

Zeitschrift: Theologische Zeitschrift
Herausgeber: Theologische Fakultät der Universität Basel
Band: 65 (2009)
Heft: [1]

Artikel: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin's Theology
Autor: Johnson, Merwyn S.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-877650>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 25.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Justification and Sanctification in Calvin's Theology

The following article would be amiss if it did not begin with a tribute to you, Professor Martin Anton Schmidt, and my deepest gratitude to you as a devoted Christian, as an excellent scholar and theologian, as a compelling teacher, and as a warm human being. In the Testatbuch of my studies at the Universität Basel, 1969–73, your signature stands beside lectures, seminars, and guided studies on the great theologians of the Early and Medieval Christian Church—the Christology of the early Church, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Ockham. You delivered them to your many listeners with marvelous clarity, depth of insight, carefully selected quotes, and critical yet balanced perspective. You always communicated a gracious, respectful bearing toward your subject and toward your students, whether in or out of class. I still cherish the notes from your lectures, as well as the memories of your kindness to me. The figures you brought to life have remained important conversation partners ever since.

In every way, you became for me—and still are—an extraordinary model of excellence for the Christian theologian and seminary professor. I thank God for you and for the providence that put our lives together at the same time and place during those precious years of study. To celebrate your life, your gifts, and your accomplishments is a great privilege. With joy I dedicate the following article to you, my esteemed Professor and friend, Martin Anton Schmidt.

«The sum of the Gospel,» says John Calvin, «consists in repentance and forgiveness of sins.»¹ Calvin is here talking about what we today call reconciliation and transformation. The forgiveness of sins, or justification, deals with the reconciliation of sinful humans to God, which is also key to our reconciliation with one another. Repentance, unending regeneration or sanctification for Calvin, pertains to the on-going transformation of our lives in fellowship with both God and one another.

For the post-Reformation era in which we live—Modernism-Pietism (1650-1950/present)—reconciliation is generally regarded as the first step toward transformation, like salvation to the Christian life, or faith to good works. As «faith without works is dead» (James 2:17), so reconciliation is only as good as the transformation it stirs—in ourselves, in our fellow humans, and in our natural environment. Everything is thus measured by the extent of its transformation, reconciliation collapses into transformation, and both are placed upon humanity as demand requirements for normative change. The questions become urgent: Doesn't this collapse of reconciliation into transformation reintroduce the problem of works righteousness, against which the Reformation protested so vigorously? Doesn't this collapse jeopardize both

¹ *Institutes*, 3.3.1, 3.11.1. All references to the *Institutes* are from: Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion. The references follow the standard format (bk.chapt.sect), coinciding with the Latin edition in: Calvin: Opera Selecta, and the English edition of McNeill.

reconciliation and transformation as matters of God's redeeming grace and God's continual presence with us?

John Calvin, like most of the Protestant Reformers, thought it very important to relate justification (the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation) to sanctification (repentance, the transformation of human life) in such a way that one is always attached to the other, not one above or before the other, and both transparently gifts from God. This paper concerns how Calvin does just that. I will pose three questions and let Calvin address them, grounded in his own language and historical situation:

- Do justification and/or sanctification transform us, i.e., make us actually righteous?
- Do they set up an order of salvation, which would allow justification to collapse into sanctification or *vice versa*?
- Is fear a condition either for justification or for sanctification?

My thesis is simple: *The aim of being Christian for Calvin is not to make sinners righteous or humans good, but to put sinful humans in communion with God, who is righteous and good altogether.*

1.

Does justification make sinful humans actually righteous before God, incorporating sanctification into justification?² Or does justification simply declare sinful humans in Christ to be righteous before God (*iustitia christi forensis*), in which case some form of sanctification has to be added in order to make us actually righteous?³ I would argue that Calvin follows neither of these opti-

² The several formulas for this theological move are: *iustitia operae* (righteousness of works) or *iustitia fidei qua operae* (righteousness of faith as a work—Anabaptists), *iustitia infusa* (infused righteousness—Medieval+), or *iustitia essentiali* (essential righteousness—Osiander). See Appendix A for a full listing of these and the other formulas for justification and sanctification which Calvin rejects. Of particular help in identifying these formulas were McGrath: *Justitia Dei*; Toon: *Justification and Sanctification*; Heppe: *Reformed Dogmatics*; Schmid: *Doctrinal Theology of the Ev. Lutheran Church*; Muller: *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*; Barth: CD IV/2, § 66; Braaten: *Justification*; Forde: «The Work of Christ» and «Christian Life», in: *Christian Dogmatics*, 5–104.305–474; Husbands, Treier: *Justification*; Gundry: *Five Views on Sanctification*; Zachman: *The Assurance of Faith*.

