to which Calvin can endure the tension in these illustrations. A comparable inconsistency is found in Calvin’s 1539 illustration of the fallen state, which is described on the one hand as earthly filth (in the *imago* text) and on the other hand as the excellence of the state in managing the cultural world. The integration and resolution of this conflict is found in the 1559 *Institutes*. Calvin cites John 1: 4 in order to illustrate human attainment of eternal life through understanding the knowledge of God (in the *imago* text—I, 15, 4). At the same time, in discussing human corruption, he appeals to John 1: 5 in order to assert the excellence of fallen human nature above the animals (II, 2, 12).

⁷³⁰ II, 2, 14 -15.

the privilege of human creaturehood is also found after the fall in the ability to discern good from evil and just from unjust. Calvin claims that it is the remnant of this excellence of human nature which still places the fallen above animals.⁷³¹ In other words, the excellent gift which is given by God remains in relic form after the fall. The fallen are still human, being recognized through the remnant of the *imago dei*. “Still, we see in this diversity some remaining traces of the image of God, which distinguish the entire human race from the other creatures.”⁷³²

6.1.2.2.4. God’s appointment in creation

Calvin has argued since the 1539 *Institutes* that God ordains, sustains and governs the whole of creation.⁷³³ This insight is deepened in the 1559 *Institutes* in his discussion of the doctrine of God’s providence. Here Calvin asserts that God’s grace nourishes creation and that God’s will governs all occurrences.⁷³⁴ The emphasis falls on God’s governance over each detail of the workings of creation, and on God’s fatherly love in his care for humankind.⁷³⁵ Yet God’s sustenance is not standardized, rather it is given according to the character of each creature in creation. This points to what Calvin calls God’s appointment, in which each kind of creature is defined and set in place as a part of the overarching order of God’s creation. For Calvin, the difference between animal life and human life, and between the human body and the human soul, is constituted by God’s appointment.⁷³⁶

⁷³¹ II, 2, 12.

⁷³² II, 2, 17.

⁷³³ This teaching can be found from the 1539 *Institutes* on. C. O. 1, 511.

⁷³⁴ I, 16, 1.

⁷³⁵ I, 16-18.

⁷³⁶ See also *Psychopannychia*, C. O. 5, 209-210; 201-202. 218.

In his commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 47, Calvin writes: “Hence, although the first man had an immortal soul, and that too, not taken from earth, yet he, nevertheless, savoured of the earth, from which his body had sprung, and on which he had been appointed to live.”⁷³⁷ In Ps 115: 3 we read, “Our God is in the heaven; he does whatever he pleases.” In Calvin’s interpretation of this passage, “God in heaven” points to God’s unlimited strength which governs and guides both heaven and earth. This stands in opposition to “the idolatry of unbelievers”⁷³⁸ who limited God and saw his will as inactive. “That God can do whatsoever he pleaseth is a doctrine of great importance, provided it be truly and legitimately applied.”⁷³⁹ The strength of God is provided both to the Church—which God sustains and provides with advantages from his strength—and to the universe, where God manages all things according to his will and achieves the aim of his creation. For Calvin, all things are under God’s appointment and that means that nothing occurs accidentally. God has appointed all things in creation from his eternal, inner-Trinitarian counsel. “We ought not to be ashamed frankly to acknowledge that God, by his eternal counsel, manages all things in such a manner, that nothing can be done but by his will and appointment.”⁷⁴⁰ With this statement, Calvin believes that God designs the individual characteristics of each creature, and appoints to human beings a mortal body and an immortal soul.

In his commentaries on 1 Cor 12: 18-24, Calvin compares the human body, which functions like a society, to the body of Christ, which is God’s church. He appeals to God’s appointment for this analogy as well. Calvin sees each system of society, or any community, as having similar workings to the human body, i.e. as a biological

⁷³⁷ *Comm 1 Cor 15: 47.*

⁷³⁸ *Comm Ps 115: 3.*

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

operation. For Calvin, the instincts of the human body adapt it to its environment. All aspects of the body recognize their respective functions within the system,⁷⁴¹ and this is grounded on the appointment of God. It is God who designs all aspects of the body to cooperate with each other and sets up a reciprocal correspondence between the members. In discussing verses 18-20, Calvin provides an explanation of God's appointment, and this cannot be separated from the providence of God. According to God's will, all members of the body are given different gifts. This suggests that nothing occurs at random, but that everything is the assignment of God aimed at the common good of the body. This displays God's preservation, where the human body works for that purpose which God prepared for it and assigned to it.⁷⁴²

In conclusion, Calvin argues that God appoints each characteristic of his creatures and the diverse functions of his creation. He governs each occurrence in creation. The human creature was designed to consist of body and soul. The soul, endowed with the *imago dei* and immortal, animates the body. The life of human beings is superior to animals because of this endowment of the *imago dei*. This is proved in the resurrection, where the human body is raised and transformed into an immortal body. For Calvin, the spiritual body surpasses the corporeal body because it is everlasting, because it is the effect of the Holy Spirit. Correspondingly, the soul surpasses the body due to this immortality.⁷⁴³ It is God's design that immortal souls should dwell in mortal bodies in this world. The immortal soul expresses two kinds of human

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴¹ *Comm. 1 Cor 12: 24.*

⁷⁴² *Comm 1 Cor 12: 18-20.*

⁷⁴³ The diversity of creaturehood is God's will, but also God's mystery in creation. Calvin emphasizes in this regard the will of the creator, who has the freedom to design the creation in any way he wants. This thought is found in the commentaries on Psalm 115.

existence: life in God or life estranged from God. While this is expressed in the temporal world, it finds its continuation in eternity.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit, whose power raises the body in the resurrection, quickens the souls of believers in the temporal world. In this way, believers undergo a transformation into new life. This is a life in the Spirit, in contrast to life in the human soul. In the believers' struggle against very real temporal desires the body is seen in a negative way as "flesh". However, through his appointment—through his providence—God provides diverse energies for the workings of each aspect in creatures, each in accordance with their creaturehood. It was for this reason that God endowed the human creature with the *imago dei*. Yet the strength of the human soul does not yet reach the level required for perseverance; the workings of the soul cannot constantly and exclusively desire righteousness, even though the soul was assigned sufficient strength to pursue righteousness. The gift of perseverance is given only through the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴⁴ This understanding constitutes the fundamental element of Calvin's conception of the *imago dei* in regards to the relationship between God and human beings. This important feature will be discussed in the following.

