

Christ and the Spirit: The Meaning and Promise of a Reformed Idea¹

Dr. Mark A. Garcia

Adjunct Professor of Church History
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Though a rather narrow topic at first blush, the “economic identity” of Christ and the Spirit brings into view an impressive collection of the perennial questions with which theology continues to be engaged. I have chosen to come at this topic from the perspective of Calvin’s theology, particularly as it informs his exegesis of Romans and opens up this vast theological expanse. Through a brief analysis of union with Christ and story in Calvin’s theology, I will point to several of the more significant features in Calvin’s model and raise some matters for reflection.

Christ Without his Spirit? Medieval Mice and Reformed Theology

The Objectivity of Christ’s Eucharistic Presence

From one perspective, the theological tradition which we call “Reformed” began with a mouse on a medieval church floor. The medieval tradition, made official at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), affirmed a presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements so objective that it is wholly independent of the worthiness of the communicant. This tradition was motivated by a concern to emphasize the objectivity of Christ’s presence in the Mass in order to ensure God does not become dependent on the creature. For theologians, however, this also raised an immediate and pressing question. Is Christ’s presence so definite, so objective, that his transubstantiated body and blood may be consumed not only by an unbeliever but even by an animal, say, a mouse?

Aquinas and the Mouse

Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) provided the definitive answer to this question (whether or not unbelievers partake of Christ in the Supper) as well as the related thought experiment (whether or not animals partake of Christ). He explained that Christ’s bodily presence necessarily persists as long as the accidents of bread and wine remain. And so Aquinas grants the point of the thought experiment: if a crumb of consecrated bread should fall to the floor and be eaten by a mouse, then the body of Christ will in fact have been eaten by a mouse. However, though

¹ Taken from *From Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. by Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), pp. 424-42. Used with permission from P&R Publishing Co. P O Box 817, Phillipsburg, N J 08865 www.prprbooks.com

This is a slightly revised version of a paper read on March 26, 2007 at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. In places it draws selectively from material in *my Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (Studies in Christian History and Thought; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008). To aid the reader, I will point to places in *Life in Christ* where arguments in this paper are given more extensive attention.

Christ's body will have been consumed, it will have been eaten physically, not spiritually. For to use the elements spiritually is to use them properly, that is, to one's spiritual benefit, something of which a mouse is naturally incapable.²

What is true for mice must then be true for unbelievers. In Aquinas' words, "Should even an unbeliever receive the sacramental species, he would receive Christ's body under the sacrament: hence he would eat Christ sacramentally." Or, put differently, both the pious and the impious share a real sacramental eating of Christ, one "perfectly" and the other "imperfectly."³

The Lutheran Version and Calvin's Response

But what do opportunistic mice have to do with Reformed theology? Even though the Lutheran model of eucharistic communion was joined to a rejection of transubstantiation, Aquinas' argument is the line of reasoning Calvin was convinced he encountered in his Lutheran opponents. In his *Second Defense* against the feisty Lutheran Joachim Westphal, Calvin addresses Westphal's conviction that communion in the sacramental *substance* (Christ) is common both to believer and unbeliever, while the spiritual *effect* differs with respect to the presence or absence of faith. Hence both believer and unbeliever partake of the substance of Christ but with differing outcomes – one to life, but the other to judgment.

Calvin objects to both Roman Catholic and Lutheran separations of the "substance" from the spiritual "effect" of Christ. He argues that, on this view, "Christ is rendered lifeless and is severed by sacrilegious divorce from his Spirit and all his virtue."⁴ A careful reading of Calvin's argument, which appears with astounding frequency against Westphal and others, points to a consistent christological-pneumatological *sine qua non* in Calvin's theology: the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit. While on the one hand Christ must never be confused ontologically with the Spirit, on the other hand, in their functional or economic identity, Christ must not be separated from his Spirit. In fact, at one point Calvin framed his entire disagreement with the Lutherans in precisely these terms. Seeing Lutheran thinking on the Supper as but one revealing instance of a broader area of disagreement, Calvin writes: "The matter now disputed between us, that is, whether unbelievers receive the *substance* of the flesh of Christ *without his Spirit*, is peculiarly applicable to the Supper."⁵

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (London: Burns, Oates & Washburne, Ltd., 1920-42), III q.80 a.3. Hereafter, the *Summa Theologica* shall be referred to as ST.

³ ST III. q.80 a.1; cf. a.4.

⁴ John Calvin, *Secunda Defensio, Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, 59 vols., Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Ruess, eds. Included in the *Corpus Reformatorum*, 101 vols., ed. Karl G. Bretschneider, et al, (Halle, Berlin, Leipzig, and Zurich, 1834-1962), 9.89. Hereafter this will be referred to as CO; Theodore Beza, *Tracts and Treatises: With a Short Life of Calvin*, trans. Henry Beveridge, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 2.303. Hereafter this will be referred to as TT.

