

CALVIN VERSUS DARWIN: ANNIVERSARIES, ORIGINS AND WORLD-VIEWS¹ (3)

Rev. Angus Stewart

The Significance of Calvin

But what about *Calvin* versus Darwin (and the evolutionary world-view)? Why especially should we highlight Calvin (and the Reformed faith he helped shape)? Why is this the key in the creation versus evolution debate?

Whereas evolutionism seeks to remove the Lord of glory from every aspect of His universe and from every field of knowledge or activity, Calvin was a “God-intoxicated man.”² Calvin’s theology, perhaps more than that of any Christian dogmatician, is theocentric theology: it is all about God—*solī Deo gloria*. Calvin was rightly dubbed “The Theologian” by Melancthon, and was so considered by his contemporaries.

Moreover, Calvin’s theology is a world-view (and this is true of Reformed theology which takes its cue from Calvin). This is vital because evolutionism is a world-view and needs to be fought with an opposing world-view. Calvin proclaims clearly, consistently and forcefully, “God is here and in the entire universe. He is not silent for He has not left Himself without a witness. He is the creating, ruling, redeeming and judging God. He is the Triune God—God the Father, God the Word and God the Holy Spirit—who must be thanked, worshipped and served.”

Within this framework and contrary to the naturalistic approach of evolutionism, Calvin exhorts us to “learn to contemplate the works of God” and see His “hand” in His creation:

¹ This article is an expansion of a speech given in N. Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Wales and the United States in 2009. An audio (www.cprf.co.uk/audio.htm#special) and a video of the speech (www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI#grid/user/07E1E2A78051B101), are available on-line. The CD or DVD (£1 each, inc. P&P) can be ordered from Mary Stewart (7 Lislunnan Road, Kells, N Ireland BT42 3NR or 028 25 891851).

² Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, p. 93.

Let us always recognize the hand of God, and let us not be like unbelievers, who much amuse themselves by seeking out nature's secrets while forgetting [or even burying] God, who is the principle figure. That lets us see the hand of God in all his instruments and realize that he uses them with such freedom that he could do without them if he chose to, and that he does so to be glorified and to lift us up to himself. And let us use them as mirrors by which he shows us his face, that is, reveals to us his powers, because of which he deserves to be glorified by us.³

Creation, the Theatre of God's Glory

Calvin's doctrine of creation is robust and faithful to the Holy Scriptures. God made all things out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) by the Word of His power about six thousand years ago.⁴ This work took neither a single moment (as some in Calvin's day reckoned) nor billions of years (as many in our day conjecture) but six days.⁵ Calvin argues, "by this circumstance," that "God's work was completed ... in six days," "we are drawn away from all fictions to the one God who distributed his work into six days that we might not find it irksome to occupy our whole life in contemplating it."⁶

Calvin rightly views Genesis, including its opening chapters, not as myth, legend or saga, or even poetry, but as "history," with Genesis 1f. giving us "the history of Creation."⁷ In the "Argument" at the start of his commentary

³ Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, p. 142.

⁴ E.g., Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.1, pp. 160, 161. Calvin roots the denial of the young universe in wicked unbelief: "Profane men ... will not refrain from guffaws when they are informed that but little more than 5,000 years have passed since the creation of the universe" (3.21.4, p. 925). David J. Engelsma notes that for Calvin the young earth confronts us with the contrasting eternity of God (*The Reformed Faith of John Calvin* [Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2009], pp. 88-89; cf. *Institutes* 1.14.1, p. 160).

⁵ E.g., Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, pp. 14, 116, 123, 125, 127, etc.; cf. *Westminster Confession* 4:1.

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.2, p. 161. W. Gary Crampton is correct: Calvin "would have nothing to do with a day-age or a literary framework theory" (*What Calvin Says* [Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1992], p. 40).

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.1, p. 160.