6.2. The vertical dimension of the *imago dei*

Calvin's conception of the *imago dei* has multiple aspects. One of these aspects of the *imago dei* can be seen in the mutual participation that occurs between God and the elect. We can call this participation 'the vertical dimension' of the *imago dei*, in which objective knowledge of God in Scripture becomes a living image of God both

⁷⁴⁴ I, 15, 4; I, 15, 8. *Comm 1 Cor 15: 45*.

through subjective human awareness of that knowledge and through the leading of a God-oriented life under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Here we see Calvin's experiential and practical understanding of the *imago dei*. We must first examine the interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the self. It is necessary to discuss this model of knowledge independently from its relation to the *imago dei* because the variations of this knowledge of God in human awareness constitute the variations in the human condition, which correspond to the variations of the *imago dei* in terms of human spirituality (see section 5.1. above). We will then be able to move on to the mutual participation between God and human beings (5.2.), where God participates in human existence with his grace (5.4.) and human beings participate in God with their entire being (5.3.). Since Calvin highlights human responsibility and the pre-fall state of the human being (5.3.5), the mutual relation between God and human beings is, so to speak, the reciprocal relation between God's perfect autonomy and imperfect human autonomy. In this way, God's grace in Christ is necessary for the expression of the *imago dei* in believers in this life.

6.2.1. Knowledge of God and the self and the *imago dei*

Under 'knowledge of God' Calvin means that situation where the human creature apprehends the relationship between itself as creature and its creator. In this vertical relationship, the human creature recognizes not only its origin in God but also its consequent obligation to serve its creator.⁷⁴⁵ To serve the creator means to become truly human, to fulfill what is bestowed upon us;⁷⁴⁶ in this way it has a direct link on our ontological constitution. The knowledge of God established the direction of

⁷⁴⁵ I, 1, 1; I, 2, 1-2.

human life already before the fall. Calvin argues that after the corruption of human beings, the human mind became blind: the fallen no longer recognize God as the creator.⁷⁴⁷ For this reason God gave us Scripture which mainly reveals the knowledge of God in its objective dimension. This objective dimension is then confirmed through the Holy Spirit, which affects the minds of believers enabling them to affirm the word of God.⁷⁴⁸ In this way Calvin establishes the interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the self, in which believers experience the contrast between their own self-lowliness and God's glorious and majestic nature. Only with this knowledge can believers worship God correctly and serve God sincerely.⁷⁴⁹

6.2.1.1. The pre-fall state and the knowledge of God and the self

Calvin highlights the necessary differentiation between the pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian states. This differentiation points out human responsibility for the fall,⁷⁵⁰ and constitutes a twofold knowledge of the self.⁷⁵¹ For support, Calvin appeals to John 1: 4. Human understanding in this context is called 'the light'. Through this light, human beings can know God. "The knowledge of God has been naturally implanted in the minds of men."⁷⁵² The human soul before the fall possessed knowledge of God by contemplating the self; this worked because God had endowed human beings with great gifts and God's power sustained their nature. Calvin cites

⁷⁴⁶ I, 3, 3.

⁷⁴⁷ I, 4, 1-2.

⁷⁴⁸ I, 6.

⁷⁴⁹ I, 1-2.

⁷⁵⁰ I, 15, 8.

⁷⁵¹ This idea can be found in Calvin's work from the 1539 *Institutes* on. His stress on the pre-lapsarian state can also be seen in his discussion of the knowledge of man and regeneration from the 1539 edition on as well as in the *imago* text of 1559.

⁷⁵² I, 3: "*Dei notitiam hominum mentibus naturaliter esse inditam*"—this is the title of the chapter. Cf. Thomas H. L. Parker, "The Failure of Nature," in *The Doctrine of the knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Calvin* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1952), 27.

Acts 17: 27 and asserts that human beings search for God in themselves. “He separates man from the rank of other creatures; because we perceive more readily the power of God by feeling it in us than by beholding it at a distance. Thus Paul charges us not *to seek God* at a distance, because he makes himself to be felt within us, (Acts 17:27).”⁷⁵³ The happiness of life consists in the knowledge of God. This also suggests that human beings are created in order to know God and to anticipate eternal life.⁷⁵⁴ This activity is called ‘ascending to God’.⁷⁵⁵ Moreover, we recognize God’s kindness toward us and are grateful for the gifts he has given; this prompts us to worship God.⁷⁵⁶ In other words, the knowledge of God is to recognize correctly the relationship between God and human beings and to be thankful for the blessings from God the creator. This corresponds to Calvin’s understanding of religious piety.⁷⁵⁷

Having recognized the contrast between the pre-fall state of perfection and the fallen condition of self-corruption, human beings learn humility and self-denial and on this basis they can pursue true knowledge of God. The dual knowledge of the self, as once perfect and as corrupted, lends new depths to Calvin’s interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the self. The state of the pre-lapse corresponds to the post-resurrection state in eternity, where the elect appropriately respond to God and worship him.

⁷⁵³ *Comm John 1: 4.*

⁷⁵⁴ One notes that Calvin does not identify the *imago dei* with eternal life because eternal life embraces the transformed spiritual body and restored human nature in its entirety with the *imago dei*. In other words, eternal life points to the human being as a whole after the resurrection. Yet it is the soul which expresses the *imago dei*, with which eternal life is attained. I, 2,1; II, 1, 1-3.

⁷⁵⁵ Schreiner, *The Theater of his Glory*, 65.

⁷⁵⁶ Gerrish sees gratitude, which correlates to God’s goodness, as the central expression of the *imago dei*. In contrast, its deformity signifies human complacency. The contrast corresponds to the interrelated knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of God as creator and redeemer and the knowledge of the self before and after the fall. Gerrish is right to point out that gratitude is grounded on the knowledge that God bestows upon human beings a great gift. Gerrish, “The Mirror of God’s Goodness: A Key Metaphor in Calvin’s View of Man,” in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage*, 150-151; 154.

6.2.1.2. The various expressions of the knowledge of God and the self correspond to the variations of the imago dei

After the fall, fallen human beings possess only natural knowledge of the creator. With such knowledge they can recognize the glory of God in creation in varying degrees and this recognition removes any excuse they may put forward for their ignorance of God.⁷⁵⁷ This displays the eschatological orientation of the remnant imago dei which is within them, i.e. to a certain degree they can still perceive the concept of God. However, while the fallen perceive this remnant knowledge of God, it confuses and confounds them and quickly aims them off in the wrong direction. Thus Calvin tends to characterize natural knowledge of God as established on speculation and false knowledge, and leading into idolatry, superstition, hypocrisy and image worship.⁷⁵⁸ For Calvin, conscience allows the fallen to perceive God's judgment. Here the knowledge of God is limited to God's role as judge, an understanding which lasts into eternal perdition. Hence the remnant of the imago dei appears not only to possess a temporal character, but also an eschatological character.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁷ I, 2, 1.

⁷⁵⁸ In Calvin's view, the fallen are inexcusable for their ignorance of God. This corresponds to his stress on the prefallen state: the human being was endowed with the imago dei and could respond well to God. For more detail on the concept of the natural knowledge of God, David Steinmetz surveys Calvin's view in comparison with his contemporaries, and recognizes the role human responsibility plays in Calvin's work on human ignorance of God. "Calvin [argues] that human blindness is culpable; but it is an argument which, in the form Calvin presents it, is not embraced by Denis, Melancthon, [and many others]... ." David Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God," in *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31.