³ For Peter Lombard, the Medieval Scholastics, and the Council of Trent (1545ff.) the justification of sinners before God is rooted in the *satisfactio christi* (satisfaction of Christ) or *meritum christi* (merits of Christ), received cooperatively by humans as

ons, but he sets forth justification and sanctification as mutually indispensable, complementary ways in which sinful humans participate in the righteousness of Jesus Christ (*iustitia participationis in christo*),⁴ in the process communing with God (3.6.2, 3.11.8 & 10).

From the outset Calvin makes justification and sanctification (or repentance)⁵ subsets of faith: they are effects of faith (*effectus*, 3.3.1) or benefits of faith (*bona*, 3.1.1; *beneficia*, 3.16.1). Like faith they are both gifts of God, the work of the Spirit. Because they are so joined with faith, when faith establishes the avenue of our participation in Jesus Christ (and our union with Christ),⁶ justification and repentance do the same. Indeed, for Calvin justification and repentance spell out what participation or union with Christ entails.⁷

For repentance (sanctification) Calvin reinterprets the traditional terms, mortification and vivification, to describe participating in the death and resur-

iustitia fidei et operae (the righteousness of faith together with the righteousness of works). For the Protestant Reformers the justification of sinners before God (*iustificatio impiorum*) is rooted in *iustitia christi forensis* (the righteousness of Christ declared to us), which contains in itself both *remissio peccatorum* (the remission of sins) and *iustitia imputata* (imputed righteousness). Justification is also and at the same time the effect of human faith (*fides*), but the faith by which it comes is understood as a gift of God, the work of the Holy Spirit uniting us with Christ and all his benefits, hence the formula *iustitia fidei* (the righteousness of faith). To the *iustitia fidei* Luther and the Lutherans after him add *iustitia inherens* (a righteousness inhering in the believer, as in the expression, «a good tree bears good fruits»). To *iustificatio* or *iustitia christi forensis* Calvin and most of the Reformed tradition after him add *poenitentia* (repentance unto life, or sanctification).

⁴ Calvin's language for participation is variously «union with Christ,» «engrafted into his body,» «a fellowship with his righteousness,» and the whole language of adoption. Other ways of talking about participation or union with Christ arise in connection with mutual abiding (re: John 15:1–17 and elsewhere), covenant, the third use of the law, the church, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. See Tamburello: Union with Christ, 41–63: «The Theology of Justification in Bernard and Calvin», and 84–101: «John Calvin on Mystical Union». See also Barth: CD IV/2, § 66.

⁵ Calvin uses the terms repentance and sanctification interchangeably, as also regeneration, renovation, and conversion. The rest of this essay uses Calvin's term repentance from this point on. See his discussion of terms in 3.3.5 & 9. Repentance (*poenitentia*), says Calvin, «is the true turning (*conversionem*) of our life to God, arising from a pure and earnest fear of God; and it consists in mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in vivification of spirit.» (3.3.5, revised translation).

⁶ «Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.» (3.2.7).

⁷ See Alister McGrath's treatment of Calvin on justification: *Iustitia Dei*, 253–257.

rection of Christ. «Both things happen to us by participation (*participatione*) in Christ,» says Calvin.

For if we truly partake (*communicamus*) in his death, «our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin perishes» [Rom. 6:6p], that the corruption of original nature may no longer thrive. If we share (*participes*) in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God (*Dei iustitiae respondeat*). (3.3.9, 1539)

Calvin's later treatment of the Christian life (3.6–10) includes self-denial and cross-bearing on the mortification side and, on the vivification side, reflection on the future life (+ how to live as pilgrims traveling through this life). Calvin thus reinforces our intimate participation in Christ at the points of Jesus' death and resurrected life.

For justification⁸ the remission of sins and the imputation of righteousness are a participation in the righteousness of Christ. «We are righteous only by participation (*participatione*) in him,» says Calvin (3.11.8).⁹ By his death he forgives our sins. By his resurrection and on-going life he restores our humanity to the image of God. By his obedience in every respect Christ maintains, manifests, and extends the righteousness of *God* to a sinful humanity. In so doing Christ not only transposes God's righteous demand into a promise of mercy but also fulfills the promise.¹⁰ In any case righteousness belongs to God, not to us, a point Calvin made early (1539+) but had to repeat emphatically against Osiander (1559). Whether before or after Christ, works have no causal relation either to justification or to repentance: each in its place is a gift of God (3.3.21, 3.11.18). Calvin in fact does not forget: we humans made in the image of God are at best a reflection of God's righteousness, a righteousness we do not have out of ourselves in any case. *All the righteousness we will ever have is a participation in Christ's righteousness.*

⁸ Calvin defines «justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men,» which «consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness» (3.11.2). He extends the definition somewhat in 3.11.3: «To justify means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed.»