Calvin Versus Darwin

on Genesis, Calvin is emphatic that the first book of the Bible, the book of beginnings, records what actually happened, real “history.”⁸ The first sentence of the “Argument” includes this line: “THE HISTORY OF THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.”⁹ *Institutes* 1.14.20 provides some of Calvin’s clearest remarks in this regard. The Genevan Reformer speaks of Moses as having “faithfully and diligently recorded the *narrative* of Creation [Gen., chs. 1 and 2].”¹⁰ He also writes of “the history of the creation of the universe, *as it has been set forth* [and not in any other way!] briefly by Moses [Gen., chs. 1 and 2].”¹¹

The Father formed the universe by His hand. God created by His divine and personal Word, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3), etc., and the Spirit was brooding upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). The Triune God is creator and, contrary to Darwin, *He* is the origin of species, for He made them “after their kind” (Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25).¹² Calvin’s teaching is not compatible with, and totally irreconcilable to, evolutionism.¹³

Unlike the closed universe of atheistic, materialist naturalism, Calvin, following Holy Scripture, believes in the existence of angels and demons. Indeed, the bulk of *Institutes* 1.14, which treats the creation of the *universe*—*Institutes* 1.15 deals with *man* as created—is given to a (non-speculative) discussion of angels and devils.¹⁴

This is the very first sentence of Calvin’s *Institutes*: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”¹⁵ This is why evolutionism is so pernicious:

⁸ Calvin, Comm. on Gen., pp. 57, 58, 59, 64, 65.

⁹ Calvin, Comm. on Gen., p. 57.

¹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.20, p. 180.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.20, p. 179.

¹² In language echoed in the first paragraph of *Belgic Confession* 12, Calvin states that God “endowed each kind [of living creature] with its own nature, assigned functions, appointed places and stations ... and provided for the preservation of each species” (*Institutes* 1.14.20, p. 180; cf. *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, pp. 48-50, 80-81, 84-85).

¹³ Cf. Erik Guichelaar, “Creation, Providence and Divine Accommodation: John Calvin and Modern Theories of Evolution” (www.limerickreformed.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23:calvins-doctrine-of-creation&catid=13:creation&Itemid=12).

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.3-19, pp. 162-179.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1, p. 35.

it destroys the knowledge of both God and ourselves. The person who believes evolutionism does not know who he is or where he came from; he thinks he is an evolved monkey. He does not know where the planet on which he is living or the universe came from; he thinks all originated with a huge explosion. True wisdom is to know God and oneself; without this, the evolutionist is a fool. The very first Scripture alluded to in the *Institutes* is Acts 17:28: “in [God] we live, and move, and have our being.”¹⁶ This must be asserted and maintained over against Darwin and his followers.

Book 1 of the four books of the *Institutes* is entitled “The Knowledge of God the Creator.” Notice that it is not “God the Creator;” it is very deliberately “*The Knowledge of God the Creator.*” With this title Calvin is affirming not only that God is creator but also that *we must know Him as creator*. Unless you know God as creator, you cannot know Him as the governor of the world; you cannot know Him as the redeemer of the elect; you cannot know Him as the judge. By rejecting God as creator, evolution makes the knowledge of God—the true God, and not merely some idol—impossible.

In his *Institutes*, commentaries, sermons and other writings, Calvin refers frequently and characteristically to the creation as the “theatre of God’s glory” that reveals His majesty: “God has put us in this world as in a theatre to contemplate his glory.”¹⁷ Thus, Calvin declares, “wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern some sparks of his glory.”¹⁸

Calvin waxes eloquent when describing the beauty and wonder of God’s creation. This aspect of the man, however, is not widely recognised. Those

¹⁶ Calvin continues, “our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God” (*Institutes* 1.1.1, p. 35).