⁷⁵⁹ I, 1, 4.

⁷⁶⁰ The temporal orientation of the remnant of the imago dei is found in the natural ordinance, which Calvin calls the political order. However, this functions in order to preserve communal life. Yet the existence of conscience signifies that the remnant of the imago dei possesses a temporal orientation, i.e. in regards the natural law, as well as an eschatological orientation, i.e. in confronting God's judgment. This simultaneous possession in conscience of both a temporal and eschatological character

Yet for Calvin, it is the knowledge of the redeemer—which corresponds to God’s will—which constitutes the decisive element of faith.⁷⁶¹ With faith, the Holy Spirit affects believers, assuring them of God’s goodness in Christ.⁷⁶² Furthermore, believers in faith recognize the knowledge of their creator.⁷⁶³ Calvin’s teaching on faith as knowledge stresses first its psychological direction, which produces the certitude of the heart, and which then points to the reality of that knowledge.⁷⁶⁴ In the act of regeneration, Calvin’s interrelated model of the knowledge of God and the self reflects the restoration of the *imago dei*; the human mind is quickened by the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of God is reformed in us. Furthermore, Calvin admits that even believers still confront the knowledge of God as judge, and that this compels believers, in the face of divine punishment, to return to God and to pursue a God-oriented life.⁷⁶⁵

For Calvin, the knowledge of God is fully expressed in human existence only when human beings rid themselves of the troubles of the flesh in this world. This is not to say that after death believers can then apprehend God in the same way as God knows himself. Calvin insists that human beings will only know God in this state in correspondence with that knowledge they possessed before the fall. The knowledge of God is consistent as his revelation through his works and words. However, the crux

points to the excellence of this divine gift, which is not merely divine: it cannot be separated from human beings. In other words, God endows the human soul with the *imago dei* which is a substantial property of human beings. And the remnant of the *imago dei* is not limited to its temporal expression but provides a parallel to its renewal and its eschatological orientation. The function of the remnant of the *imago dei* in temporal life has been investigated by Schreiner. Schreiner, “Their Conscience Also Bears Witness: Natural Law And Societal Life,” in *The Theater of His glory*, 87-90; 95.

⁷⁶¹ III, 2, 2.

⁷⁶² III, 2, 7.

⁷⁶³ Cf. Pitkin, “Calvin’s twofold Notion of Faith,” in *What Pure Eyes Could See*, 142-145.

⁷⁶⁴ Wendel provides a good description here: “Nor is this a matter of rationally understanding God’s attitude towards us, but of having a full and entire certitude about him.” Wendel, *Calvin*, 241.

of the issue is that the minds of believers will still be active and able to discern the things of God even after death, and they will be able to worship God and obey God.⁷⁶⁶ This notion is just as important as asserting human responsibility for the deformity of the *imago dei* and for ignorance regarding the knowledge of God.⁷⁶⁷

6.2.1.3. Knowledge of God as judge and its impact on the knowledge of the self

In the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin emphasizes the knowledge of God in a threefold way: the knowledge of the creator, knowledge of the redeemer, and knowledge of God as judge.⁷⁶⁸ In this system, God as judge carries out his penalty on the unrighteous. One notes that Calvin softens this description from the 1539 edition on; in his chapter on the law, he shifts his focus to the positive use of the law in Christian faith. Despite the shift, he still affirms that God cannot tolerate wickedness due to his very nature. In Calvin's new orientation, the law embraces both God's promise as well as his threats.⁷⁶⁹ For Calvin, God's law functions by deepening the knowledge of the self in believers. Believers experience despair before the law and are threatened with the punishment of eternal death. This is the work of conscience. "Both these emotions engender humility and self-abasement."⁷⁷⁰ Believers learn to be humble and to search out God's mercy in order to avoid such punishment. "Thus it finally comes to pass that man, thoroughly frightened by the awareness of eternal death, which he sees as

⁷⁶⁵ III, 3, 5-9. *Comm Col 3: 10. Comm Eph 4: 20-24.*

⁷⁶⁶ This concept is the main theme of Calvin's *Psychopannychia* in 1534 as well as his exposition "Wherein Is Shown the Significance of Regeneration" in the *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines. Psychopannychia*, C. O. 5, 171-172; *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, 262-266.

⁷⁶⁷ I, 15, 4. *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, 264-265.

⁷⁶⁸ O. S. I, 37.

⁷⁶⁹ C. O. 1, 373-374.

⁷⁷⁰ C. O. 1, 373.

justly threatening him because of his own unrighteousness, betakes himself to God's mercy alone, as the only haven of safety."⁷⁷¹

In his work on repentance, Calvin adds a paragraph on the fear of God which is compatible with the above assertion.⁷⁷² In his chapter on faith in the 1539 edition, Calvin inserts one section on the fear of God, which corresponds to the above two contexts. Calvin stresses that believers can learn to keep God's rule and that God carries out his penalties toward the unrighteous in order to remind them of their wickedness. Also, in the act of self-examination, believers become aware of their weaknesses and thus search out and rely upon God's grace. Calvin mentions God's chastisement of the Israelites in the Old Testament and cites 1 Cor 10: 11 in support.⁷⁷³ "These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come." Calvin interprets such examples in the Old Testament as acts of God's instruction for his people. In these events God shakes off the inertia of the flesh and strengthens their faith.⁷⁷⁴

He cites further Rom 11: 20, "They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe." In interpreting this text, Calvin argues that believers should not become overconfident with their own abilities. Inasmuch as God refused the Jews because of their arrogance and

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷⁷² See the above investigation of Calvin's conception of the *imago dei* in the 1539 *Institutes*. See also C. O. 1, 689-690.

⁷⁷³ C. O. 1, 461.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

complacency, the Gentiles were accepted into their place.⁷⁷⁵ However, the fear of God, so far, points to the fear of God's judgment and chastisement.

Calvin goes on to cite Phil 2: 12,⁷⁷⁶ "Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Calvin turns here to assert the comparative expressions of the knowledge of God and the self:⁷⁷⁷ "he [the apostle] demands only that we become accustomed to honor the Lord's power, while greatly abasing ourselves. For nothing so moves us to repose our assurance and certainty of mind in the Lord as distrust of ourselves, and the anxiety occasioned by the awareness of our ruin."⁷⁷⁸ Calvin provides a final citation from Ps. 5: 7, "But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you." He sets up a contrast between the presence of God's majesty in great splendor and the human state of filthiness in the encounter with the divine: "they turn their eyes now upon their own vanity, and then bring the thought of their minds to bear upon the truth of God."⁷⁷⁹ In this way, believers must have faith in God accompanied by reverent fear. Only thus is the true knowledge of God and the self properly expressed. In this way, fearing God means to be in awe of God, and to give reverence to God's majesty. However, the fear of God and its connection to the interrelated expression of the knowledge of God and the self finds its consonance in the chapter on the knowledge of God in the 1539 edition. In this chapter, Calvin argues that according to Scripture God's people exist in dread of being annihilated by the presence of God. This displays God's power and majesty,

⁷⁷⁵ C. O. 1, 461-462.