⁵ Calvin, *Secunda Defensio*, CO 9.90; TT 2.305. The distinction is essentially the same as the distinction in later Reformed orthodoxy of a *manducatio sacramentalis* or *symbolica* from a *manducatio spiritualis* (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985], 183-184). "Sacramental" or "symbolical" eating pertains to all who eat the bread and drink the wine, believer or unbeliever; however, real, "spiritual" eating, i.e., a true partaking of Christ's flesh and blood by the operation of the Spirit, belongs exclusively to those with faith. This seemed to Calvin's Lutheran critics to entail a denial of the real presence of Christ, understood in the ordinary sense of presence, for if Christ is truly present he is

The Spirit of the Anointed Mediator

The Locus of the Economic Identity of Christ and the Spirit

But why should we see Christ and the Spirit as economically one? If it is clear Calvin argues strongly for the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit, we do not yet see where – or, better, when – he locates its origin or grounds. For this we should look to the memorable opening section to Book 3 added in the final revision of his *Institutes*.⁶ Prefacing his famous exposition of saving grace, here Calvin introduces the Spirit as the “bond” of union with Christ. And it is here that Calvin ties the union-work of the Spirit to Christ’s own *baptism* or anointing with the Spirit (3.1.1). Calvin explains that the Father bestowed the Spirit liberally upon the Son to be minister to us of his own liberality. He “laid up” the gifts of the Spirit in Christ in order then to give them to us (3.1.2). In short, Christ cannot be separated from his Spirit because, from the point of his baptism, he is always, as Mediator, the Spirit-anointed Christ and no other.

This conviction stems from Calvin’s larger theology of Christ’s Person and work. As Calvin scholars have noted, Calvin’s model reflects the western christological perspective as rooted in Hilary, Ambrose, and Augustine, in which the distinction rather than inseparability of the natures is emphasized, in contrast with the divinization idea of the East. From the start, this generally western perspective carried with it a natural orientation into soteriological matters, and it certainly did in Calvin’s case. In particular, Calvin’s modification of the traditional person-work use of the Anselmic model in the direction of a whole-person structure functions to clarify that Christ as Mediator “must be considered in and through his office.”⁷ In connection with this “official” or “Mediatorial” focus, Calvin’s frequent emphasis on Christ’s humanity concentrates specifically on his humanity *as sanctified by* or *as gifted with the Spirit*.

As the Spirit-invested incarnate Son of God, however, Christ was anointed in his whole divine-human Person, not only his humanity. For Calvin, the Spirit bestowed upon the incarnate Son the gifts requisite to performing his mediatorial function or role, and these gifts then belonged

present independent of the communicant’s faith or unbelief. To argue otherwise is to make Christ’s promise and God’s work entirely dependent on man, and thus to do dishonor to the glory of Christ. On their view, the unbeliever truly partakes of the flesh and blood of Christ (by way of a *manducatio oralis*, which is not a carnal eating but a *manducatio hyperphysica sive supernaturalis*) but to his condemnation rather than blessing (because the spiritual body and blood are not “digested” in a similar sense that bread and wine are not digested), while the believer by faith receives, through the *manducatio sacramentalis* or *spiritualis*, the merits and graces of Christ.

⁶ On the importance of the timing of his additions to Book 3, and its context in the ongoing Eucharistic controversy, see Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 133, 210, et al., esp. pp. 36-41.

⁷ Richard Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1986), 28, noting also François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet, (1963; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 216-20; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 124, 221-223. It also points to the basically Scotist strain in Calvin’s explanation of the necessity of a Mediator: it is not an absolute necessity but one resulting from God’s ordained will regarding our salvation.

to the entire person by reason of the *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of properties).⁸ So the *communicatio* is not made irrelevant by the accent on messianic baptism; far from it. While Calvin locates the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus, it is the *communicatio* which renders the full God-man the Spirit-anointed Mediator.

In this connection, it is important to notice that Christ and the Spirit are not economically identified simply because they are ontologically united in the Trinity. Their economic identity is not just another way of speaking of their sharing the divine essence. Instead of looking to the Trinity, Calvin looks to the baptism at the Jordan. It is as the baptized, anointed Messiah that Jesus Christ, not in his humanity alone but in his whole Person, performs his work *in the power of the Spirit*, so that there is already, on this christological presupposition, no possibility of separating the intent and effect of Christ's redemptive work from the Person and work of the Spirit. Christ, Calvin writes, "was filled with the Holy Spirit, and loaded with a perfect abundance of all his gifts, that he may impart them to us."⁹ Recalling his objection to his Lutheran counterparts, Calvin's chief contention was thus tied to his Mediator-focused theology of Christ as Redeemer. As the Spirit-anointed Mediator, there is no partaking of Christ that is not at the same time a partaking in his Spirit, no union with Christ that may be divorced from the life-giving Spirit. Not for the faithless, and especially not for a mouse.

