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Did Calvin Believe in Freewill?

A.N.S. Lane

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I. INTRODUCTION

Did Calvin believe in freewill? Popularly he is seen, with Luther, as one of the archenemies of human freewill. Calvin himself did not discourage such an interpretation. One of the chapters of his *Institutio* is entitled: 'That man is now stripped of freedom of choice and bound over to miserable servitude'.¹ A slender volume could be produced comprised solely of Calvin's attacks on freewill.

Calvin's position seems to run counter to the tradition of the Western church. Even those, such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who laid great stress on God's sovereignty and predestination took care to safeguard man's freewill. Augustine, Calvin's great mentor, at the end of his life wrote a work entitled *On Grace AND Freewill* in which he opposed those who 'so defend God's grace as to deny man's freewill'.² It would appear that Luther and Calvin, in denying freewill, were falling into just that error and were departing from the whole Augustinian tradition. This is the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation, pioneered in 1542 by the Dutch theologian Albertus Pighius.³ But the little word 'freewill' can have many different meanings. More recent Roman Catholic scholarship has been less hasty to proclaim the discord between Calvin and the Augustinian tradition. The Dominican writer C. Friethoff concluded fifty years ago that while Thomas accepted and Calvin rejected freewill, there is no contradiction involved because they meant such different things by the term.⁴ A more recent Roman Catholic writer, H. J. McSorley, has sought to show that the Reformers were reviving the 'biblical and catholic concept of *servum arbitrium*', though he also detects an unbiblical and uncatholic 'necessitarian concept of *servum arbitrium*'.⁵

While Calvin repeatedly and violently attacked the term 'freewill' his opposition to it was not as unequivocal as is often supposed. On occasions he was prepared to concede that it could have a perfectly sound and acceptable meaning. His attitude to freewill was complex and needs to be examined in the context of the different phases of man's existence.

¹ *Inst.* II.ii. Standard abbreviations will be used for the titles of Calvin's works. The Latin text is from the *Opera Selecta* of P. Barth and W. Niesel (*OS*) where possible, otherwise from the *Opera Calvini* of G. Baum, *et. al.* (*OC*). English translations are from the H. Beveridge translation of the 1559 *Institutio*, from vol. 22 of the *Library of Christian Classics (Calvin: Theological Treatises)* (*LCC*), from the Calvin Translation Society volumes of *Tracts (CTS 1-3)*, from the Calvin Translation Society edition of the OT commentaries and from the D. W. and T. F. Torrance edition of the NT commentaries. Reference will be made to the Latin edition where the translation is the author's own, where the Latin has been cited or where it is necessary to locate the reference (in the treatises).

² *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 1.1 (P. Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, 1971), 443).

³ Albertus Pighius, *De libero hominis arbitrio et divina gratia* (Köln, 1542). Cf. G. Melles, *Albertus Pighius en zijn strijd met Calvijn over het liberum arbitrium* (Kampen, 1973), 17-53 for a summary of Pighius' case. For a recent leading Roman Catholic scholar, cf. E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (London, 1936), 322. For a list of modern works comparing Calvin and the Augustinian tradition, cf. my 'Calvin's Use of the Fathers and the Mediaevals', *Calvin Theological Journal* 16, 1981, Appendix I.

⁴ C. Friethoff, 'Die Prädestinationslehre bei Thomas von Aquin and Calvin', *Divus Thomas* 4, 1926, 461. He does not deny that there are other points where Calvin does contradict Thomas.

⁵ H. J. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* (New York, *et. al.*, 1969), 353-5, 367-9.

II. MAN AS CREATED

Calvin repeatedly insisted on the need to distinguish between man as God created him and man in his present fallen state.⁶ Philosophers and theologians have both erred by failing to take account of this crucial distinction.⁷

(1) *Intellect and Will*

Calvin divided the soul into two parts: intellect and will.