⁷⁷⁶ C. O. 1, 462.

⁷⁷⁷ I, 1, 1-3.

which human creatures can neither bear nor grasp. Calvin believes the description of Scripture and sees human beings as ignorant of their own lowly state in comparison to God's majesty. Calvin lists many citations—Judg 13: 22; 6: 22; Isa 6: 5; Ezek 2:1; 1: 28; 1 King 19: 13; Gen 18: 27; Job 7: 5; Ps 22: 6; Isa 24: 23 and so on—in order to assert the contrast between God's majesty and the deficient human state.⁷⁸⁰ As an example, he speaks of Abraham: “we see how Abraham recognizes more clearly that he is earth and dust when once he had come nearer to beholding God's glory (Gen 18: 27).”⁷⁸¹ This contrast of states is best seen in the encounter between human beings and God's presence.

For Calvin, God can only ever love righteousness and can never tolerate anything unrighteous. In contrast, human nature wavers and is very changeable.⁷⁸² It is due to the variations of human nature that human beings confront the diverse faces of God. “Now what is to be learned from the law can be readily understood: that God, as he is our creator, has toward us by right the place of Father and Lord ... It is not fitting for us to measure God's glory according to our ability; for whatever we may be, he remains always like himself: the friend of righteousness, the foe of iniquity.”⁷⁸³

6.2.2. The imago dei is expressed through the reciprocal participation between God and human beings

It is vital to understand the relationship between God and human beings if we are to

⁷⁷⁸ C. O. 1, 462.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ C. O. 1, 281.

⁷⁸¹ C. O. 1, 281.

⁷⁸² C. O. 1, 372-373.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

comprehend the workings of the *imago dei* in Calvin's theology. Here we are dealing with the vertical dimension of the *imago dei*. The relationship between God and human beings is reciprocal, i.e. it consists of God's participation in human existence first and the subsequent human response to God's work. In this way, God participates in the relationship through his grace and human beings participate in God with the wholeness of their being.

6.2.2.1. Creation

God first participates in human existence through his creation of the world. God creates the world as a house which is prepared for human beings. God's fatherly love is found not only in his preparation of the world but also in his government and nourishment of the world.⁷⁸⁴ God endows human beings with a great gift, and with this gift of the *imago dei* they now resemble God's power, goodness and wisdom. In Calvin's view, the human creature has received by far much more of God's favor than the rest of creation. Calvin admires the observation of ancient thinkers which saw the human creature as a microcosm radiating through all its parts the glory of God.⁷⁸⁵ Calvin goes on to illustrate the excellence of the soul's function, i.e. to give humans the understanding they need in order that they can respond to God.⁷⁸⁶ This function of the soul was already determined by God in his inner-Trinitarian counsel. This displays the miracle of human existence, namely that God imprinted his immortal image upon the mortal soul of a mortal body. And it is with this immortal *imago dei*

⁷⁸⁴ *Argumentum* of the commentaries on Genesis. I, 14, 22. Wendel, *Calvin*, 170-171.

⁷⁸⁵ I, 5, 2-3. That the human being is a microcosm points to a common feature of the human race, regardless of whether we are speaking of the elect or the fallen. This concept was adopted in the Renaissance in order to describe humanity; see Schreiner, "A Little Lower Than the Angels," in *The Theater of His Glory*, 70.

⁷⁸⁶ *Comm John 1: 4. Sermon on Job 10: 7-15.*

that the likeness of God is reflected. Here we find the basis of human dignity.⁷⁸⁷ Yet Calvin also stresses that human beings are not merely endowed with the light of understanding. God also gave them a healthy will in order to establish within them an autonomous human existence.⁷⁸⁸

Calvin divides the faculties of the soul into understanding and will. These are both natural gifts and they are corruptible. To these natural gifts God adds supernatural gifts. These consist of the love of God, faith, the desire of justice and purity, and charity toward one's neighbors. Human beings can only attain eternal life because they have been so well equipped by God.⁷⁸⁹ Calvin speaks of the pre-fall state in terms of the grace of God, because it was by the grace of God that the human soul was endowed with the *imago dei*. Yet Calvin admits the weakness of this pre-fall state: human nature does not possess a constant will to follow God's rule. There is here a space allowed to human beings either to choose to obey or to disobey God. This suggests that the human creature must now carry out its will through its own judgment and choice, i.e. the creation of human autonomy. Before the fall, the human creature was free to carry out the function of its soul, in correspondence to that purpose for which it was created.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁷ I, 15, 2-3. II, 2,1. Wendel, *Calvin*, 187.

⁷⁸⁸ I, 15, 8. In the commentaries on Gen 1: 26, Calvin highlights the difference between the creation of human beings and the rest of creation. God gave dignity to the human creature by adorning it with the *imago dei*. The process of the creation of human beings is reinforced in the commentaries on Gen 2: 7, namely that God created human beings from the earth, that he breathed into this human-shaped clay, and then imprinted the *imago dei* upon its soul. The dignity that arises from the excellence of human nature in its entirety is reflected as the image and the likeness of God. We should note here that Calvin does not differentiate the image of God from the likeness of God. *Comm Gen 1: 26*; I, 15, 3.

⁷⁸⁹ II, 2, 12; I, 15, 6-8.

⁷⁹⁰ II, 2, 8. Calvin argues that human beings possessed free will only before the fall, losing with their move into corruption. Thus it is not correct in theological discussions on Calvin to use the expression "free will" in reference to corrupted human reason after the fall. Cf. Oberman, "The Pursuit of Happiness," in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation*, 264.

At this point, human nature has to be contrasted to God's nature. Human nature is capricious in its obedience to God's rule. In contrast, God is immutable and constantly stands on the side of righteousness.⁷⁹¹ "God, who is the highest righteousness, cannot love the unrighteousness that he sees in us."⁷⁹² Human beings became complacent with their gifts and were no longer grateful to God for them. For this reason, God must judge them for their perversity and for their disobedience to God's word.⁷⁹³ In other words, Adam could have obeyed God's rule, but he decided to betray God and disobey his word. For Calvin, that the *imago dei* can still be expressed in human existence is due solely to God's special sustenance. Only because of this sustenance can we display constancy of will and perseverance. This suggests that the central feature of the expression of the *imago dei* lies in "strength;"⁷⁹⁴ God alone can support its constant expression. In this way, the *imago dei* points both to the glory of God, i.e. God's workmanship, and the grace of God, which supports the constant expression of the *imago dei*.

Calvin argues that the human creature participated in God with the entirety of its being before the fall. To participate in God means here to express or live out a God-oriented life which corresponds to the characteristics of God.⁷⁹⁵ With the integrity of human nature, human beings recognize the correct relationship that should exist between them and their maker. With this awareness, human beings should become grateful for the excellent gift they have received and should be happy to follow God's precepts. This attitude should be heightened when they compare themselves to the

⁷⁹¹ III, 24, 6-9. II, 8, 2.