⁹ The larger phrase reads, «God alone is the source of righteousness, and we are righteous only by participation in him [Christ—m.j.],» or in the Latin, «*solus Deus fons est iustitiae, nec aliter quam eius [christo—m.j.] participatione sumus iusti.*»

¹⁰ To be accounted righteous, he says, is nothing else than «to lodge our righteousness in Christ's obedience because the obedience of Christ is reckoned to us as if it were our own.» (3.11.23)

2.

Are justification and sanctification truly gifts from God, a «double grace» (3.11.1),¹¹ as Calvin puts it? Or is one of these a condition for the other—either

- justification before sanctification (as in: salvation is the necessary pre-condition for good works or the Christian life);
- sanctification before justification (as in: repentance or regeneration or conversion is the necessary condition for faith and justification); or
- sanctification after justification (as in: good works are the necessary outcome of salvation)?

Each of these sets up some order of salvation (*ordo salutis*). I would argue that Calvin (like Luther) denies an order of salvation.

Whether from the vantage point of faith or of Christ, Calvin is explicit that justification and repentance belong together and work together. Since by faith we grasp Christ's righteousness, «these benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond.» (3.16.1) But also, «Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself.» (3.16.1) Since, says Calvin, «it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other.» (3.16.1) Our so-called good works have to be justified as well as the sinners who do them (3.17.3-5); and, because we continue to sin, God's mercy has to counter and by «continual forgiveness of sins repeatedly acquit [...] us.» (3.14.10. Similarly 3.14.11, 12)

How, then, do justification and repentance complement each other? To be in communion with the God of righteousness, we sinful humans have to deal with a righteousness we cannot attain out of ourselves; and we have to receive a compatibility with that righteousness as a gift without our own doing (3.13.1).¹² We work against God at both points. Our human sinfulness leads us repeatedly to insist on making ourselves righteous, one way or another, before or after Christ, more or less, constantly calculating what WE HAVE TO DO: to be saved, to be a moral person, to live a «good» Christian life, to be deserving of another person's love, or just to accomplish something in this earthly life. The result is a never-ending treadmill of striving to justify ourselves and our own existence by what we do. The Bible calls that works of

¹¹ Calvin also defends the term «double righteousness» for justification and repentance/sanctification, *vis á vis* Osiander (3.11.11).

¹² «The Lord's purpose in bestowing righteousness upon us in Christ,» he says, «was to show us his own righteousness.» (3.13.1, quoting from Rom. 3:25) He continues: «But the righteousness of God is not sufficiently set forth unless he alone be esteemed righteous, and [he alone—m.j.] communicate the free gift of righteousness to the undeserving.» (3.13.1)

the law (see Galatians 3:2, 5, 10–12). The Protestant Reformers call it «works righteousness» (*iustitia operae*, e.g., 3.14.16).

Justification before God, however, is an entirely different matter. United by faith with Christ, we—sinful human beings that we are—find immediate release from the burden of having to make ourselves righteous or «good enough.» Christ has already done that, and, participating in him, we participate in the ultimate righteousness which he has accomplished. At the same time we are invigorated to press toward that righteousness with every fiber of our being. For life in the presence of this God is an end in itself that subordinates all other aims in life to itself. Participating in the righteousness of Christ, we find ourselves already in close fellowship with the living God and with our own eschatological future in God's kingdom.

Repentance comes into play here as well. United with Christ by faith, we still have to live in the present moment with all its ambiguities, tensions, temptations, obstacles, adversities, pettiness, malice, and evil. What we see in ourselves and others all around us is the more painful because the light of God's righteousness and mercy, indeed the glory and majesty of God, illumine the harsh, ugly realities of our sinful human existence. Participating in the righteousness of Christ, however, turns us to a love of righteousness and a hatred of sin, including our own. Beginning with ourselves, we begin to repent of particular sins particularly and in the process commune more and more with Christ and his actual righteousness here and now.¹³ So, by justification we participate in the ultimate righteousness accomplished by Christ; and by repentance we participate in that righteousness concretely while facing the daily issues of life. Justification is clearly «the hinge on which religion turns» (3.11.1) for Calvin. But at any given moment, we never have justification without repentance or *vice versa*.

3.