The office of the intellect [is] to distinguish between objects, according as they seem deserving of being approved or disapproved; and the office of the will, to choose and follow what the intellect declares to be good, to reject and shun what it declares to be bad.⁸

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‘The intellect is to us, as it were, the guide and ruler of the soul; ... the will always follows its beck, and waits for its decision, in matters of desire’. The intellect governs the will.⁹ Before the Fall the will was ‘perfectly submissive to the authority of reason’.¹⁰ This would seem to imply that the will would inevitably obey reason, but that is not what Calvin meant.¹¹ ‘In this upright state, man possessed freedom of will (*liberum arbitrium*), by which, if he chose, he was able to obtain eternal life’. The will had the choice whether or not to follow reason. It was not determined in that it was ‘pliable in either direction’.¹²

(2) *Providence*

Calvin’s account of man as created seems to leave no reason for questioning his original freedom before the Fall. But doubts are raised once one turns to the doctrine of providence.¹³ God’s sovereignty and rule means that he controls not merely the ‘laws of nature’ but the whole course of history.

⁶ *Inst.* I.xv.1,II.i.1 (both 1559). (All passages from *Inst.* first appeared in the 1539 edition unless stated); *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.259, 263f., 332, 351, 361, 378, 381, etc.) Cf. *nn.* 76f., below.

⁷ *Inst.* I.xv.7 (1559), II.ii.4.

⁸ *Inst.* I.xv.7.

⁹ *Ibid.* ‘Always follows its beck’ is too strong a translation. The Latin implies only that the will is mindful of (*respicere*) reason (OS 3.185).

¹⁰ *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559). Again, ‘perfectly submissive’ is too strong for ‘*prorsus consentanea*’ (OS 3.185f.).

¹¹ W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen, 1957), 90 and G. Babelotzky, *Platonische Bilder and Gedankengänge in Calvins Lehre vom Menschen* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 230 concur with this judgement. A. Lecerf, *Le déterminisme et la responsabilité dans le système de Calvin* (Paris thesis, 1895), 37, wrongly says that the intellect imposes on the will a ‘plein déterminisme’. C. Calvetti, ‘I presupposti filosofici della dottrina calvinista del “servo arbitrio”’, *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica* 44, 1952, 301-333 (which reappears with minor modifications in his *La filosofia di Giovanni Calvino* (Milan, 1955), 46-99) repeatedly accuses Calvin of destroying the freedom of the will by subjecting it to the intellect (especially pp. 302-16). What his study demonstrates is that there are questions here which Calvin did not adequately answer and to which Calvetti, with his scholastic approach, has a ready answer.

¹² *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559) (OS 3.186).

¹³ Providence is raised at this stage because it concerns God’s relation to man as a creature, and only secondarily as a sinner or a saint.

Hence we maintain that, by his providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined.¹⁴

God does not simply permit man to act in a particular way.

Men do nothing save at the secret instigation of God, and do not discuss and deliberate on anything but what he has previously decreed with himself, and brings to pass by his secret direction.¹⁵

God works internally in the minds of men so that 'whatever we conceive in our minds is directed to its end by the secret inspiration of God'.¹⁶

The hand of God rules the interior affections no less than it superintends external actions; nor would God have effected by the hand of man what he decreed, unless he worked in their hearts to make them will before they acted.¹⁷

It follows therefore that 'the will of God is the chief and principal cause of all things'.¹⁸ But this does not mean that God is the only cause, although Calvin can be quoted out of context to this effect.¹⁹ We must distinguish between God, who is the principal or sovereign cause of all, and his creatures, who are the inferior causes.²⁰ 'The proximate cause is one thing, the remote cause another.'²¹

We do not make the minds of men to be impelled by force external to them so that they rage furiously; nor do we transfer to God the cause of hardening, in such a way that they did not voluntarily and by their own wickedness and hardness of heart spur themselves on to obstinacy. What we say is that men act perversely not without God's ordination that it be done, as Scripture teaches.²²

If God controls the purposes of men, and turns their thoughts and exertions to whatever purpose he pleases, men do not therefore cease to form plans and to engage in this or the other undertaking. We must not suppose that there is a violent compulsion, as if God dragged them against their will; but in a wonderful and inconceivable manner he regulates all the movements of men, so that they still have the exercise of their Will.²³

More briefly, 'man, though acted upon by God, at the same time also acts'.²⁴

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(3) Determinism?