⁷⁹² II, 16, 3.

⁷⁹³ II, 1, 4.

⁷⁹⁴ Heron, "Calvin: Homo Peccator and the Imago Dei," 50.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid.

rest of creation.⁷⁹⁶ In the commentaries on Gen 2: 16, Calvin sees God’s prohibition in the garden of Eden as a test of human obedience. “There was, indeed, another special reason, ... lest Adam should desire to be wise above measure; but this is to be kept in mind as God’s general design, that he would have men subject to his authority.”⁷⁹⁷ In the beginning, human creatures in possession of God’s great adornment also knew their own boundaries. Within these limits they were free. The matter was not how much or how little knowledge they should have, but rather that they should recognize who they are and be content with what they possess. Therefore, it is more important simply to understand correctly this relationship that exists between God and human beings than to search out God’s nature beyond creation.

6.2.2.2. Human corruption and human responsibility for the deformity of the imago dei

We can see at this stage that the participatory relation between God and human beings has been disturbed. It is equally clear for Calvin that this disruption has been caused by human perversity, and is due specifically to human rebellion against God’s rule. The expression of the imago dei in human beings is now distorted—the natural gifts have been deformed and the supernatural gift effaced.⁷⁹⁸ This can be seen from another angle: human nature lost its sustenance in God’s grace and has entirely collapsed.⁷⁹⁹ Calvin calls this collapsed soul ‘dead’ and the fallen become the children of God’s wrath.

⁷⁹⁶ The *argumentum* of the commentaries on Genesis.

⁷⁹⁷ *Comm Gen 2: 16*.

⁷⁹⁸ II, 2, 4. II, 2, 12.

For Calvin, human beings are entirely responsible for the deformity of the *imago dei* because they had been endowed with the integrity of human nature; they had been endowed with human autonomy. They were given free will but did not use it appropriately. With free will, human creatures were able to follow God's word;⁸⁰⁰ yet they failed in this, left their proper service and went their own way. Another reason Calvin gives for human responsibility for the fall is that human beings abandoned their righteous state. With this, Calvin again appeals to the contrast between the immutability of God and the caprice of humankind.⁸⁰¹ In his sermon on Ephesians 4: 23, Calvin cites Gen 6: 6 in order to express the rage of the immutable God over the now sinful human state. He argues that we can see God's incompatibility with sin in the expression "God regrets his creation of human beings". "Not that God has any human passion, but to show us that we are detestable to him, until his image is restored to us."⁸⁰² In short, human perversity interferes with the order given to creation by God—it contradicts the will of the fountain of righteousness.

To summarize, human perversity disrupts the relation between God and human beings. Yet having destroyed it, human beings cannot re-establish it. This also helps us to understand the expression of the *imago dei* within us, since it depends wholly on God's grace; human capacities and abilities cannot achieve the purpose of the gift. In

⁷⁹⁹ Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 85.

⁸⁰⁰ I, 15, 7-8. Human responsibility for the fall is also asserted in Calvin's refutation of Pighius. Pighius argued that if God predestined human perversity, then God would be the cause of sin. Calvin stresses the free will that humans possessed before the fall. The first cause of human corruption was human perversity, and this evil originated in the human being itself. *De Aeterna Praedestinatione Dei*. C. O. 8, 294-297.

⁸⁰¹ II, 8, 2. The contrast between God's immutability and human caprice corresponds to that contrast between God's will and human will. Calvin argues against Pighius that God created human beings for his own glory. And this includes all human beings, the elect and the reprobate since God's will governs the reprobate as well. In other words, God is not limited in his goodness toward the elect. He is the one who created all and governs all the occurrences in the world. *De Aeterna Praedestinatione Dei*. C. O. 8, 292-293. A similar expression is found in the 1559 *Institutes*, where Calvin need not be so polemic: "from man's Fall [God] might gather occasion for his own glory." I, 15, 8.

short, the expression of the *imago dei* consists of the created gifts as well as the relationship between God and human beings. In contrasting the original state of the *imago dei*, i.e. being obedient to God, to its deformed state, i.e. being disobedient to God, it can be seen that the relational dimension is decisive for the operation of the *imago dei*.⁸⁰³

Moreover, the human race as a whole was corrupted through Adam's fall.⁸⁰⁴ Yet surprisingly, Calvin understands this as appointed by God.⁸⁰⁵ One may well ask: why did God not endow the gift of perseverance upon human beings at the very beginning? Calvin sees this as one of God's mysteries, hidden beyond human understanding.⁸⁰⁶

6.2.2.3. Redemption

For Calvin, God's power, autonomy and immutability are manifested in his love, upon which redemption is grounded. Calvin argues that God participates in the

⁸⁰² *Sermon Eph 4: 24.*

⁸⁰³ Cf. Gerrish, "The Mirror of God's Goodness: A Key Metaphor in Calvin's View of Man," in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage*, 154.

⁸⁰⁴ Calvin's definition of sin is in chapter one of Book II. He deepened his understanding of sin by refuting the argument that corruption is to be restricted to the flesh, or to the inordinate impulses of the appetites and senses. Such an understanding ignores the power of sin to corrupt one's entire nature. Calvin highlights the total corruption of human nature, in which "not only did a lower appetite seduce him, but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind, and pride penetrated to the depths of his heart." Calvin appeals to supernatural grace, which must renew the soul as a whole. Moreover, he refers to Paul, who describes original sin in the whole of Rom 3 in order to assert the importance of knowing the root of this corruption. Thus, Calvin feels that total corruption can be contrasted to the renewal of human nature, and he cites Eph 4: 23, Rom 12: 2 and Rom 8: 6-7. The main point here is that the power of the Spirit, as supernatural grace, not only corrects the lower rank of the soul, but also reforms all aspects of it. Calvin traces the root of sin to be unbelief; this state precedes disobedience to God. However, Calvin also quite often expresses sin as alienation from God (see for example II, 16,1-4; *Comm Gen 3:1*). Niesel gives a good explanation of sin as alienation in Calvin's theology, and its correspondence to total depravity: "Sie [Sünde] ist auch kein moralischer Schaden am Menschen. Sie lässt sich nur umschreiben als eine Preisgabe der rechten Beziehung des Menschen zu seinem Schöpfer." Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 79.