From Sacrament to Salvation: No Justification Without Sanctification

But the importance of the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit extended well beyond questions of mice and consecrated wafers. From the start, it is important to recognize Calvin's theological objection to the Lutheran model (one cannot truly partake of Christ without partaking in his life-giving Spirit) as the sacramental form of Calvin's familiar soteriological argument that justification cannot be separated from sanctification (and vice versa). It is only one theological parallel among many, but it is arguably the most important one. And in both contexts, sacramental and soteriological, Calvin's argument rests on the presupposition that the nature of the Christ-Spirit relationship requires a life-giving, transformative effect in all who partake or are truly united to Christ. As he does on many occasions, in his commentary on Romans, Calvin makes this point with recourse to a particularly violent metaphor. In each case, he adds the metaphor in his final revision which, like his 1559 *Institutes*, reflects the ongoing eucharistic controversy.¹⁰ In his comment on 8:9:

*...those who separate Christ from His Spirit make Him like a dead image or a corpse. We must always bear in mind the counsel of the apostle, that free remission of sins cannot be separated from the Spirit of regeneration. This would be, as it were, to tear Christ apart.*¹¹

⁸ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 32. Muller notes that this is not yet the twofold anointing subsequently described by Ursinus, Perkins, and Polanus, though Calvin's idea "does, however, contain the germ of the later conception."

⁹ Cf. with *Westminster Confession of Faith* 8.3.

¹⁰ For an investigation into Calvin's use of this metaphor against the backdrop of classical rhetorical and sixteenth-century controversial-polemical usage, see Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 228-41.

¹¹ Calvin, *Commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, T. H. L. Parker and D. C. Parker, eds. (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1999), 160. Hereafter this will be referred to as *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*; *Calvin's New*

Commenting on Rom 8:13, Calvin notes similarly that Paul adds a severe warning to those who think they are justified by faith but are sluggish in loving righteousness. “It is, indeed, true,” he says, “that we are justified in Christ by the mercy of God alone, but it is equally true and certain, that all who are justified are called by the Lord to live worthy of their vocation.” In 1556 Calvin adds a further note to this comment:

Let believers, therefore, learn to embrace Him, not only for justification, but also for sanctification, as He has been given to us for both these purposes, that they may not *tear him to pieces* by their own mutilated faith.¹²

He also makes the same point, using the same metaphor, in the opening sentence of his commentary on Romans 6, again adding the metaphor in his 1556 revision in the heat of christological-eucharistic controversy.

Union with the Spirit-Anointed Christ and Paul’s Conditional Language

The Challenge of Romans 2

This general argument takes on a specific shape in his exegesis of challenging verses in Romans 2.¹³ When Johannes Eck, a vigorous opponent of Luther, criticized Luther’s doctrine of justification, he did so by citing several Pauline passages (and one from Luke) as part of a brief discussion of how good, living works are acceptable to God and worthy of eternal life, as opposed to works done by the impious, which the Apostle condemns. Eck’s discussion prominently features Rom 2:6, 7 and 13. Most importantly, in almost every case, Eck points to *instances of conditional language*, that is, to places where eternal life is conditioned in some way upon obedience or good works, of which Romans 2 is arguably the most familiar example.

What This Passage Does Not Mean

Among Calvin’s chief concerns, therefore, was the acutely felt obligation to account fully for Paul’s conditional language, perhaps especially in Romans 2. Here the Apostle makes the explicit statement that God “will render to every man according to his works” (v. 6), specifically “to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, [he will give] eternal life” (v. 7). The relationship of 2:13 (“for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified”) to 3:20 (“because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in his sight”) poses a similar interpretative challenge.

Keenly aware of the difficulties connected with the passage, Calvin still remarks both in his commentary and in a parallel passage in his 1539 *Institutes* that “this sentence, however, is not as difficult as it is generally assumed.”¹⁴ Calvin argues that Paul is not explaining the merit of

Testament Commentaries, ed. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 164. Hereafter this will be referred to as CNTC.

¹² Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 163; CNTC, 166-7.

¹³ For what follows, see the fuller discussion in Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 89-148.

¹⁴ Cf. Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 42; CNTC, 44. This important section from 1539 would remain in 1559 as Inst. 3.18.1-10. Cf. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, (Library of Christian Classics 20-21; Louisville: WJKP, 1960), 20.821-33. Hereafter this will be referred to as *LCC* 20-21.

good works accruing to the zealously obedient but is exposing, of necessity, the instability before God of the pseudo-holy, those “unseeing pretenders to sanctity” who mask their wickedness with a veneer of good works. The purpose of Paul’s statement is therefore not the commendation of meritorious works as a ground for divine acceptance, but the identification of the particular character of the righteousness of which God approves.¹⁵ Therefore the reference to works is not positive but negative: “By punishing the wickedness of the reprobate with just vengeance, the Lord will repay them what they deserve,”¹⁶ despite appearances to the contrary counterfeited by superficial holiness.