The fear of God (*timor Dei*)¹⁴ is prominent in Calvin's treatment of both justification and repentance. Does the fear of God set up some further condition

¹³ Works of any kind have no causal effect on our righteousness, but they do confirm us in our believing because they are the locus of our communion with Christ/God. See 3.14.17–21. Calvin's treatment of the third use of the law (2.7.12ff. and related places), of the Ten Commandments (2.8), of Christian freedom (3.19), of prayer (3.20), and of the Church (Book 4) belong to the same sense of *locations where* our communion with Christ/God takes place.

¹⁴ *Timor Dei* is Calvin's preferred Latin term for «the fear of God» in the sense of awe or reverence toward God. In this respect he is simply following the Latin translation of the Bible before him, in both the Old and the New Testaments. Calvin also

for sinful humans to meet as part of justification and/or sanctification? That is to say, does either justification or repentance arise out of the fear of God's wrath, a threat of condemnation and punishment which sinners have to overcome before they can be saved? That may set justification before sanctification or *vice versa*. Alternatively, do justification and repentance both arise out of God's mercy toward sinners? If so, what happens to the fear-factor? I would argue that for Calvin God's mercy is the take-off point for both justification and repentance, but the ever-present fear-factor plays out differently for the believer and the unbeliever.

Of course, fear is part of Calvin's definition of repentance: the «true turning of our life to God» arises from «a pure and earnest fear (*timore*) of [God—m.j.]» (3.3.5)¹⁵ The fear of God also comes up in Calvin's treatment of faith (3.2.17–28). Christian believers, he says, following Scripture, face two kinds of fear towards God.¹⁶ One is the fear of what God can justifiably do to humans who offend or sin against God. That makes God a deadly enemy.¹⁷ The other kind of fear is awe, respect, reverence, and humility before the sheer majesty, grandeur, glory, righteousness, and power of God, upon whom humanity depends for life. *The problem of faith, for Calvin, is how sinful humans can move from fearing God as an avenger to standing in awe and reverence toward God as a gracious father* (3.11.1; 3.2.7). «Where our conscience sees only indignation and vengeance [even in Scripture—m.j.],» says Calvin, «how can it fail to tremble and be afraid? Or to shun the God whom it dreads?» (3.2.7) Knowledge of the will of God is not enough. We have to be persuaded of God's benevolence toward us.¹⁸ The «firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence to-

uses a variety of different Latin words to talk about the fear of God in the sense of dread at God's wrath: notably, *mutus, horror, terror, and formidine*.

¹⁵ The key Latin phrases are «*verum ad Deum vitae nostrae conversionem*» and «*sincero seroque Dei timore*.»

¹⁶ The fear of God as reverence and awe is more typical of the Old Testament than the New (e.g., «The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,» Prov. 1:7), but it shows up in the New Testament, too (e.g., proselytes were often called «God-fearing,» as was Cornelius in Acts 10:2). Calvin refers often to the «fear and trembling» with which we are to work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12f.); see 3.2.22f. Calvin's treatment of two kinds of fear is most likely taking issue with Melancthon, who in his 1521 *Loci Communes* distinguishes the fear of threats and punishment (from the law) with faith in the divine promise (of the gospel). See Pauck: LCC XIX: Melancthon and Bucer, 92–109.

¹⁷ «And so, whether adversities reveal God's wrath, or the conscience finds in itself the proof and ground thereof, thence unbelief obtains weapons and devices to overthrow faith. Yet these are always directed to this objective: that, thinking God to be against us and hostile to us, we should not hope for any help from him, and should fear him as if he were our deadly enemy.» (3.2.20)

¹⁸ Calvin asks out loud, «What if we were to substitute his benevolence or his mercy

ward us» (3.2.7) thus becomes the lead part of Calvin's definition of faith.¹⁹

For unbelievers things are simple. God is to be feared as the one who holds them accountable for what they make of themselves. They act out their fear(s) the most in calculating how to be good enough. For believers things are more complicated. Believers have to deal *both* with fear of God's punishment *and* with fear as awe before God's majesty and glory. Calvin is quite clear that Christians live in a constant tension between these two kinds of fear (3.2.18). Believers «are repeatedly shaken by gravest terrors,» he says, and also «in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief.» (3.2.17)