¹⁴ *Inst.* I.xvi.8. Calvin did not, of course, refer to the 'laws of nature', but he taught that God maintained the 'order of nature' by his general providence (*Inst.* I.xvi.4,7 (1559)).

¹⁵ *Inst.* I.xviii.1 (1559).

¹⁶ *Inst.* I.xviii.2 (1559).

¹⁷ *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (tr. J. K. S. Reid) (London, 1961) (hereafter *Predestination*), 175f. (OC 8.358).

¹⁸ *Predestination* 177 (OC 8.360) ('summam et praecipuam rerum omnium causam'). Cf. *Inst.* I.xviii.2 (1559).

¹⁹ 'No cause must be sought for but the will of God' (*Inst.* I.xvi.8 (1559)).

²⁰ *Contr. Lib.* 14 (OC 7.188); *Ep.* 1659 (October 1552) (OC 14.381). Cf. *Inst.* I.xvii.9.

²¹ *Predestination* 181 (OC 8.363).

²² *Predestination* 174f. (OC 8.357f.).

²³ *Comm.* Is. 10: 15.

²⁴ *Inst.* I.xviii.2 (1559).

Calvin's doctrine of providence seems to prejudice man's freedom.²⁵ It is true that many (but not all) of the passages quoted in the last section refer to God's dealings with the wicked. But what is there asserted is much more than the loss of man's freedom through sin and the control that God exercises is a control over man as a creature, not just man as a sinner. Was Calvin, therefore, a determinist? This question has been keenly debated and this is not the place to enter fully into the debate, but a number of points can be clarified.

To ask whether Calvin was a determinist is not very helpful unless one specifies what one means by 'determinism'.²⁶ Clearly Calvin's doctrine of providence implies that man's choices are in *some* sense 'determined' by God. This 'determinism' is not confined to the realm of sin and grace but extends to the whole of life.²⁷ Calvin reprimanded those who concede to man a free choice (*libera electio*) in morally indifferent areas, thinking of the Augsburg Confession and Melancthon's other works.²⁸

While none of man's choices is purely undetermined, we cannot simply call Calvin a determinist without further qualification. For Calvin, it is *God* who determines the course of history. Man is not subject to a deterministic 'fate', as the Stoics taught.²⁹ Nor is he subject to a physical determinism of the sort often postulated by modern science. If man's acts are 'determined' it is not because they are simply the outworking of a fixed process of cause and effect. Man is not subject to a 'naturgesetzlich kausale interne Verarbeitung der Motive'.³⁰ Nor is he subject to an 'absolute metaphysical determinism' of an impersonal nature.³¹ Such a determinism would not permit any causality other than the absolute causality. But while Calvin taught the primary absolute causality of God he also taught the real secondary causality of man. He opposed the Libertines who taught that God is the sole author of all things such that 'all that happens in the world should be directly regarded as his work'. 'In this they attribute no will to man, no more than if he were a stone, and they remove all discretion between good and evil, for to them no deed can be evil as long as God is its author.'³²

Calvin's 'determinism' is marked by the fact that he preserved the human will and made man the real agent in all that he does.³³ Providence covers all events, all of man's choices, but Calvin did not argue from this to deny the reality of human choice. Thus any 'necessity' flowing from providence will be of a different order to that flowing from the bondage of the fallen will or the sovereign action of grace, where Calvin clearly did teach a curtailment of man's freedom.³⁴

²⁵ The doctrine of providence raises two specific problems related to man's sin: is man responsible and is God the author of sin? The former question is tackled in sections III.3 and IV.4, below; the latter question falls outside the scope of this article.

²⁶ G. Melles, *op. cit.*, 1 considers it a calamity that this theological question has been polluted with terms like (in)determinism. Unfortunately such terms once introduced cannot be ignored.

²⁷ *Inst.* II.iv.6f., *contra* J. Kohler, 'Calvin and die Willensfreiheit', *Archiv für Rechts- und Wirtschaftsphilosophie* 7, 1913/4, 242.

²⁸ *Inst.* II. iv.6 (*OS* 3.295, n.3 gives the references). Pighius took up this same point, referring to the Augsburg Confession (*op. cit.*, f 6b). Calvin responded in *Def. sere. arb.* (*OC* 6.250f.).