In his comment on Rom 2:13, Calvin makes a similar argument. Calvin has little patience with those who use this passage to support justification by meritorious works: they “deserve universal contempt.” Instead of supporting justification by works, this passage actually rules out the possibility inasmuch as no one can claim full obedience to the law. At these points, then, Calvin agrees with Melancthon’s basic identification of the statements as, one might say, Law, not Gospel.

The Bigger Picture: A Gospel Context for Conditional Language

But to leave it there, as some are inclined to do, would be a tragic misstep as it would neglect the bigger picture Calvin is concerned to keep in view. Hearing him thus far one might ask, “But Calvin, does not the Apostle also teach that God will reward the works of the righteous with eternal life?” His subsequent comments on this passage confirm that Calvin would reply in the affirmative, and rather strongly at that, explaining how this idea is not in conflict with the doctrine of justification. Quite to the contrary, the certainty of eschatological glory, included in God’s election of believers, implies and ensures his progressive work of renewal within them: “[B]ecause He sanctifies those whom He has previously resolved to glorify, He will also crown their good works.”¹⁷ Still, against the view represented vigorously by Eck and the Sorbonne, Calvin argues that a *meritorious* “crowning” of believer’s works is not the point in Rom 2:6 since Paul is affirming the reward but not the value due to good works.¹⁸ Importantly, however, this distinction does not preclude Calvin’s linking good works with the reward of eternal life, as his remarks on v. 7 make clear. Here, where the Apostle says eternal life is granted to those who patiently pursue glory, honor, and immortality, Calvin states, summing up the Apostle’s argument: “The meaning, therefore, is that the Lord will give eternal life to those who strive to attain immortality by *endeavoring to do good works*.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 42; CNTC, 44. “He has, therefore, pointed out the true righteousness of works which God will value, in case they should confidently assume that it was enough to please Him by bringing words and mere trifles.”

¹⁶ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 42; CNTC, 44.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 42; CNTC, 44.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 42; CNTC, 44. Later, on 2:11, Calvin notes the positive place of regeneration and good works by describing a “twofold acceptance (*duplicem acceptionem*) of men before God.” First, God elects us out of his unmotivated goodness alone, not because of anything attractive in our nature; second, the result of his work of regeneration within us and the bestowal of his gifts upon us is that he “shows favor” to the image of Christ which he sees in us (*Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 45; CNTC, 46). This *duplicem acceptionem* of election and image-favor has clear parallels to his more familiar *duplex gratia*, indicating his strong proclivity for the language of *duplex*.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 43; CNTC, 44.

Order, Sequence, and Pattern: The Hermeneutical-Theological Priority of Romans 8

To understand how Calvin is able to use such strikingly positive language about the place of good works in salvation, we need to observe his use of Scripture to interpret Scripture and, in connection with this, observe how the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit functions in his model. In brief, the ideas of *order*, *sequence*, and *pattern* are of the highest importance to Calvin in his handling of conditional language.

Through the Pursuit of Good Works

Calvin offers a few points of explanation for his take on Romans 2. We are first brought into fellowship or union with Christ by the faith-work of the Spirit. Only then does eternal life “begin” in us and then finally progress to fruition. So for Calvin it is, first, union with Christ by faith and the Spirit, and with this union the true beginning of eternal life, which leads finally to its consummation. The exegetical basis for Calvin’s perspective, however, is six chapters later than his present concern, in the Pauline “order” he locates in Rom 8:29-30. And this passage is crucial for understanding Calvin because it carries a *hermeneutical priority* over conditional passages, functioning very much as a lens through which Calvin reads, in this case, the conditional language of Romans 2. More specifically, Calvin understands the theology of Rom 8:29-30 as the large-scale framework within which Paul’s conditional language must be located.

The point will be clearer when we look briefly at Romans 8, but the basic idea is already amply evident from Calvin’s comment on 2:6 in which he makes a clear allusion to the language of 8:29-30. Calvin explains that God “sanctifies those whom He has previously resolved to glorify” and will, consequently, “also crown their good works.”²⁰ We can perhaps think of it this way: Calvin affirms the reality of these conditions for eternal life because his perspective on this topic is fully governed or controlled by the end in view for all believers – not just chronologically, as in the end of time, but teleologically – the end-result in view for our salvation. In other words, Calvin looks to what the Church will be when grace gives way to glory and, on the basis of the Spirit’s role in bringing about this certain end, and in light of the nature of his ministry in believers, he is able to claim a fully legitimate yet non-meritorious place for conditional language in the context of the gospel. As will soon become clear, this amounts to an eschatological redefinition of the traditional understanding of causation.