Calvin insists that sinful humans—both believers and unbelievers—reflect on the judgment seat of God and repent of their sins. Do we, then, have to resolve the fear of God's wrath before we get to God's mercy? That is the movement Calvin learned from Luther, Melanchthon, and Bucer: from law to gospel, sin to grace, God's wrath to God's mercy. By contrast, Calvin says plainly, the mercy of God cannot be merely a relief from the threat of punishment (3.3.3f.).²⁰ Indeed, interpreting Matth. 3:2, he asks rhetorically: «do they [John the Baptist and Jesus—m.j.] not derive the reason for repenting from grace itself and the promise of salvation?» (3.3.2) And he draws out his answer: «a man cannot apply himself seriously to repentance without knowing himself to belong to God... [N]o one is truly persuaded that he belongs to God unless he has first recognized God's grace.» (3.3.2, 1539)²¹ Is Calvin going in a circle here?²²

in place of his will, the tidings of which are often sad and the proclamations frightening?» (3.2.7). He encourages himself to take the step, «for,» he says, «it is after we have learned that our salvation rests with God that we are attracted to seek him. This fact is confirmed for us when he declares that our salvation is his care and concern. Accordingly, we need the promise of grace, which can testify to us that the Father is merciful; since we can approach him in no other way, and upon grace alone the heart of man can rest.» (3.2.7).

¹⁹ See fn. 6 for definition of faith.

²⁰ Calvin appears to have reservations about Luther when he says, «There are some, however, who suppose that repentance precedes faith, rather than flows from it, *or is produced by it as fruit from a tree. Such persons have never known the power of repentance, and are moved to feel this way by an unduly slight argument.*» (3.3.1) The body of this quote comes from 1539; the italicized portion was added in 1559. Calvin also opposes Melanchthon's and Bucer's distinction between a law repentance and a gospel repentance. Calvin shows how the Biblical examples they cite for «repentance of the law» say the opposite of what Melanchthon and Bucer intend. Scripture, he says, «represents them as acknowledging the gravity of their sin, and afraid of God's wrath; but since they conceived of God only as Avenger and Judge, that very thought overwhelmed them. Therefore their repentance was nothing but a sort of entryway of hell, which they had already entered in this life, and had begun to undergo punishment before the wrath of God's majesty.» (3.3.4, from 1536)

To be sure, God's judgment seat and righteousness also belong to God's majesty and glory. Awakened by faith (prior to repentance) to the true glory and righteousness of God, believers come to fear offending God more than they fear being punished by God. Calvin says *twice* in the *Institutes*: «Even if there were no hell, we would still fear God,» (1.2.2, 3.2.26), still «dread offending him more gravely than any death» (3.2.26).²³ Reflecting on God's judgment seat, he says, leads us to *humility* not before God's wrath but *before God's mercy* (3.12.6-8), which is God's higher righteousness (*iustitia excelsior*, 3.12.1) extended to us in Christ Jesus (3.13.2, 5). Believers thus come to see God as a gracious father instead of an avenging judge. Here, too, justification draws sinful humans to the full, benevolent righteousness of God, so they will in repentance daily seek and find communion with God in all God's majesty and in all God's mercy/grace to an undeserving, sinful humanity.

Why, then, does Calvin spend so much energy talking about the fear of God's wrath? I believe the answer lies in the fears of Calvin's own life and times.²⁴ Calvin was well acquainted with raw fear.²⁵ Death was a constant rea-

²¹ In 1559 Calvin strengthens his point with the following: «Perhaps some have been deceived by the fact that many are overwhelmed by qualms of conscience or compelled to obedience before they are imbued with the knowledge of grace, nay, even taste it. And this is the initial fear that certain people reckon among the virtues, for they discern that it is close to true and just obedience. But here it is not a question of how variously Christ draws us to himself, or prepares us for the pursuit of godliness. I say only that no uprightness can be found except where that Spirit reigns that Christ received to communicate to his members. Secondly, I say that, according to the statement of the psalm: «There is propitiation with thee ... that thou mayest be feared» [Psalm 130:4, Comm.], no one will ever reverence God but him who trusts that God is propitious to him. No one will gird himself willingly to observe the law but him who will be persuaded that God is pleased by his obedience. This tenderness in overlooking and tolerating vices is a sign of God's fatherly favor.»

²² Barth: CD IV/2, 580f., takes issue with Calvin at this point, but does not seem sufficiently to grasp what Calvin is doing with the two kinds of fear.