²⁹ *Inst.* I.xvi.8. Cf. *Adv. Contr. astrol.* (*OC* 7.513-42).

³⁰ J. Kohler, *art. cit.*, 246, cf. 242f.

³¹ J. Bohatec, *Budé and Calvin* (Graz, 1950), 359.

³² *Contr. Lib.* 13 (*OC* 7.183), ET by R. G. Wilkie and A. Verhey, *Calvin Theological Journal* 15, 1980, 205.

³³ J. Bohatec, *op. cit.*, 359. Bohatec rightly observes that Calvin considered the ability to perform what one wants to be irrelevant to the issue of freewill (*Inst.* II.iv.8), but wrongly concludes that Calvin conceded such freedom to man and that he was therefore not a thoroughgoing determinist.

³⁴ Cf. sections IV.1 and V.1, below.

Here we see a significant divergence between Luther and Calvin. Luther taught that 'all things happen by absolute necessity'.³⁵ He also denied the scholastic distinction between absolute or consequent necessity (*necessitas consequentis*) and necessity of consequence (*necessitas consequentiae*).³⁶ Pighius assumed that Luther and Calvin were agreed on this and accused them both of teaching that nothing is contingent but that all things happen by absolute necessity.³⁷ Calvin did not dissent from the statement that he and Luther agreed concerning the bondage of the will, but he introduced a significant reservation regarding the specific point of absolute necessity. This point, he said, would be covered later in his response to the second part of Pighius' work, in his *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, which was to appear in 1550.³⁸ In this work Calvin took a position significantly different to Luther's. He agreed that God's will is 'the chief

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and principal cause of all things' and 'the necessity of things'.³⁹ But he conceded the validity of the scholastic distinctions between relative and absolute necessity (*necessitas secundum quid et absoluta*) and between necessity of consequence and consequent necessity.⁴⁰ 'Though it is proper for us to regard the order of nature as divinely determined, I do not at all reject contingency in regard to human understanding.'⁴¹ This is further spelt out in the 1559 *Institutio*. While all things are controlled by God, 'to us, however, they are fortuitous'. Not indeed that they are truly random, but 'they have the appearance of being fortuitous, such being the form under which they present themselves to us, whether considered in their own nature, or estimated according to our knowledge and judgement'. From our point of view the future is contingent, although the outcome is determined. 'At the same time, that which God has determined, though it must come to pass, is not, however, precisely, or in its own nature, necessary.' Christ's bones were like ours and therefore clearly breakable, and yet it was impossible for them to be broken (Jn. 19: 33, 36). There is, therefore, good ground for the scholastic distinction between different types of necessity.⁴²

Calvin's acceptance of this scholastic distinction sets him apart from Luther and aligns him with the great mediaeval scholastics.⁴³ Why was Calvin willing here to accept a scholastic distinction when he normally rejected such distinctions as sophistic subtlety?⁴⁴ Furthermore, why should Calvin use the distinction when his expressed concern was 'lest any subtlety should prevent even the most simple of my readers from understanding what I say'?⁴⁵ Perhaps the answer is to be found in the controversy with Pighius. In 1543 Calvin promised an answer to the charge that he agreed with Luther in asserting absolute necessity. When it came to the answer Calvin explicitly renounced the idea of absolute necessity, by making use of the scholastic distinction. The simple were indeed in danger of being confused—by Luther's position, especially as expounded in his well known *De servo arbitrio*. It was in order to

³⁵ *Assertio omnium articulorum*, cited by H. J. McSorley, *op. cit.*, 255.

³⁶ In the *Lectures on Romans*, the *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* and the *De servo arbitrio*, cited by H. J. McSorley, *op. cit.*, 232-6, 242, 315-21. For the meaning of the distinction, cf. *ibid.*, 234f., 319f.

³⁷ A. Pighius, *op. cit.*, f. 6a.

³⁸ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.247-52, especially 248, 250).

³⁹ *Predestination* 177f. (OC 8.360).

⁴⁰ *Predestination* 170 (OC 8.354). The ET is unreliable here, conflating the two distinctions into one.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Inst.* I.xvi.9 (1559).

⁴³ For the scholastics, cf. *OS* 3.201, n.2; H. J. McSorley, *op. cit.*, 234f.