⁸⁰⁵ *Comm Gen 3: 1.*

restoration of corrupted human beings in a twofold way: by giving the promise of the covenant to the patriarchs, and by sending his Son in fulfillment of that promise.⁸⁰⁷

In regard the restoration of the *imago dei*, Calvin highlights the office of Christ as mediator. He opposes Osiander's view of the *imago dei* since, for Calvin, Osiander's correlation between Christ and Adam tended toward Manichaeism. Osiander thought of Adam as being made in accordance with Christ's 'manhood', i.e. his nature as a human being, a characteristic that the Son possessed within the Trinity even before creation. "Christ as man had been foreknown in the mind of God, he was the pattern to which men were formed."⁸⁰⁸ In contrast, Calvin argues the opposite, namely that Christ became flesh according to Adam's humanity. Only in this way can he be the substitute for our sinful state. Furthermore, God adopts us as his children because of Christ's merits. "Therefore, relying on this pledge, we trust that we are sons of God, for God's natural Son fashioned for himself a body from our body."⁸⁰⁹ For Calvin, Osiander's view cannot be accepted since Christ would not have come in the form of a man if Adam had not failed.⁸¹⁰ Christ only became flesh, adopting historical contingency, in order to restore the loss of the *imago dei* in humanity. In other words, the role of Christ's mediatory office is to answer to God's righteousness. While Christ's two natures are substantially different, Christ's manhood is truly human. He is truly a descendent of Adam and can be called the "second Adam." While Calvin highlights Christ's manhood, he sees the danger in Osiander's view of the *imago dei* which would mix the divinity of Christ with Adam's humanity.⁸¹¹ For Calvin, Christ,

⁸⁰⁶ I, 15, 8. Wendel, *Calvin*, 186.

⁸⁰⁷ II, 16, 6.

⁸⁰⁸ II, 12, 7.

⁸⁰⁹ II, 12, 2.

⁸¹⁰ II, 12, 5.

⁸¹¹ II, 12, 7. Wendel, *Calvin*, 236.

as the image of the invisible God, with his sinless human nature obeyed God in our place and achieved the work of atoning for Adam's disobedience to God.⁸¹²

Furthermore, Calvin argues that the grace of Christ is given in God's election before creation. He cites Eph 1: 4-5 and asserts that God's love toward his children is established before the creation of the world. "For it was not after we were reconciled to him through the blood of his Son that he began to love us. Rather, he has loved us before the world was created."⁸¹³ God does not select the elect because they are in some way better-created than others. It is by grace that the elect are transformed, and this is compatible with God's calling in this world.⁸¹⁴ This reinforces the role of God's grace in Christian life and in the workings of the *imago dei*. For Calvin, Christian existence is constituted from eternity by God's election through the grace of Christ. Yet can Calvin's doctrine of God's election in his predestination help us to understand his work on the *imago dei*? To answer this question, we need to understand clearly what is meant by "God's grace." For Calvin, God's grace means God's strength in governing creation and our deliverance by God's providence in creation and in redemption. Yet God's grace is called "grace" only when believers in faith actually recognize it. It is in this way that the elect can be grateful for God's grace, realizing that God has adopted them in Christ even though they have not deserved such concern from the creator.⁸¹⁵ It should also be noted at this point that

⁸¹² II, 12, 3-4. In his chapter on justification, Calvin argues against Osiander's view of the gift of righteousness through justification. For Osiander, the elect already possess divine righteousness because the *imago dei* includes the body which in turn was modeled after the righteous Son. Calvin stresses the derived nature of righteousness: it is a merit of Christ which is imparted to the elect. Cf. Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 133-134.

⁸¹³ II, 16, 4.

⁸¹⁴ II, 22, 3.

⁸¹⁵ The grace of God is given through Christ to the elect in eternity, from which faith is proceeded. Yet the sanctification is the result of faith. Therefore, believers in faith apprehend the grace of God in God's providence and in eternity. In this way, God's will in predestination coincides to God's will in

while the elect already experience the change that has occurred in their lives, the grace of Christ affects only a gradual, life-long regeneration. Therefore, the elect are still participating in the journey, they lead an 'in-between' existence.

6.2.2.4. Human participation in Christ as our response to God

The elect can be restored from corruption into new life by participating in Christ.⁸¹⁶ The renewal of the *imago dei* in the elect is grounded upon this union with Christ. In it God's benevolence, which has been bestowed on Christ, is extended to the elect.⁸¹⁷ This also points to the effect of the Holy Spirit, which moves human nature toward this renewal. Furthermore, regeneration is preceded by faith.⁸¹⁸ For Calvin, the process of regeneration consists of two parts: the mortification of the flesh and the vivification of the spirit.⁸¹⁹ But Calvin highlights the renewal of human nature as a whole which aims at restoring the *imago dei* to that which it was created. Calvin describes this renewed nature as fear of God and as turning to God, i.e. subjecting one's life completely to God.⁸²⁰ In this way, renewed human nature is the best reflection of what the human state was like before the fall.

6.2.2.5 The effect of the Holy Spirit in regeneration as the grace of Christ

Calvin compares the grace of God in creation to the grace of God in redemption and asserts that the greater measure of grace is seen in Christ, in relation to the *imago dei*.

providence. For the notion of God's will in providence and in predestination, see Wendel, *Calvin*, 267-268.

⁸¹⁶ III, 3, 9.

⁸¹⁷ III, 1, 1-3.

⁸¹⁸ III, 3, 1-2. Wendel, *Calvin*, 242.

⁸¹⁹ III, 3, 5-9.

His description in the imago-text of 1559 is brief; a full explanation can be found in his commentaries on 1 Cor 15: 44-45 where Calvin discusses the resurrection of the body. Calvin differentiates the human body, as quickened by the soul, from the resurrected body, which is raised by the Holy Spirit, in order to show the diverse effects of these animating powers upon the body and the corresponding variations in the quality of the body. “For as to the soul’s now quickening the body, that is effected through the intervention of many helps; for we stand in need of drink, food, clothing, sleep, and other things of the similar nature. Hence the weakness of animation is clearly manifested. The energy of the Spirit, on the other hand, for quickening, will be much more completely, exempted from necessities of that nature.”⁸²¹

Calvin states that the Spirit of Christ has a greater effect upon believers. In other words, while the human soul was created with the excellence of the imago dei, thus placing it above other creatures, the strength of the human soul, as it was first created, was natural: it animated the body and eventually succumbed to temptation. The Holy Spirit of Christ, which affects the elect, is far greater in strength than this natural soul.

6.2.2.5. The question of gradual regeneration

With this understanding of the strength of Christ’s grace, one may gain the impression that the elect can be active in the life in God while still in this world. Yet Calvin shows us that the reality of regeneration is to be understood in quite a different way. God restores human nature according to the particularities of its human characteristics, its ‘human-ness’. The renewal of the imago dei occurs through human

⁸²⁰ Wallace, “Progress Towards Perfection,” 322.

participation in Christ, as we read in chapter three, section nine of Book III. The whole section can be divided into two parts. In the first, Calvin describes human participation in Christ in a twofold way: as participation both in Christ's death and in his resurrection—this corresponds to the process of repentance, to mortification and vivification.⁸²² Further, Calvin identifies repentance with regeneration, which aims at restoring the *imago dei* to that state in which it was created. Calvin stresses that human beings still remain totally human despite salvation in Christ. Believers are simply justified through the merits of Christ, being accepted as righteous before God. To support this position, Calvin appeals to 2 Cor 3: 18, Eph 4: 23 and Col 3: 10.⁸²³

Secondly, Calvin discusses the gradual process of this restoration.⁸²⁴ He opposes Staphylus' explanation, which views the restoration as already completed in believers in this life. Calvin argues that this restoration occurs continually and gradually. He gives two reasons for this: on the one hand, God has to cleanse the corruption of the flesh and purify our transgressions in order that the elect may become his temple. This suggests the necessity of recovering human nature.⁸²⁵ On the other hand, God appoints for them a life-long process of repentance in accordance with their continuing 'human-ness'. The elect recognize this commission, and must continue to practice repentance throughout their lives.⁸²⁶ In this description, Calvin pictures a field of struggle; because of this continuing struggle we cannot yet clearly discern the renewal of the *imago dei*. Once again we are reminded of the 'in-between' state in

⁸²¹ *Comm 1 Cor 15: 45.*

⁸²² III, 3, 9. Participation in Christ's resurrection in this context points to the regeneration of human nature, i.e. to divine life in the elect. "If we share in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life (III, 3, 9)."