Calvin helpfully and more fully elucidates this emphasis on the positive place of Christian obedience in God’s *ordo*, or ordained pattern of salvation, in his 1539 revision of the *Institutes*, on which he was working the same time as he worked on his Romans commentary. Here Calvin

²⁰ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 42; CNTC, 44. Of note is Calvin’s use of the Augustinian idea of the “crowning” of the believer’s works. Peter Martyr Vermigli, in his 1558 commentary, would argue along similar lines: “But works are not of our selves, for they are called the gifts of God, which he works in us. Wherefore Augustine very wisely says: That God doth crown his gifts in us. Now if our works be due unto him (which thing we cannot deny) then undoubtedly the nature of merit is utterly taken away.” More notable still is the parallel between aspects of Calvin’s replication principle (defined below) and the way Vermigli relates works to the reward of eschatological life: “Eternal life is sometimes in the holy scriptures called a reward: But then is it not that reward, which Paul writeth to be given according to debt: but is all one as if it should be called a recompensation. Gods will and pleasure was, that there should be this connection, that after good works should follow blessedness: but yet not as the effect followeth the cause, but as a thing joynd with them by the appointment of God (*In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos commentarii doctissimi...* [Basel, 1558], 40a).”

is more expansive about the issue of “causation,” stating that Paul in Rom 2:6 intends “an order of sequence rather than the cause.” Setting the commentary beside the 1539 *Institutes* is revealing. Here are two statements, practically identical, in which Calvin makes a series of important theological points regarding Rom. 2:6. The passage in the *Institutes* is slightly fuller, and reads:

The statement that God will render to every man according to his works is explained with little difficulty. For the expression indicates an order of sequence rather than the cause. But, beyond any doubt, it is by these stages of his mercy that the Lord completes our salvation when he calls those chosen to himself; those called he justifies; those justified he glorifies. That is to say, he receives his own into life by his mercy alone. Yet, since he leads them into possession of it through the pursuit (*studium*) of good works in order to fulfill his own work in them according to the order that he has laid down, it is no wonder if they are said to be crowned according to their own works, by which they are doubtless prepared to receive the crown of immortality.²¹

This carefully constructed passage is like a well-oiled machine: every part works together. Two of these parts, the sequential and the “order” elements, are clearly important to Calvin’s theology of good works. He sees that it is by “stages of mercy” that God, according to his own sovereign design, “completes our salvation” when he calls us to himself, justifies the called, and glorifies the justified. Indeed, “he leads them into possession of it [i.e., eternal life] *through the pursuit of good works* in order to fulfill his own work in them according to the order that he has laid down...” Through this diligent obedience which characterizes the life of the Christian, one is thus “prepared to receive the crown of immortality.”²² Though Paul does not include sanctification in the Rom 8:29-30 series, Calvin appears to include it under the aegis of glorification as its preparatory and anticipatory precursor in the experience of the redeemed. In this divine sequence, good works are therefore indispensable to the ongoing restoration of the divine image in believers and their ultimate salvation and glory. Believers pass from calling to eschatological glorification and eternal life *through* the “pursuit of good works.” Elsewhere, Calvin’s dependence upon this Pauline *ordo* is equally clear. For instance, he refers to works as “inferior causes,” tying this to God’s “order of dispensation,” and says,

What goes before in the order of dispensation [God] calls the cause of what comes after. In this way he sometimes derives eternal life from works, not intending it to be ascribed to them; but because he justifies those whom he has chosen in order at last to glorify them, he makes the prior grace, which is a step to what follows, as it were the cause.²³

Anticipating concerns, he adds a little later that this does not make believers the authors of their own salvation, or make salvation to stem from their good works. Rather, the good work which

²¹ 1539 *Inst.* In the margin next to this passage, Calvin (or possibly his editors) placed references to Romans 2 and 8 near the quite obvious allusions to these Pauline texts.

²² Calvin, *Inst.* (1539) 3.18.1; LCC 20.821.

²³ Calvin, *Inst.* (1539) 3.14.21; LCC 20.787. In 1559, Calvin adds an additional clarification, again expounding on the relationship of sequence and cause: “In short, by these expressions sequence more than cause is denoted. For God, by heaping grace upon grace, from the former grace takes the cause for adding those which follow that he may overlook nothing for the enrichment of his servants. And he so extends his liberality as to have us always look to his freely given election, which is the source and beginning.”

God has begun in his own he will certainly complete, but it is only complete when his people resemble their Father in righteousness and holiness, thus proving their identity as his children.

The Christ-Pattern: Suffering, then Glory

This leaves us to add one last layer of detail in Calvin's portrait for a finished picture. And this last layer is also the most pastorally important.

What we have observed in Calvin's exposition of Rom 2:6-7 is his concern for a particular sequence of obedience-then-eternal life. We have also seen, albeit briefly, that his perspective is fully controlled by the end in view: the certainty of the Church's eschatological glory combined with the nature of the Spirit's work in his glory producing ministry results in a contextualization of conditional language along the lines of sequence. But what Calvin's comments on Romans 8 make clear is that this sequence is itself grounded in Christ, or more specifically, the Spirit-anointed Christ with whom believers have been united. In short, the existential character of saving union with Christ is that of a replica, in the experience of believers, of the pattern of Christ's own historical experience. Baptized with the same Spirit that brought Christ from death to resurrection, humiliation to exaltation, suffering to glory, the Church in union with Christ, by that same Spirit, also goes from death to resurrection, humiliation to exaltation, suffering to glory. Here, in this Christ-sequence, one is able to discern the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit functioning to resolve a crucial exegetical and theological question.