²³ «But believers, as has been said, both fear offending God more than punishment, and are not troubled by fear of punishment, as if it hung over their necks. But they are rendered more cautious not to incur it.» (3.2.27)

²⁴ Recognition of the aspect of fear in Calvin's life is the significance of W.J. Bouwsma's book: *John Calvin*, which Bouwsma finds, notably, in Calvin's treatment of the terms «abyss» and «labyrinth.» According to Richard Muller, these terms are not original to Calvin and don't bear the weight Bouwsma puts on them where Calvin is concerned. See R. Muller: *Beyond the Abyss and the Labyrinth. An Ordo recte docende*, in: *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, New York 2000, 79–98. Bouwsma's treatment of Calvin nonetheless gives us another window on Calvin's life, notably, the fear factor. See Heiko Oberman's illuminating discussion of Bouwsma's book,

lity for him: two brothers during his childhood, his mother when he was six years old (ca. 1513 or 1514), his father when he was 21 (1531), his only natural child when he was 33 (1542), and his wife when he was 39 (1549).²⁶ The memory and deadly effects of recurring bouts with the bubonic plague were strong in Calvin's day.²⁷ Political intrigue and war were rampant throughout Calvin's lifetime and in his immediate region.²⁸ Calvin had to deal personally with the Inquisition, persecution, and hostility coming from the Papal Church.²⁹ Calvin's own efforts at leadership met with stiff resistance most of

in: *Initia Calvini*, 123–134.

²⁵ Calvin's intense, personal awareness of fear is transparent in:

- *The Psychopannichica* re: death (written 1534, published 1542);
- the quote on providence, *Institutes* 1.17.10, 1539 (see Appendix B);
- his graphic treatment of Jesus' descent into hell, *Institutes*, 2.16.10–12+;
- his commentary on 2. Tim., 1548, Calvin's favorite book of the Bible according to Oberman: *The Two Reformations*, 127, based on correspondence CR 82, 5. Calvin obviously identified with Paul when facing the opposition to his leadership in Geneva.

²⁶ See Parker: *John Calvin*, 2,102.

²⁷ Alister McGrath: *A Life of John Calvin*, 23, cites the report that in 1523 Calvin's father sent him out of Noyon to avoid the plague, not to attend the University of Paris at age 14 as many have assumed. Parker: *John Calvin*, 2,29, refers to frequent summer breakouts of the plague at Noyon and reports that in 1533 Calvin was at Noyon helping to organize public prayers against the plague. The onset of the plague, or Black Death, in Europe occurred in 1347–51 and killed 25–33% of the population of Europe, which makes it the biggest single disaster in European history to date. The population numbers only recovered to pre-plague levels in the late 16th Century. Bouts continued intermittently throughout this time, including the mid-15th Century, 1528 in England, 1542 in Geneva itself, culminating in Germany during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) and in England in the 1660s. See Oberman: *The Two Reformations*, 5ff.,17; and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago 1968, 3:742a–743a; 17:1140b–1147b.

²⁸ This includes:

- the war between the Holy Roman Empire (Europe) and the Ottoman Turks, which peaked with the siege of Vienna in 1529 but continued in Europe (e.g., annexation of Hungary, 1541);
- struggles of succession over the Holy Roman Emperor (competition mainly between Austria-Hungary, France, and Spain) and the Pope; and
- the regional wars between Geneva and the Duke of Savoy, threatening Geneva constantly throughout Calvin's tenure there. The Bernese liberated Geneva from Savoy in 1530, from the Papal prince in 1535/6, but thereafter gave back some parts to Savoy.

²⁹ These troubles begin with his father's and brother's excommunication by the Cathedral Chapter at Noyon; the repeated persecution of Lutherans by the Canon theologians of the Sorbonne during the 1520s in Paris; his own flight as a fugitive

his time at Geneva, beginning with his early failure, 1536–1538, which ended when he fled the city at night in the rain with nothing but the clothes on his back.³⁰ Calvin's involvement with the Reformation movement meant he lost all the consolations of the medieval sacramental system in which he had been reared, notably the sacraments of penance,³¹ the mass, and extreme unction.

Also important for Calvin's mind set here were the dramatic cultural changes swirling around him at this time. To name the main ones:

- the Renaissance discovery of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Bible;
- the broad-based religious and societal reform movement coming from civil law, vigorously opposed by the Papal Church (canon law);
- the paradigm shift from the Ptolemaic view of the world as flat to the Copernican view of the world as round;
- the expansion of the new world across the Atlantic Ocean with new wealth and trade possibilities both to the East (Marco Polo) and to the West (American colonies);
- new technology, such as the invention of the printing press (by Gutenberg in the 1450s) and the Western discovery of how to use gun powder imported from the East.

With these sweeping, often harsh realities in mind, Calvin typically expresses his amazement, in sermons and commentaries as well as the *Institutes*, that people actually believe in the mercy or benevolence of God. When they do, by God's grace alone, the light of God's glory (and mercy) throws everything into bold relief. Here even God's judgment seat looks like «the only safe haven in which they [we—m.j.] can securely breathe» (3.12.4).