¹⁷ Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, p. 6. For other references to this “theatre” in Calvin’s works, see, e.g., *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, pp. 12, 122, 124, 127; *Institutes* 1.5.8, p. 61; 1.6.2, p. 72; 1.14.20, p. 179; 2.6.1, p. 341; Comms. on Gen. p. 64; 1:6; Ps. 19:7; Heb. 11:3. Hence the title of Susan E. Schreiner’s work on Calvin’s teaching on the created order: *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991).

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.1, p. 52. Henry Van Til remarks, “For Calvin beauty is nothing more than the shining forth of the majesty and glory of this God. Therefore, to divorce beauty from God is idolatry” (*The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, pp. 107-108).

Calvin Versus Darwin

who abhor Calvin's strong biblical and Reformed theology have maligned him as a boor with no aesthetic sense. Others, who have not read Calvin for themselves, have thereby gained a false impression of the French Reformer. To correct this misapprehension, T. H. L. Parker recommends "reading in the *Commentary on Genesis*, or that on the *Psalms*, or Book I, chapter 5 of the *Institutio*."¹⁹ To this we would add that one should peruse Calvin's *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, especially the homilies on Genesis 1-3. Parker reckons that while Calvin "praises the beauty and wonders of the earth, he is still more moved by the majesty of the heavens."²⁰ After providing several appropriate quotations from Calvin to sustain his point, Parker continues, "Yet, lovely and magnificent as are the heavens and the earth, there is an even more wonderful example of God's handiwork—man, the crown of God's creation."²¹ Calvin speaks of man as a microcosm or little world or world in miniature:

Certain philosophers, accordingly, long ago not ineptly called man a microcosm, because he is a rare example of God's power, goodness, and wisdom, and contains within himself enough miracles to occupy our minds, if only we are not irked at paying attention to them.²²

But the evolutionist wants to deny the creator and sustainer of the theatre and rob God of His glory. This is how Engelsma expresses the issue between Calvin and creation versus Darwin and evolution:

This, then, is at stake in the contemporary struggle for the biblical truth of creation. Shall this creation be viewed as

¹⁹ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 14.

²⁰ Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp. 14-15.

²¹ Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p. 16.

²² Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.3, p. 54. For more on man as a "microcosm," see *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, p. 90. Contrast Darwin, as he thought more and more within his evolutionary world-view: "Near the end of his life, Darwin acknowledged several times in his writings that two things had become dull to him as he got older. The first was his joy in the arts; and the second, his joy in nature. This is very intriguing. Darwin offered his proposition that nature, including man, is based only on the impersonal plus time plus chance, and he had to acknowledge at the end of life that it had these adverse effects on him" (Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970], p. 11; cf. Boorstin, *The Discoverers*, pp. 471-472).

the theater of God's glory, or shall it be regarded as the accidental outcome of the blind forces of natural powers over billions of years?²³

Romans 1 teaches that the visible things of our universe do not indicate evolution through time and chance; the visible things reveal for us the invisible creator and "his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20). This is what the universe all around us witnesses; this is what your body proclaims; this is what your mind says: "God!" This true God must be thanked and praised (Rom. 1:21). But foolish and depraved man does not want to do this (Rom. 1:21-22). He is inexcusable (Rom. 1:20), for he suppresses and holds down the truth (Rom. 1:18) with idolatry (Rom. 1:21-23), which, particularly in our highly sophisticated pagan society, takes the form of the "lie" of evolutionism (Rom. 1:25).²⁴

Calvin is emphatic that there is in every human being a sense of divinity (*sensus divinitatus*).²⁵ Everyone knows it; it is innate, inbuilt and ineradicable in every human being, and "God daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe ... men cannot open their eyes without being compelled

²³ Engelsma, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin*, p. 89.