⁸²³ III, 3, 9.

⁸²⁴ This section is a new addition in the 1559 *Institutes*.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.* Wallace, "Progress Towards Perfection," 321-332; especially see 322-324.

which believers exist.

6.2.2.4. The continual restoration of the imago dei

6.2.2.4.1. Believers are still sinners

In Book III, chapter three, section ten, Calvin argues that believers are liberated from the dominion of sin through their regeneration; yet the depravity of human nature is not yet completely overcome in this life.⁸²⁷ On account of Christ's atonement, God adopts the elect as his children in Christ and forgives them their sins and the consequences of sin.⁸²⁸ At the same time, God restores the elect "to true righteousness by sanctification of his Spirit."⁸²⁹ In this way, the Holy Spirit enables believers to obey God, in conjunction with repentance. Believers still experience the inordinate desires which drive them against God's law, they are still caught up in struggle; yet in this struggle the renewed life slowly learns to obey God in spite these vicious desires.⁸³⁰

For Calvin, the objective struggle of the soul between perversity and obedience is clearly recognized by the believer. They must learn to perceive their own weakness and learn to be humble before God. "They do not obtain full possession of freedom so as to feel no more annoyance from their flesh, but there still remains in them a continuing occasion for struggle whereby they may be exercised; and not only be

⁸²⁷ III, 3, 9.

⁸²⁸ III, 3, 19. While the elect are truly adopted as the children of God, their state in this life is not yet compatible with that of God's children. This is first experienced in the resurrection. This is the struggle of the elect, who are still constantly troubled by the flesh. *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, 294. *Comm 1 John 3: 2*.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

exercised, but also better learn their own weakness.”⁸³¹

In section eleven of chapter three, Book III, Calvin unpacks the correlation that exists between sin, its dominion, God’s power in regeneration and the Christian struggle.⁸³² He cites Eph 5: 26-27, “in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.” For Calvin, God promises his grace in purging the church and fulfills this through the sanctification of the elect. He subtly differentiates iniquities from the substance of sin; the former grows from the latter. For Calvin, the Holy Spirit supports believers in this struggle, that they may overcome the impulses of sin which drive them against God’s rule. In this way, while sin cannot reign in believers, it still resides within them.⁸³³ Although it no longer has dominion over them, sin remains within believers, making them humble in the awareness of their weaknesses. In this way, the saints are indeed sinners, yet God liberates them through his mercy and counts them as righteous.⁸³⁴ In this way, believers must constantly struggle between obeying God’s law and being subject to the flesh.⁸³⁵

Calvin appeals to the law, which believers are also unable to fulfill. He cites Deut 6: 5 and Matt 23: 37—we ought to “love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our faculties.” For Calvin, it is simply not an aspect of this life that believers

⁸³⁰ III, 3, 10.

⁸³¹ Ibid. In regard to human nature in the restoration of the *imago dei*, Calvin is thinking here of the integrity of human nature, i.e. its wholeness. *Sermon on Eph 4: 23-24. Comm Col 3: 9-10.*

⁸³² III, 3, 11. Cf. Wallace, “Progress Towards Perfection,” 322-323.

⁸³³ III, 3, 11.

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

⁸³⁵ See also Calvin’s opposition to the view of regeneration held by certain Anabaptists. *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, 268-267.

or non-believers will be able to love God with all the concentration and energies of their souls.⁸³⁶ Human beings will experience unbridled desires and sudden affections. Calvin also opposes those who think such inordinate impulses cannot be classified as sin. For Calvin, whatever directs human beings into transgression against the law is sin.⁸³⁷

At this point, one may well ask where the borderline exists between the inclinations of human nature, as it was first created, and the weakness of the elect. Calvin's answer to this question corresponds to his understanding of human nature as it was created.⁸³⁸ Adam was able to bind his affections to his reason and to choose life's correct orientation, i.e. an orientation which is compatible with the law of God. Adam's sense perceptions are in harmony with the created order of his being.⁸³⁹ This suggests that God created human beings with desires which cannot be removed from their humanity; yet it also suggests that these desires were not at first vicious by nature.⁸⁴⁰ Calvin admits that human perversity has made reason blind, the affections inordinate, and desires vicious. In other words, it is sin which has deformed those qualities of the created aspects of human nature. "We hold that they are inordinate because nothing pure or sincere can come forth from a corrupt and polluted nature."⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

⁸³⁷ Ibid. *Comm Rom 7: 7-8*. Calvin views human transgression, which elicits disobedience to God, as a deep and hidden sickness. "For thou do for a time he was deceived, and believed not that righteousness would be violated by coveting, he yet, at length, understood that he was a sinner, when he saw that coveting, from which no one is free, was prohibited by the law." Believers have to fight against this weakness and learn to obey God.

⁸³⁸ III, 3, 12.

⁸³⁹ I, 15, 3.

⁸⁴⁰ III, 3, 12. Calvin appeals here to Augustine. See III, 3, 13.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid.

6.2.2.4.2. Against the Anabaptists

Calvin's main point against the Anabaptists is that they hold the souls of believers to be more vigilant under the effect of the Holy Spirit. Calvin's understanding of both the human soul and the effect of the Holy Spirit is clearly different from the Anabaptists. These Anabaptists had argued that the souls of believers were now tranquil and that they had been restored to a state of innocence.⁸⁴² Calvin maintained that the power of the Spirit in Christ conforms us to a God-oriented life in which human nature is appropriately expressed. In this way, human beings are responsible for their choices and their judgments. Thus, believers actively discern just from unjust and can control their emotions well.⁸⁴³

The Spirit purifies the vice of believers, freeing their hearts from the hold of unbridled desires. Consequently, they can obey God's rule. Calvin argued that the Anabaptist viewpoint would actually support the activities of vicious desires. Furthermore, such an approach means that believers would fail in their struggle to obey God and fail to appreciate either their weaknesses or the necessary humility. With his high view of the active soul, Calvin asserts that it is our duty to fight against the evil within us. We do not have here a Manichean fight between God and Evil, but rather a struggle between the flesh and the new life. Otherwise, "we [would] be overwhelmed by the stratagems of the flesh."⁸⁴⁴

In conclusion, Calvin's high view of the 'equipment' of human nature is decisive for

⁸⁴²See also *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, 263. What Calvin portrays as 'the Anabaptist view' in this context corresponds to his understanding of the Anabaptists in the *Psychopannychia*. C. O. 5, 177-178.

his interpretation of the *imago dei*. He consistently perceives the same process: the gift of human autonomy in creation, the loss of this autonomy in corruption, its restoration in regeneration and its perfection in eternity. In each of these stages, Calvin stresses human awareness of the self and responsibility for one's deeds before God because the creator had given them correct understanding and a proper will. Yet the integrity of human nature can only be expressed through the grace of Christ in God's autonomy. Hence, Calvin reminds us of our weakness, for which we need the sustenance of grace. This need makes us humble before God; we must learn to rely on God alone.⁸⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the reciprocal participation between the creator and the human creature.