It is this sequence that Calvin has in view in Romans 2, and which is unfolded strikingly in Romans 6 when he modifies the *imitatio Christi* tradition in his discussion of baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. But it comes more fully into view with his reflections on Romans 8.

In the Apostle Paul's teaching in Romans 8, one encounters this Christ-pattern in connection with Christian suffering and the conditional nature of adoption. This is particularly important since, in this chapter, Paul states that the blessing of adoption entails becoming fellow-heirs with Christ of the eschatological reward of eternal life. For Calvin, the key to Paul's point here is simple: only those who suffer like Christ are truly God's children. But this suffering is neither a cruel twist of fate nor a mere "imitation of Christ" effort on our part. It is in fact the Spirit's work of replication of the pattern of Christ, something Calvin regards as indispensable to salvation.

Perhaps surprisingly, this Christ-pattern is included in the content of predestination. When the Apostle in Rom 8:28 points sufferers to the divine purpose, Calvin says Paul's predestination language is specifically referred to suffering so that predestination is specifically predestination *to cross-bearing*. The source of election is (ultimately) the same as the source of suffering. In the divine decree, suffering in Christ is laid out as the path of conformity to Christ and as a prerequisite of heaven.²⁴ Predestination, one might say, has in view the means as well as the end of the Church's story.

All of this comes together in the way Calvin interprets the conditional language in Rom 8:17, which reads: "If children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."²⁴ Calvin explains that we are

²⁴ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 175-6; CNTC, 179-81.

fellow-heirs of Christ only if we, with a view to our inheritance, follow the pattern of our Leader. Expanding on his point, Calvin sums up the Apostle's chain of reasoning:

Paul made this mention of Christ, because he intended to pass on to this exhortation by these steps: "The inheritance of God is ours, because we have been adopted by His grace as His sons. To remove any doubt, the possession of it has already been conferred on Christ, with whom we are made partakers. But Christ went to that inheritance by the cross. *We, therefore, must go to it the same way.*"²⁵

Hence cross-shaped suffering is the ordinary path to the believer's inheritance. However, this should not suggest that our suffering-obedience causes our eternal glory in an unqualified sense. Scripture is identifying the "order" that God follows "in ministering salvation to us, rather than its cause."²⁶ The first cause of salvation in this divine order is God's sovereign act of adoption in Christ, but this act includes the real necessity that suffering conform us to his holy image.²⁷ As he puts it in his comment on 8:29, God has determined that his adopted children will bear the distinct image of the Christ of death and resurrection. Free salvation is thus inseparable from the calling to bear the cross. In fact, he says, "*No one can be an heir of heaven who has not first been conformed to the only begotten Son of God.*"²⁸ Indeed, he writes,

Conformity to the humility of Christ is our salvation. In this [Paul] teaches that our participation in the cross is so connected with our vocation, justification, and finally our glory, that *they cannot in any way be separated.*²⁹

So Calvin is not opposed in principle to the language of *exemplar* or even imitation of Christ; nor is he uncomfortable with the idea of the believer's present sanctification (the pneumatic preparatory precursor to final glorification) as a true condition of eternal life. But the distinguishing mark of his doctrine is that this imitation-like process belongs to the Spirit's larger project of replication. It is indeed because of this principle that the works/sufferings/obedience of believers do not compromise the reality of a gracious justification *sola fide* as in the semi-Pelagian presuppositions of the "imitation of Christ" traditions. Instead they serve to confirm the truth that all of salvation must be sought in Christ as Head, and that all aspects of a believing response are ultimately the work of his Spirit.

²⁵ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 167; CNTC, 171.

²⁶ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 167; CNTC, 171. Note also Calvin's integration of the ideas of decree, adoption, and inheritance in his comments on 8:23.

²⁷ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 176; CNTC, 179-80. Also, his abiding concern with merit in Christian works leads Calvin immediately to add an important qualification to his note on Rom. 2:6: "but not on account of merit."

²⁸ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 177; CNTC, 181. More fully, "Paul meant only that God had determined that all whom He has adopted should bear the image of Christ. He did not simply say that they should be conformed to Christ, but to the image of Christ, in order to teach us that in Christ there is a living and conspicuous example (*exemplar*) which is set before all the sons of God for their imitation. The sum of the passage is that free adoption, in which our salvation consists, is inseparable from this other decree: that He had appointed us to bear the cross. *No one can be an heir of heaven who has not first been conformed to the only begotten Son of God*" (emphasis mine).

²⁹ Calvin, *Comm. Epist. ad Romanos*, 177-78; CNTC, 181 (emphases mine).