⁴⁴ A. Lavalley, *Calvin's Criticism of Scholastic Theology* (Harvard University Ph.D. thesis, 1967), 67.

⁴⁵ *Predestination* 170 (OC 8.354).

rescue the simple from Luther's conclusion that Calvin resorted to the uncharacteristic use of scholastic distinctions.

Not all would agree that there is a substantial difference between Luther and Calvin at this point. Dr. H. J. McSorley argues that Luther had not properly grasped the meaning of the scholastic distinction and that he did in fact accept the basic point that it makes.⁴⁶ A definitive verdict as to the extent of the difference between Calvin and Luther would depend on a precise understanding of Luther's own position vis-à-vis determinism. But unfortunately there is no consensus among Luther scholars on this point⁴⁷ and this is not the place to seek to resolve their disputes.

III. THE FALL

(1) *Adam's Sin*

Why did Adam sin? Calvin clearly taught that it was his own fault. Adam could have stood but he fell solely by his own will. This happened because 'his will was pliable in either direction, and he had not received constancy to persevere'.⁴⁸ But that is not to say that the Fall was inevitable. Adam was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*).⁴⁹

He had a free choice of good and evil (*libera electio boni et mali*); and not only so, but in the mind and will there was the highest rectitude, and all the organic parts were duly framed to obedience.⁵⁰

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The first man had 'soundness of mind and freedom of will to choose the good (*voluntas ad bonum eligendum libera*)'.⁵¹ Calvin summed his position up in a confession of faith: 'We believe that man was created pure and complete and that it was his own fault that he fell from the grace that he had received'.⁵²

(2) *Decretum horribile*

Calvin insisted that the Fall happened through man's own fault. But there is more to it than that.⁵³ Adam fell because God decreed it, his awesome decree (*decretum horribile*).⁵⁴ It is illegitimate to say that God willed merely to permit the Fall. What God wills is necessary and must happen. 'The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should: why he deemed it meet, we know not'.⁵⁵

Then, as now, this teaching was called unjust and Calvin was asked why God should decree that man should fall. 'God knowingly and willingly suffers man to fall; the reason may be

⁴⁶ H. J. McSorley, *op. cit.*, 233f., 242, 259, 315, 319-21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 256-60.

⁴⁸ *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559).

⁴⁹ *Inst.* II.iii.13; *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.402f.); *Comm.* Mt. 4: 1.

⁵⁰ *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559) (OS 3.186).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Confessio ecclesiae Parisiensis* (OC 9.716).

⁵³ In *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559), where Calvin teaches that Adam had freewill, he adds a reminder that the question of secret predestination must later be considered.

⁵⁴ *Inst.* III.xxiii.7. Most, but not all, of the section comes from 1559, including 'decretum horribile' (OS 4.401).

⁵⁵ *Inst.* III.xxiii.8.

hidden, but it cannot be unjust.⁵⁶ Calvin was firmly opposed to any attempt to speculate here beyond what has been revealed, a modesty denied to many of his more ardent followers.

How it was ordained by the foreknowledge and decree of God what man's future was without God being implicated as associate in the fault as the author or approver of transgression, is clearly a secret so much excelling the insight of the human mind, that I am not ashamed to confess ignorance.... I daily so meditate on these mysteries of his judgements that curiosity to know anything more does not attract me.⁵⁷

Calvin explicitly appealed to the doctrine of providence for support in this matter. If God did not decree the Fall, 'where will be the omnipotence of God, by which, according to his secret counsel on which everything depends, he rules over all?'⁵⁸ 'Man therefore falls, divine providence so ordaining.'⁵⁹ It is clear that, given his doctrine of providence, Calvin had no choice but to say that God decreed the Fall. Until the final edition of the *Institutio* he treated providence and predestination together but in 1559 he broke with theological tradition and separated them, placing predestination in the setting of soteriology.⁶⁰ But the link with providence remains, not least in the idea that God decreed the Fall. This idea, far from being weakened by the separation of predestination from providence, is strengthened in 1559 by the inclusion of new material drawn from the polemical works of the 1550s.