6.3. The *Imago dei* in relation to ethics in the *Institutes*

In examining the relationship between the *imago dei* and ethics, we see that Calvin presents the *imago dei* as the basis of obedience to secular authority, of the prohibition against violating fellow human beings and of the command to love one's neighbor (5.5.2. and 5.5.3.). Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* in relation to ethics in the *Institutes* has a twofold dimension: an eschatological and a temporal dimension. The eschatological dimension points to the divine gift, with which human beings can attain eternal life.⁸⁴⁶ The temporal dimension points to the order of creation, where even social status and social order is ordained by God and manifests God's glory.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴³ III, 3, 14.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ Cf. Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 129.

Calvin's treatment of the temporal dimension of the *imago dei* in relation to ethics points to reverence of the God who ordains the order of creation. Calvin sees the natural ordinance as aiming mainly at the preservation of communal life, at the sustenance of humanity. Only within stable societies can the human race establish a common life. And it is only upon such a foundation that the gospel can be preached and God's eternal plan—by which he brings his people into his kingdom—be carried out.⁸⁴⁸

The *imago dei* in its eschatological dimension and in relation to ethics is affirmed within the discussion of those commandments of God which prohibit murder and demand the love of one's neighbor.⁸⁴⁹ In the prohibition of murder in the sixth commandment, Calvin argues that it is God's view of our fellow human beings which must constitute the basis of Christians' treatment of them. Despite what our opinions might be, God values his image in all human beings. To injure the *imago dei* in fellow humans is to violate God. In this way, humanity itself is preserved by this reverence for God's image in all human beings.⁸⁵⁰ A similar assertion is found in the commentaries on Gen 9: 6. In this context, Calvin writes that it is because of the *imago dei* that God values humankind so highly. God views human beings favorably, be they elect or fallen, because God's image is engraven upon them. Calvin states that

⁸⁴⁶ I, 15, 3-4. *Comm Gen 1: 26; 9: 6.*

⁸⁴⁷ I, 15, 4; *Comm Gen 1: 26; 1 Cor 11: 7.*

⁸⁴⁸ Calvin sees human existence in its entirety as consisting of the body and the soul, upon which the *imago dei* is imprinted. Calvin presents both the *imago dei* and our shared humanity as the reasons why fellow human beings deserve our respect. He supports this position by appealing to the commandments against murder and for the love of one's neighbor. II, 8, 39-40. Moreover, Calvin perceives us to be stewards of God, the creator and lawgiver. It is therefore our obligation to serve God's purposes in the world. III, 7, 6. This also reminds us that Calvin does not ignore the relation between human beings with the *imago dei* and the natural ordinance. Schreiner, "Creation Set Free," in *The Theater of His Glory*, 97-114. However, the relation to natural ordinances is not the main theme in Calvin's work on the *imago dei*.

⁸⁴⁹ II, 8, 39-40; III, 7, 5-6.

⁸⁵⁰ II, 8, 40.

even the remnant of this gift motivates God's love toward them.⁸⁵¹ Calvin supports his ethical interpretation by reference to God's providence which ordains the political law in order to forbid murder and preserve communal life. God can also revenge himself on evil outside of and in addition to the law, most notably in instances of war.⁸⁵² The sovereign Lord governs his creation at all times. God watches over his creation until the end, since he created humankind with this excellent gift by which they can attain eternal life.⁸⁵³

The elect revere God and adopt for themselves God's view of their fellow human beings. In this way they become the image of God and become God's representatives in the world. This also opens up a new dimension to Calvin's view of the fallen: they deserve God's providence and preservation because they too were created for attaining eternal life. Calvin implicitly believes that the fallen might be under God's grace toward eternal life since only God knows who is elected and calls them to return to him.

In teaching on the love of one's neighbor, Calvin stresses the image of God. This image is the only reason one can give for loving our fellow human beings, especially since after the fall human beings have become unworthy of love.⁸⁵⁴ While this can be seen as a general principle, Calvin asserts that believers in fact deserve more attention because the *imago dei* has been renewed in them.⁸⁵⁵ As to why the image of God should be the basis of such love, Calvin explains that the image of God reminds us of

⁸⁵¹ *Comm Gen 9: 6.*

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*

⁸⁵³ *Comm Gen 9: 6. Deinde ipsum coelestem fictorem utcunque corruptus sit homo, finem tamen primae creationis habere ante oculos: cuius exemplo reputare nos decet quorsum homines condiderit et qua excellentia eos dignatus sit prae animantibus reliquis.* See also I, 17, 2.

⁸⁵⁴ III, 7, 6.

God the creator, whom we must serve by nature. Moreover, God bestows his gift upon us, and with this gift we receive countless benefits and God's blessings. Thus we must honor and love God's mark in fellow human beings.⁸⁵⁶ This is especially so in the case of loving our enemies. The image of God in our enemies may be deformed, but this reminds us that God wants our forgiveness of their sins. Calvin appeals to God's governance, arguing that God "would truly have them charged" for their sins.⁸⁵⁷ In this way, the *imago dei* in our enemies helps us to ignore their evil intentions and to embrace them as worthy because God values the gift in them, the same gift that is in us and with which God's goodness benefits us. Loving our enemies, which is against our fallen nature, can only be achieved when we look upon the image of God in them.⁸⁵⁸ This suggests that God cannot love humankind after the fall, yet he searches for the remnant of his image in us. This is the reason why he can still love us and can participate in our existence.

To summarize, Calvin's understanding of the *imago dei* in relation to ethics is grounded on the reverence of God, who is the creator, sustainer and governor of his creation and who is the provider of all our benefits. God's image in our fellow human beings deserves our respect and should motivate our love toward both neighbor and enemy. When we adopt God's view on other human beings, then we can treat them according to God's will. In short, our reverence of God reflects our knowledge of the relationship between humanity and God, which in turn represents true knowledge of God and thus our correct response to this relationship.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid. Cf. Heron, "Calvin: Homo Peccator and the Imago Dei," 53-54.

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