Summary

We may now restate these points in summary form before raising some matters for further reflection. In rejecting the Lutheran argument that the faithless truly partake of Christ but not his Spirit, Calvin argues that Christ is identified economically with his Spirit. And this economic identity of Christ and the Spirit has implications. Because by virtue of this economic identity Christ is never where his Spirit is not, no one or nothing – not even a medieval mouse nibbling on a consecrated wafer – truly partakes of Christ in the Supper without partaking of his life-giving Spirit. For the same reason, in a soteriological context, no one is truly joined to Christ for justification who is not sanctified by his Spirit. To divorce the reality and necessity of sanctification from justification is in effect to tear Christ from his Spirit. This conviction finds expression in the way Paul’s conditional language is to be understood. The certainty of final, eschatological glory informs the way we understand the means to that end. Because glorification is sure, and because the present sanctifying work of the Spirit is the ordinary prerequisite to the consummation of his work, we can speak properly of obedience, good works, or faithful suffering as conditions of eternal life. They are “conditions” because, in the divine sequence or pattern, “what goes before may be called the cause of what comes after,” to use Calvin’s language. But we can also say something specific about this pattern: it is Christ-shaped. And this accentuates the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit. Because union with Christ is always union with the Spirit-anointed Christ who went from obedience to resurrection life, humiliation to exaltation, suffering to glory – and who did so in history – this is precisely what our union with Christ by the same Spirit looks like: obedience to eternal life, humiliation to exaltation, suffering to glory. The pattern that the Church exhibits is the pattern fleshed out in her Head. Put simply, there is no other Christ than this Christ; and so there is no union with Christ apart from participation in his story.

Reflections

Inevitably these matters raise related ones, and I would like to tease out of Calvin’s model the following points for consideration.

Economic Identity and Reformed Theology

First, a historical-theological point may be offered. What I have rehearsed here is only a snapshot of a much larger image of the emergence of the Reformed theological tradition. But it seems to me beyond question that, because what we call “Reformed” has its origins as a distinct perspective on eucharistic union with Christ, we need to appreciate that, with a view to its wide-ranging implications, the Reformed theology of union with Christ lies in significant ways at the theological heart of what it means to be Reformed.³⁰ Even more particularly, we should

³⁰ However, this is not to say that union with Christ is the *central dogma* of Reformed theology, i.e., that it is the idea that governs all of theological system and on which that system ought to be built. Neither do I intend to suggest here, nor have I ever suggested, that union with Christ is Calvin’s *central dogma*, and certainly not on the basis of the Institutes alone. For an example of confusion on this question, see Thomas Wenger, “The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to the Recent Calvin Interpretations,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (2007): 311-328, who refers to several writers as representatives of this view who, to my knowledge, in fact do not argue for a union with Christ *central dogma* as this term has been understood in Calvin scholarship. Wenger confuses their approach with the Barthian-Torrancian (et al.) approach which puts Calvin in almost unqualified tension with his successors. In one of their many misrepresentations of my review article, W. Robert Godfrey and David

recognize that there is such a thing as a Reformed theology of union with Christ, one which has at its core a conviction regarding the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit. It is this christological-pneumatological infrastructure of union with Christ which was cross-applied in sacramental and soteriological contexts in Calvin's theology, and which in just two decades served to distinguish Reformed theology along more than eucharistic lines.

The Indispensability of (Real) History and Ontology

Beyond this general observation we can raise a second point, this time about Calvin's model itself. It is crucial to appreciate what Calvin accomplishes: his move toward a whole-person, three-fold office theology of Christ as Mediator, which entails the baptism-to-resurrection story of this Mediator, is a strong affirmation of the indispensability of *history*. Because in contemporary theology it seems we cannot fully shake off the idea that history is in some sense less important than the communication of a message or idea, that revelation is identifiable not with *histoire* but with *geschichte*, this alone makes his model very timely. To turn Cornelius Van Til's critique of Barth into a positive statement, Calvin's replication model clarifies further why there *must be* a transition from wrath to grace, from cross to resurrection, from humiliation to exaltation, from suffering to glory *in history*, or the Church's life in union with Christ is without shape, meaning, or hope.

In light of theological construals which oppose metaphysics to story, we should also observe how Calvin makes this move without leaving behind the classic, ontologically-oriented two-natures model. Instead, the three-fold mediatorial office of Christ functions as an extension and enlargement of the classical two-natures model. As his persistent critique of the ontology of the Lutheran model makes clear, two-natures Christology hardly recedes into the background because of the three-fold office. He sees no need to choose between ontology and redemptive history. While for Calvin the eternal, trinitarian status of the incarnate Son is clearly more ultimate and controlling, the office and, yes, the baptism-to-resurrection story that the incarnate Son assumed and lived out are far from marginalized. It is in fact in connection with Christ's eternal divine status, or perhaps better in extension from it, that an equally robust, redemptive-historically focused exposition of Christ's mediatorship and of his story emerges clearly into view.

Baptism or Resurrection?