The outcome of Calvin's address to these three questions is a realistic, rugged, engaged, vigorous faith in Jesus Christ with all its benefits, reflecting a deeply personal communion with the triune God. *The aim of being Christian for Calvin, you see, is not to make sinners righteous or humans good, but to put sinful humans in communion with God, who is righteous and good altogether.*

Put in terms of the larger theme of this essay, Calvin insists that reconciliation and transformation be so coordinated that one does not collapse into the other. Above all, both are God's to accomplish, not humanity's. They are

from Paris in November 1533 (related to the rector's address of Nicholas Cop); the affair of the *Placards* in October 1534 which led to Calvin's flight now from the whole of France; the burning of his friend and landlord in Paris, Etienne de la Forge, in February 1535; and the repeated martyrdom of French pastors sent out from Geneva.

³⁰ With William Farel, in March–April 1538. See Parker: John Calvin, 66,97–116.

³¹ Is it significant that the word Calvin uses for repentance—*poenitentia*—is the same as the name of the sacrament of penance (*poenitentia*)? See Muller: Dictionary, 229f.

gifts, pure and simple, albeit gifts we participate in eagerly, enjoy fully, and constantly reach for more.

Bibliography of Secondary Literature Consulted

- Barth K.: Church Dogmatics [CD], Vol. IV, Part 2: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Edinburgh 1958.
- Bouwsma W.J.: John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait, New York 1988.
- Braaten C.E.: Justification. The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls, Minneapolis 1990.
- Calvin J.: Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2 vol., ed. by J.T. McNeill, transl. by F.L. Battles, Philadelphia 1961.
- Calvin J.: Opera Selecta, Editio secunda emendata, ed. by P. Barth, W. Niesel, Munich 1957, vol. III–V.
- Forde G.O.: «The Work of Christ» and «Christian Life», in: Christian Dogmatics, vol. 2, Minneapolis 1984, 5–104.305–474.
- Girardin B.: Rhetorique et Theologique, Paris 1979.
- Gundry St.N.: Five Views on Sanctification, Grand Rapids 1987.
- Husbands M., D.J. Treier (ed.): Justification. What's at Stake in the Current Debates, Downers Grove 2004.
- McGrath A.E.: Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, Cambridge 2005.
- McGrath A.E.: A Life of John Calvin, Oxford 1990.
- Millet O.: Calvin et la dynamique de la parole, Geneva 1992.
- Muller R.A.: Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms. Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology, Grand Rapids 1985.
- Muller R.A.: The Unaccommodated Calvin. Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition, New York 2000.
- Oberman H.: Initia Calvini. The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation. Amsterdam 1991.
- Oberman H.: The Harvest of Medieval Theology, Cambridge 1983.
- Oberman H.: The Two Reformations, New Haven 2003.
- Parker T.H.L.: John Calvin. A Biography, Philadelphia 1975.
- Pauck W. (ed.): The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XIX: Melancthon and Bucer, Philadelphia 1969.
- Schmid H.: Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Minneapolis 1875/1887/1899.
- Tamburello D.E.: Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard, Louisville 1994.
- Toon P.: Justification and Sanctification, London 1983.
- Wendel F.: Calvin. Origins and Development of His Religious Thought, New York 1963.
- Zachman R.C.: The Assurance of Faith. Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin, Minneapolis 1993.

Appendix A: Formulas Calvin Rejects

Calvin's treatment of justification and repentance/sanctification as participation in the righteousness of Christ (*iustitia participationis in christo*) excludes any form of human, *self*-righteousness (works of the law, good works, works righteousness), before or after Christ, by unbeliever or believer:

1. by our own good works (3.11.3, 3.14.16) or faith as a good work (3.1.4, 3.15.6)—*iustitia operae* or *iustitia fidei qua operae*.
2. by incarnating the essence of Christ, whether his righteousness or his divinity (3.11.5–12)—*iustitia Dei infusa* (Medieval) or *iustitia essentiali* (Osian-der);
3. by requiring good works in addition to the faith that unites us with Christ (3.11.13–20)—*iustitia fidei et operae* (vs. Lombard & Scholastics);³²
4. by making works the proper response to our salvation/faith or otherwise putting good works into some order of salvation (3.14.17, 21)—*ordo salutis*;
5. by allowing the Spirit/Christ to indwell/inhere us by faith and work itself out spontaneously in good works (3.11.23)—*iustitia fidei inhaerens*;
6. by enabling us (from the righteousness of Christ/the Spirit within) to do the good works (required by the law) after Christ which we could not do before Christ (3.14.10)—a variation of the previous (# 3, 4, or 5);³³
7. by allowing partial righteousness to suffice for the whole (3.14.12–17) or special merit from superior people doing superior works (works of super-erogation, 3.14.13)—a variation of *iustitia operae* (# 1).
8. by allowing *iustitia forensis* or *iustitia imputata* without *iustitia poenitentiae* (3.16.1+).