²⁴ Three times in the very first sentence of his first sermon on the first book of the Bible, dealing with Genesis 1:1-2, Calvin speaks of the ungodly suppressing God's revelation of Himself through His creation: "Even though [1] men maliciously try to obscure God's glory, it is certain they cannot open their eyes and look in any direction without seeing evidence that leads to knowledge of him, [2] knowledge which they would flee and [3] would like to bury completely if they could" (*Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, p. 1). In the same sermon, Calvin adds, "And it is with the knowledge of God we needed to begin. But we would prefer never to have heard of him" (p. 2). "Paul condemns men for closing their eyes and shutting down all their senses so as not to look upon the things that are designed to show God's majesty and give a definite witness to his being the Creator" (p. 4). Elsewhere, Calvin writes, "the world ... tries as far as it is able to cast away all knowledge of God" (*Institutes* 1.3.3, p. 46).

²⁵ Calvin states, "a sense of divinity is by nature engraved on human hearts" (*Institutes* 1.4.4, p. 51). Edward A. Dowey Jr. lists the "empirical effects of the *sensus divinitatus*" for Calvin: "(1) the universality of religion, which because of sin means the universality of idolatry, accompanied by (2) the servile fear of God and (3) the troubled conscience. These three together are implicated in the inexcusability of all men" (*The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994], pp. 52-53).

Calvin Versus Darwin

to see him.”²⁶ God is and He is the creator and Lord of all things who must be worshipped. Related to this is Calvin’s strong doctrine of “conscience” so that all—even pagans who have not heard the law or the gospel of the Scriptures—know the difference between right and wrong. All are inexcusable before God for their idolatry and their sinful thoughts, words and deeds. All know that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18). This is what evolutionism, with crusading zeal, wants to drive out of man’s mind. This is what Calvin and the Reformed faith and faithful churches, following the Bible, seek to bring home to fallen men in need of redemption in Jesus Christ: “the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

Providence, God’s Orderly Government and Hand

Flowing from creation, Calvin has an equally robust doctrine of providence.²⁷ God is not merely active at the start of the world; His fatherly hand does not draw back after creation; it stays in creation, everywhere in the world, every second of every day. God, with all of His infinite being—His wisdom, justice, holiness, truth, goodness and mercy—is present and active in all of heaven and earth, as the One who fills, governs and directs all things.²⁸ He must never be viewed as absent or “indolent” or “idle.”²⁹

For Calvin, God’s providential rule lavishes man with all kinds of good things, that we may glorify Him:

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.1, p. 52. At the beginning of his “Argument” introducing the book of Genesis, Calvin writes movingly, “We see, indeed, the world with our eyes, we tread the earth with our feet, we touch innumerable kinds of God’s works with our hands, we inhale a sweet and pleasant fragrance from herbs and flowers, we enjoy boundless benefits; but in those very things of which we attain some knowledge, there dwells such an immensity of divine power, goodness, and wisdom, as absorbs all our senses” (Comm. on Gen., p. 57).

²⁷ The Reformer’s treatment of providence is found at the end of *Institutes* book 1, dealing with “The Knowledge of God the Creator” (1.16-18, pp. 197-237). Calvin’s stress on the inseparable union between creation and providence (e.g., 1.16.1, pp. 197-198) is echoed in the *Heidelberg Catechism*’s exposition of the first article of the *Apostles’ Creed* (Lord’s Days 9-10).

²⁸ Cf. Engelsma: “Although Calvin does not, as far as I know, use the term, providence affirms God’s *immanence*, that is, God’s presence in the creation, God’s nearness to the creation and to every creature in the creation” (*The Reformed Faith of John Calvin*, p. 104; italics mine).

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.16.3-4, pp. 200-203.

There is no man of a mind so dull and stupid but may see if he will be at the trouble to open his eyes, that it is by the wonderful providence of God that horses and oxen yield their service to men,—that sheep produce wool to clothe them—and that all sorts of animals supply them with food for their nourishment and support, even from their own flesh. And the more that this dominion is apparent, the more ought we to be affected with a sense of the goodness and grace of our God as often as we either eat food, or enjoy any of the other comforts of life ... the legitimate order which God originally established no longer shines forth, but the faithful whom God gathers to himself, under Christ their head, enjoy so much of the fragments of the good things which they lost in Adam, as may furnish them with abundant matter of wonder at the singularly gracious manner in which God deals with them.³⁰

This is a far cry from evolution's godless, materialist universe of blind chance!