(3) *Responsibility?*

Many have felt that God's foreordination of the Fall destroys man's responsibility.⁶¹ But Calvin insisted that the Fall was man's fault. 'Man therefore falls, divine providence so ordaining, but he falls by his own fault.'⁶² The cause of the Fall lies in man.

Though, by the eternal providence of God, man was formed for the calamity under which he lies, he took the matter of it from himself, not from God, since the only cause of his destruction was his degeneration from the purity of his creation into a state of vice and impurity.⁶³

Calvin was also most emphatic that the Fall was voluntary.

Adam fell, though not without God's knowledge and ordination ... Yet

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this neither mitigates his guilt nor involves God in any blame. For we must always remember that he voluntarily (*sponte*) deprived himself of the rectitude that he had received from God, voluntarily (*sponte*) gave himself up to the service of sin and Satan, and voluntarily (*sponte*) precipitated himself into destruction. One excuse is suggested, that he could not evade what God had decreed. But his voluntary (*voluntaria*)

⁵⁶ *Predestination* 122 (OC 8.315).

⁵⁷ *Predestination* 124 (OC 8.316).

⁵⁸ *Inst.* III.xxiii.7 (1559).

⁵⁹ *Inst.* III.xxiii.8.

⁶⁰ Cf. P. Jacobs, *Prädestination and Verantwortlichkeit bei Calvin* (Darmstadt, 1968), 67-71, on the position of and relation between providence and predestination.

⁶¹ E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (London, 1949), 332; C. Calvetti, *art. cit.*, 316-22.

⁶² *Inst.* III.xxiii.8.

⁶³ *Inst.* III.xxiii.9.

transgression is enough and more than enough to establish his guilt. For the proper and genuine cause of sin is not God's hidden counsel but the evident will of man.⁶⁴

But Calvin was not quite right to say that the voluntary nature of the first transgression is 'enough and more than enough'. Fallen man also sins voluntarily and yet he is a slave of sin. Calvin needed to show not merely that the Fall was voluntary but that it was not necessary, from man's point of view. He was not quite unequivocal on this point. Man had free will, but the reason why he fell so easily was that he had not received constancy to persevere. 'If any one objects that [the will] was placed, as it were, in a slippery position, because its power was weak, I answer, that the degree conferred was sufficient to take away every excuse.'⁶⁵ Calvin conceded that God could have prevented man from sinning, but argued that this was not incumbent upon him. 'No necessity was laid upon God to give him more than that intermediate and even transient will, that out of man's fall he might extract materials for his own glory.'⁶⁶ Elsewhere Calvin reversed this argument to oppose Castellio's position that God did not will the Fall. He foresaw the Fall and he had the power to stop it, yet he chose not to. There is no explanation save that such was his will. For Adam not to fall he needed fortitude and constancy. God gives these gifts to his elect and yet he chose to withhold them from Adam.⁶⁷ Here Calvin came close to suggesting that the Fall was necessary, through the withholding of these gifts from Adam, but in fact his position is that the withholding of the gifts made the Fall possible, not necessary.⁶⁸ But the possibility is more of a probability since Calvin did not believe that man lasted long without sinning.⁶⁹ While Adam was not under a necessity, he does not appear to have been given much of a chance.

IV. MAN AS FALLEN

(1) *Bondage of the Will*

Calvin believed that the Fall changed man radically for the worse, if not the worst.⁷⁰ The whole of man is corrupted—not just the sensual part but the mind and heart as well.⁷¹ There is an unvarying corruption of human nature which affects all men, not just the wicked. It is not simply the effect of custom. Our very nature is depraved and it is futile to seek any good in it.⁷² 'Such is the depravity of [man's] nature, that he cannot move and act except in the direction of evil'.⁷³ It is true that outward virtue and respectability are to be found in the ungodly, but this is a special gift of God's grace, in which he restrains the heart without purifying it. As the inner motivation is wrong and there is no zeal for God's glory, such outward virtue has no merit before God.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ *Predestination* 121f. (OC 8.314).

⁶⁵ *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559). Cf. II.i.10.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559). Cf. *Serm.* 48 on *Harm. Ev.* (on Mt. 4: 1) (OC 46.598): Adam suffered from infirmity of nature but not from the vicious infirmity of original sin.