This leads to a third observation. As we have seen, Calvin's model ordinarily focuses on baptism as the point of Spirit-investiture (there are exceptions, but this is certainly typical). Now, there is a clear benefit to this: baptism-anointing accents the parallel of Christ's story to the Church's story in terms of what one might call a common point of departure: baptism. But we also need to recognize a significant liability: put simply, identifying the baptism at the Jordan as the point of

VanDrunen use Wenger's mistaken thesis as a criticism of my own analysis of Calvin in their "Response to Mark Garcia's Review of *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*" in *Ordained Servant Online* (December, 2007). Accessed April 14, 2018. But see Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 15-19, where I discuss the *central dogma* theory and reject it, pointing out only some of its flaws. Further, despite Wenger's argument (and Godfrey's and VanDrunen's assumption) that appreciation for the controlling prominence of union with Christ within Calvin's theology of salvation is somehow new, the reality is that this has long been a matter of common knowledge among both scholarly and non-scholarly readers of Calvin's works (cf. Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 11-45).

the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit *over-reads* the baptism. It does so as it ascribes to baptism what Paul clearly ascribes to the resurrection. To illustrate, Calvin rightly denies that the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit is exclusively ontological, but then pulls from Paul's on the resurrection to make a point he ordinarily makes by reference to the baptism. He writes, "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... In this sense he is called the 'Second Adam', given from heaven as 'a life-giving spirit'" (3.1.2). If Calvin is occasionally unclear on this point, we should not be unclear, because it is indeed the resurrection, not the baptism, which for Paul serves as the redemptive-historical, theological ground for the economic identity of Christ and the Spirit. To pull from the place Calvin himself used, it is at resurrection that Paul says Christ *became* life-giving Spirit (1 Cor 15:45).

Now, in moving in this direction, I have in view the development of Reformed reflection on this topic, particularly as that development has taken place in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos and especially in the work of Richard Gaffin. And for this reason it is useful to highlight, albeit briefly, some striking comments in Vos's landmark lecture, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit." In his lecture Vos notes perceptively, in a discussion of the OT anticipation of the Messiah as bearer of the Spirit, that "[N]ot merely the ethical but also the eschatological life of the resurrection is derived from the Messiah" and, in this connection, that "What God did for Jesus, He will do for the believer also." Also, just as Calvin insisted, Vos adds that "... [W]e must take into account the Christological background of the soteriological process. The pneumatic life of the Christian is a *product and a reflex of the pneumatic life of the Christ*. It is a life ἐν πνεύματι to the same extent as it is a life ἐν Χριστῷ."³¹ This awaits a fuller treatment, certainly, but we can appreciate that this "product and reflex of the pneumatic life of the Christ" to which Vos points is precisely what Calvin intuited from the same Apostle Paul, and Vos, because of his understanding of Paul's eschatology, gives it a clearer, more exegetically grounded expression.

What might one say about this intriguing connection? We are familiar, I trust, with the argument that, as a discipline, the covenant-historical hermeneutical and theological approach fathered in most respects by Vos is only the faithful application of the classical Reformed doctrine of Scripture as this doctrine is expressed, e.g., in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1. I completely agree with this assessment, though it is not possible to discuss the question here. But let me also suggest that Reformed biblical theology in this general tradition is, in terms of the concern in this paper, also the application of the classical Reformed *Christology*, particularly with a view to the relationship of Christ to the eschatological Spirit and in terms of the implications of this relationship for the shape of salvation in union with Christ. It would appear this is a connection which merits further sustained reflection.

Union with Christ and the Church's Story

On a fourth and final note, Calvin properly understands Paul's teaching on union with Christ to entail a commendation of Christ's own story for the Church's self-understanding. As Calvin understands Paul, union with the resurrected Christ means, yes, that we are united to the One who is exalted beyond the cross and the grave, never more to be touched by the cold, deathly

³¹ Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1990), 98, 101, and 113, respectively.

fingers of a cursed, fallen, and passing age. But it is much more than that. Union with the resurrected Christ means that the end of our story, as the Church, is in these respects nothing less than the end of his story. Believers too have a present though provisional identity, and a certain future, which is imbued with glory and not with shame, life and not with death, rest and not suffering. To pull from Vos's lecture once more, "[T]he argument from the analogy between Jesus and the believer is further strengthened by the consideration that the instrument through which God accomplished this in Jesus is *already present* in the readers."³² For the Christian sufferer, the one whose faith is sometimes shaken by the strong winds of temptation or discouragement, the gospel announces that the Spirit of the exalted, resurrected Lord – the Spirit of glory who produces glory – is already present in the Church and active in bringing pilgrims to their inheritance.

Conclusion

This investigation started with a mouse on a church floor. Since then, that mouse has pointed the way to Calvin's rich teaching on Christ and the Spirit in the sacraments and in salvation. Here once again, as is so often the case, careful reflection on Calvin's theology has opened up wider and wider vistas of the theological terrain that we as Reformed theologians delight to traverse. In this respect, if what we have considered briefly uncovers some of the rich meaning of our Reformed theological identity, certainly we can appreciate it also holds much promise for the ongoing maturation and development of Reformed theology as well.

³² Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," 101.