Everything in the universe, including good and bad angels, even sin is “directed by God's ever-present hand.”³¹ Calvin is emphatic that God's providence governs the fall of our first parents in Genesis 3—it was not a “bare permission”—as well as His judgment in all the actual transgressions and billions of deaths that flow from it.³² Even the terrible sin of the cross comes in God's providence too (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

In setting forth the biblical doctrine of providence, Calvin constantly has one great enemy in his sights: chance. With providence as with creation, the Genevan Reformer thunders, “nothing takes place by chance”!³³ Instead of

³⁰ Calvin, Comm. on Ps. 8:7.

³¹ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.16.2, p. 199.

³² E.g., Calvin, *Institutes* 1.18.1-5, pp. 228-237; 3.23.7-8, pp. 955-957; John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, trans. Henry Cole (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2009), pp. 191-196, 224-228; cf. *Westminster Confession* 5:4.

³³ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.16.4, p. 203; cf., e.g., 1.16.2, pp. 198-199; 1.16.8-9, pp. 207-210. In this connection, Calvin quotes an eastern church father with approval: “Basil the Great has truly said that ‘fortune’ and ‘chance’ are pagan terms, with whose significance the minds of the godly ought not to be occupied” (1.16.8, p. 207).

Calvin Versus Darwin

fortune and chance, Calvin stresses order and purpose in God's creation and providence.³⁴ There is no chance; there is no fortune; all things are governed by God's fatherly "hand."³⁵

In this, Calvin is attacking something fundamental in evolutionism, for evolution requires vast amounts of time *and chance*! It has been said that given enough time with enough chance, a troop of monkeys on keyboards will type up Shakespeare's complete works. But the monkeys will never type up even one of Shakespeare's plays no matter how long they are given. Even if they did, a single human being will never evolve out of slime.³⁶

Immanence, God's Closeness to His People

Not only did God create the world and not only does He govern the world; God also *came into* the world in Jesus Christ. God's immanence (or in-ness) is not just His immanence in the universe through creation and providence; it is His immanence on earth through the incarnation. God became man, living in our universe and on our planet, like us a human being! We are redeemed by one who is both fully God and fully man. He is the mediator between God and man. In Him, God comes to us; through Him, we come to God. By Jehovah's grace, we are always close, always in God's presence through our representative and saviour. Calvin writes,

Hence, it was necessary for the Son of God to become for us "Immanuel, that is, God with us" [Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23], and in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together. Otherwise the nearness would not have been near enough, nor the affinity sufficiently firm, for us to hope that God might dwell with us.³⁷

³⁴ Cf. Schreiner: "While he presupposed and used traditional Christian doctrines, Calvin's thought is characterized by his own particular emphases. Central to all his discussions about creation is the concept of order" (*The Theater of His Glory*, p. 3). By "creation" here, Schreiner is referring to the whole created order, including providence, as the context makes clear.

³⁵ E.g., Calvin, *Institutes* 1.16.1, p. 198; 1.16.8-9, pp. 207-210.

³⁶ For more on creation and providence, see this on-line Creation Resources page (www.cprf.co.uk/creationresources.htm).

³⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.12.1, pp. 464-465.