⁶⁷ *De occulta dei providentia* (OC 9.294).

⁶⁸ A. Lecerf, *op. cit.*, 38f. misinterprets Calvin to teach that the Fall was necessary. A. M. Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin*² (London, 1950), 121 wrongly states that 'as God had decreed the Fall, [he] must have in some wise already biased Adam's will'.

⁶⁹ *Comm.* Gen. 3: 6.

⁷⁰ *Inst.* II.i.5-8 (1536-1559).

⁷¹ *Inst.* II.i.8f., II.iii.1f. (1536-1559).

⁷² *Inst.* II.iii.2.

⁷³ *Inst.* II.iii.5.

⁷⁴ *Inst.* II.iii.3f., III.xiv.1-3 (mainly 1539).

Calvin repeatedly stressed that this sorry condition is not how God created man.⁷⁵ It is *fallen* human nature that he is here describing, not human nature as created.⁷⁶ This corruption can be called 'natural' (Eph. 2: 3) in that all inherit it

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from Adam, but it is not part of nature as created by God.⁷⁷ It is not part of man's substance but is 'accidental'.⁷⁸

To dwell only on this corruption would lead one either to despair or to blame God.⁷⁹ But Calvin was not a misanthrope concerned only to denigrate man. As well as contemplating our present corruption we are to remember our original nobility in Adam which will stimulate a zeal for righteousness.⁸⁰ Calvin's reply to Pighius was entitled *On the Bondage AND LIBERATION of the Human Will*. If Calvin pushed man into the dust it was not to leave him there but to show him his need and to point him to the one who can meet that need.⁸¹ We need to be pushed into the dust because by nature we incline to self-admiration.⁸²

(2) *Necessity versus Coercion*

The bondage of the will means that man cannot but sin, that he necessarily sins. 'The will, deprived of liberty, is led or dragged by necessity to evil.'⁸³ This appears to run counter to the Augustinian tradition which maintain's man's freewill (*liberum arbitrium*) even as a sinner. But Calvin took great pains to counter the idea that he was opposed to Augustine at this point.⁸⁴ Central to his case is the distinction between necessity and coercion (*coactio*).⁸⁵ Man sins necessarily, but this necessity is inherent and arises from his own nature. There is no external coercion or violence exercised on man from outside himself.

Man, since he was corrupted by the fall, sins not forced or unwilling (*non invitum nec coactum*), but voluntarily (*volentem*), by a most forward bias of the mind; not by violent compulsion (*non violenta coactione*), or external force (*non extraria coactione*), but by the movement of his own passion; and yet such is the depravity of his nature, that he cannot move and act except in the direction of evil.⁸⁶

Man sins necessarily but voluntarily. In order to defend the compatibility of necessity (but not coercion) with the integrity of the will, Calvin cited the examples of God and the devil,

⁷⁵ E.g., *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6. 259, 263f., 332, 351, 360, 378, 381).

⁷⁶ *Inst.* II.i.10, II.v.1 (1559); *Comm.* Ezek. 11: 19f.

⁷⁷ *Inst.* II.i.11.

⁷⁸ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.263f., cf. 351). Cf. *Inst.* II.i.11. In addition to using this Aristotelian distinction, Calvin appeals to Aristotle for the bondage of the will (*Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.335f.); *Comm.* Jer. 13: 23).

⁷⁹ *Inst.* I.xv.1, II.i.3.

⁸⁰ *Inst.* II.i.3.

⁸¹ Cf. L. A. Vos, 'Calvin and the Christian Self-Image' in D. E. Holwerda (ed.), *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, 1976), 76-109.

⁸² *Inst.* II.i.2.

⁸³ *Inst.* II.iii.5.

⁸⁴ Pighius devoted Book 3 of his work to refuting Calvin from Augustine (*op. cit.*, ff. 27a-58a) and Calvin responded in detail (*Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6. 292-326)). Among modern works, cf. especially H. Barnikol, 'Die Lehre Calvins vom unfreien Willen and ihr Verhältnis zur Lehre der übrigen Reformatoren and Augustins', *Theologische Arbeiten aus dem Wissenschaftlichen Prediger-Verein der Rheinprovinz* NF22, 1926, 49-193, especially 130-49.