Appendix B: Calvin, Institutes, 1.17.10 (McNeill/Battles edition)

Hence appears the immeasurable felicity of the godly mind. Innumerable are the evils that beset human life; innumerable, too, the deaths that threaten it. We need not go beyond ourselves: since our body is the receptacle of a thousand diseases—in fact holds within itself and fosters the causes of diseases—a man cannot go about unburdened by many forms of his own destruction, and without drawing out a life enveloped, as it were, with death. For what else

³² By «double acceptance» (3.17.4) Calvin means the justification of both the person and the works. Cf. 3.17.3, 5, 10.

³³ «God does not, as many stupidly believe, once for all reckon to us as righteousness that forgiveness of sins concerning which we have spoken in order that, having obtained pardon for our past life, we may afterward seek righteousness in the law.» (3.14.10, 1536ff.)

would you call it, when he neither freezes nor sweats without danger? Now, wherever you turn, all things around you not only are hardly to be trusted but almost openly menace, and seem to threaten immediate death. Embark upon a ship, you are one step away from death. Mount a horse, if one foot slips, your life is imperiled. Go through the city streets, you are subject to as many dangers as there are tiles on the roofs. If there is a weapon in your hand or a friend's, harm awaits. All the fierce animals you see are armed for your destruction. But if you try to shut yourself up in a walled garden, seemingly delightful, there a serpent sometimes lies hidden. Your house, continually in danger of fire, threatens in the daytime to impoverish you, at night even to collapse upon you. Your field, since it is exposed to hail, frost, drought, and other calamities, threatens you with barrenness, and hence, famine. I pass over poisonings, ambushes, robberies, open violence, which in part besiege us at home, in part dog us abroad. Amid these tribulations must not man be most miserable, since, but half alive in life, he weakly draws his anxious and languid breath, as if he had a sword perpetually hanging over his neck? You will say: these events rarely happen, or at least not all the time, nor to all men, and never all at once. I agree; but since we are warned by the examples of others that these can also happen to ourselves, and that our life ought not to be excepted any more than theirs, we cannot but be frightened and terrified as if such events were about to happen to us. What, therefore, more calamitous can you imagine than such trepidation? Besides that, if we say that God has exposed man, the noblest of creatures, to all sorts of blind and heedless blows of fortune, we are not guiltless of reproaching God. But here I propose to speak only of that misery which man will feel if he is brought under the sway of fortune.

Abstract

Für Calvin ist es das Ziel eines christlichen Lebens, nicht aus Sündern gerechte oder gute Menschen zu machen, sondern Menschen in Verbindung mit Gott zu bringen, der vollkommen gerecht und gut ist. Moderne Auffassungen von Versöhnung und Transformation parallelisieren Rechtfertigung und Heiligung in der reformierten Theologie Johannes Calvins. Wenn aber Versöhnung sich in Transformation oder Rechtfertigung sich in Heiligung auflöst, oder wenn wir das eine dem anderen voranstellen, dann führen wir die Werkgerechtigkeit wieder ein, welche die Reformatoren so heftig bekämpft haben. Calvin vermeidet dieses Ergebnis, indem er Rechtfertigung und Heiligung zu zwei Aspekten unserer Teilhabe an Christus macht. Beide sind unentbehrlich für einander, nicht eines *vor* dem anderen, und beide sind Gaben Gottes.

Dieser Beitrag geht drei Fragen nach:

1. *Transformieren uns Rechtfertigung und/oder Heiligung, d.h. machen sie uns tatsächlich gerecht?* Calvin sagt: «Nein». Beide lassen uns teilnehmen an dem Leben und der Gerechtig-

keit Jesu Christi.

2. *Begründen Rechtfertigung und Heiligung eine Reihenfolge der Erlösung, wo eines vor dem anderen kommt?* Calvin sagt: «Nein.» Als Wirkungen des Glaubens beginnen beide gleichzeitig und laufen parallel zueinander. Nie ist das eine über- oder vorgeordnet, nie das eine ohne das andere.
3. *Müssen Christen sich mit der Furcht vor Gottes Gericht auseinandersetzen und sie überwinden, bevor Rechtfertigung und /oder Heiligung sich bei ihnen auswirken können?* Calvin sagt: «Nein». Die «Furcht vor Gott» ist die Ehrfurcht angesichts der Majestät Gottes, und mit ihr beginnt, dass wir uns bewusst werden, dass Gott gnädig und barmherzig ist.

Merwyn S. Johnson, Charlotte NC