On the basis of, and as a reward for, Christ's earlier redemptive works, He poured out the Holy Spirit on the catholic or universal church at Pentecost. This means that God's immanence is not just His immanence in the world; it is His immanence *in us*, both corporately as the church and personally as individual believers! The Spirit of Christ indwells us; He is inside us, in our hearts and minds and souls—that close! In the first section of the first chapter of Book 3 of the *Institutes*, Calvin declares, “To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself,” and, hence, with the Triune God.³⁸

The Spirit works faith. In his *Genevan Catechism* (1545), Calvin gives a “true definition of faith:” “It may be defined [as] a sure and steadfast knowledge of the paternal goodwill of God toward us, as he declares in the gospel that for the sake of Christ he will be our Father and Saviour.”³⁹ Faith, for Calvin, is personal and includes assurance: God is *my* creator, governor, deliverer and Lord, who will never leave me nor forsake me.⁴⁰ Faith is also the bond that unites and ties me to God in Christ, inseparably and everlastingly. “To sum up,” concludes Calvin, “Christ, when he illumines us into faith by the power of his Spirit, at the same time so engrafts us into his body that we have become partakers of every good.”⁴¹

Calvin views the covenant, as “the binding of God,” as a recent book on this subject argued.⁴² In the covenant, God binds himself to us in Jesus Christ, so that we are His people and He is our God forever. He will be to us everything that a God can be and should be. In God's covenant, we have friendship, fellowship, union and communion with Him.⁴³

³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.1, p. 538.

³⁹ John Calvin, “Catechism of the Church of Geneva,” in John Calvin, *Treatises on the Sacraments: Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, and Confessions of Faith*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Scotland: Christian Heritage, 2002), p. 53; cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 21.

⁴⁰ For a fine treatment of Calvin on assurance in his *Institutes*, see Engelsma, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin*, pp. 194-199.

⁴¹ Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.35, p. 583.

⁴² Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001).

⁴³ Cf. Angus Stewart, “John Calvin's Integrated Covenant Theology (2): The Nature of the

Calvin Versus Darwin

Commenting at some length on Psalm 102:12, which he translates, “And thou, O Jehovah! shalt dwell for ever; and the memorial of thee from generation to generation,” Calvin writes,

When the prophet, for his own encouragement, sets before himself the eternity of God, it seems, at first sight, to be a far-fetched consolation; for what benefit will accrue to us from the fact that God sits immutable on his heavenly throne, when, at the same time, our frail and perishing condition does not permit us to continue unmoved for a single moment? And, what is more, this knowledge of the blessed repose enjoyed by God enables us the better to perceive that our life is a mere illusion. But the inspired writer, calling to remembrance the promises by which God had declared that he would make the Church the object of his *special care*, and particularly that *remarkable article of the covenant*, “I will *dwell* in the midst of you” (Exodus 25:8), and, trusting to that *sacred and indissoluble bond*, has no hesitation in representing all the godly languishing, though they were in a state of suffering and wretchedness, as *partakers of this celestial glory in which God dwells*. The word “memorial” is also to be viewed in the same light. What advantage would we derive from this eternity and immutability of God’s being, unless we had in our hearts the knowledge of him, which, produced by his *gracious covenant*, begets in us the confidence arising from a *mutual relationship between him and us*? The meaning then is, “We are like withered grass, we are decaying every moment, we are not far from death, yea rather, we are, as it were, already dwelling in the grave; but since thou, O God! hast made a *covenant with us*, by which thou hast promised to *protect and defend thine own people*, and hast brought thyself into a *gracious relation* to us, giving us the fullest assurance that thou wilt always

Covenant,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1 (November, 2007), pp. 29-42, esp. pp. 29-37. A longer, more developed version of this article may be found on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/calvincovenanttheology2.htm).

dwell in the midst of us, instead of desponding, we must be of good courage; and although we may see only ground for despair if we depend upon ourselves, we ought nevertheless to lift up our minds to the heavenly throne, from which thou wilt at length stretch forth thy hand to help us.” Whoever is in a moderate degree acquainted with the sacred writings, will readily acknowledge that whenever we are besieged with death, in a variety of forms, we should reason thus: As God continues unchangeably the same—“without variableness or shadow of turning”—nothing can hinder him from aiding us; and this he will do, because we have his word, by which he has laid himself under obligation to us, and because he has deposited with us his own memorial, which contains in it a *sacred and indissoluble bond of fellowship*.⁴⁴

This wonderful divine immanence and closeness stands in sharp relief against the cold, atheistic world-view of evolutionism!

What is the church? It is the body of Jesus Christ on earth (and in heaven), which He cherishes, loves, protects and guides as His bride. This is intimacy and closeness! Agreeing with Cyprian and Augustine that one cannot have God as father without having the church as mother, Calvin writes, “those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother.”⁴⁵ Almighty God works through “the visible church” as “mother:” “For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourishes at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.”⁴⁶ Thus all believers ought to join, and remain in fellowship with, faithful instituted churches.⁴⁷

Faithful preaching is, for John Calvin, nothing less than the speech of Jesus Christ from His throne in heaven. It is not just some man saying some

⁴⁴ Calvin, Comm. on Ps. 102:12.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.1, p. 1012.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.4, p. 1016.

⁴⁷ See, esp., John Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them: ‘Anti-Nicodemite’ Writings of John Calvin*, trans. Seth Skolnitsky (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001); cf. *Belgic Confession* 28-29.

Calvin Versus Darwin

religious things at the front of a hall. The preaching of the Word is the sceptre of the kingdom of God. Preaching is the main way in which Christ governs in His rule of grace. Not only or chiefly are the angels present in the worship services of faithful churches (I Cor. 11:10); Christ is there as the One who is speaking through the pastor, as *the* great prophet and Lord of the church.⁴⁸ Calvin comments on Isaiah 11:4,

When the Prophet says, *by the breath of his lips*, this must not be limited to the person of Christ; for it refers to the Word which is preached by his ministers. Christ acts by them in such a manner that He wishes their mouth to be reckoned as his mouth, and their lips as his lips; that is, when they speak from his mouth, and faithfully declare his Word (Luke 10:16).⁴⁹

Calvin developed and defended the truth about Christ's real presence in the Lord's Supper—a spiritual presence by the Word and Holy Ghost. In this way, Christ personally comes to the church to give us His broken body and shed blood to be our spiritual food and drink, nourishing us unto life everlasting.⁵⁰

What does the future hold according to Calvin (exegeting Scripture)? Chiefly and centrally, the personal return of Jesus Christ in glory with the angelic host in order to take us to Himself for ever.

If the Lord will share his glory, power, and righteousness with the elect—nay will give himself to be enjoyed by them and, what is more excellent, will somehow make them to become one with himself, let us remember that every sort of happiness is included under this benefit.⁵¹

At His second coming, Christ will speak to the dead, “Come out of your grave; you have been there long enough. Come to the last judgment.” Then

⁴⁸ Cf. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 82-95.

⁴⁹ Calvin, Comm. on Isa. 11:4.

⁵⁰ Cf. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, pp. 197-233; cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Days 28-30; *Belgic Confession* 35.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes* 3.25.10, p. 1005.

the final separation between the sheep and the goats and the great theodicy will take place, when God will be vindicated in all His works and ways, and every mouth will be stopped for all the world will become guilty and inexcusable before God (Rom. 3:19). All will fall down on their knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Triune God (Phil. 2:10-11).

This old world will be consumed with purifying fire.⁵² In the new heavens and the new earth, we will share in His throne and be near Him and with Him for all eternity—perfect and everlasting immanence!

Behind all this is God's eternal decree. Absolutely everything in the history of the world, even the movements of the fish in the oceans, is "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). God's glory, as Calvin stressed, is the supreme and highest goal in his decree, realised through the unconditional election and reprobation of every single human being for God's good and holy ends.⁵³ The alpha of God's election of us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) determines the omega of our being gathered together in Christ and sharing in His everlasting inheritance (Eph. 1:10-11).

to be concluded (DV)

⁵² This is very different from the evolutionist's fear of global warming or heat death!

⁵³ Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.21-24, pp. 920-987.