⁸⁵ For this distinction, in addition to the passages cited from *Inst.*, cf. *Def. serv. arb.*, where it occurs repeatedly.

⁸⁶ *Inst.* II.iii.5 (OS 3.278).

following Bernard. God is necessarily good, because of his nature. The devil has so fallen that he can do nothing but evil.

Therefore, if the freewill of God in doing good is not impeded, because he necessarily must do good; if the devil, who can do nothing but evil, nevertheless sins voluntarily; can it be said that man sins less voluntarily because he is under a necessity of sinning?⁸⁷

Man is a slave to sin, but his bondage is voluntary. He is under a yoke of 'voluntary servitude'.⁸⁸

(3) *Freewill?*

Does fallen man retain freewill? The Fall certainly did not destroy the will. Calvin approved of the oft-quoted saying of Augustine that 'man's natural gifts were corrupted by sin, and his supernatural gifts withdrawn', though not of the medieval use of the distinction.⁸⁹ The corruption of the natural gifts consists in the withdrawal of soundness of mind and integrity of heart (will). The will remains, but is enslaved and depraved.⁹⁰ By nature we have choice and will. 'Our capacities to discern, to will and to do this or that are a natural gift.' Furthermore, 'the soul never ceases to remain in its essence and to retain that which is inseparable from its nature according to the order God has constituted'.⁹¹

But does the will retain its freedom? The answer must depend on how freewill

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is defined. Calvin was certainly not keen on the term.⁹² In his sermons it is always portrayed as an error of the papists.⁹³ In a commentary he ironically stated that the origin of 'freewill' (*liberum arbitrium*) is that Adam wanted to be independent (*per se esse*).⁹⁴ In the *Institutio* his position is more subtle. The early fathers are criticised for conceding too much to fallen human powers, for fear of the jeers of the philosophers and for fear of encouraging sloth. All but Augustine were confused on this matter. Calvin summarised the different views on freewill, showing how there was a slow but steady retreat from the bondage of the will after Augustine.⁹⁵ Calvin was himself prepared to accept the term freewill (*liberum arbitrium*) if it was used not in the sense of 'a free choice of good and evil' (*libera boni aequae ac mali electio*) but to mean that man acts wickedly by will and not by coercion ('male voluntate agit, non coactione').⁹⁶ But he considered that freewill was far too grand a title for such a small thing when man is the (voluntary) slave of sin. Furthermore, the term has been so abused that

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* C. Calvetti, *art. cit.*, 304, 308f. insists on referring to an 'interior coercion'. He rejects the distinction between coercion and necessity (*ibid.*, 322-5).

⁸⁸ *Inst.* II.iii.5 (1559). Cf. *Comm.* Jn. 8: 34; *Comm.* Rom. 7: 14.

⁸⁹ *Inst.* II.ii.12 (1559), cf. II.ii.4 (1559). In fact the full distinction originated with Peter Lombard (*OS* 3.245, nn.7f.). N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London, *et. al.*, 1927), 427 wrongly accuses Calvin of denying the distinction.

⁹⁰ *Inst.* II.ii.12 (1559), II.iii.5; *Act. trid.* (CTS 3.109,113; OC 7.443,446); *Comm.* Ezek. 11: 19f.

⁹¹ *Contr. Lib.* 14,12 (OC 7.191,183), ET pp. 212, 201.

⁹² A. Verhey, in the translation cited in n.32, on pp. 201f. wrongly suggests that Calvin defends not just man's responsibility but his freedom.

⁹³ R. Stauffer, *Dieu, la création et la Providence dans la prédication de Calvin* (Bern, Frankfurt and Las Vegas, 1978), 205f.

⁹⁴ *Comm.* Gen. 2: 9. Cf. *Comm.* Lu. 24: 45: 'abandoning the foolish notion of freewill, we must yield ourselves to God's direction'.

⁹⁵ *Inst.* II.ii.4f. (almost entirely 1539).

⁹⁶ *Inst.* II.ii.7 (*OS* 3.249). The last phrase is mistranslated in the Beveridge translation.

most people imagine it to mean that man is 'the master of his mind and will in such a sense, that he can of himself incline himself either to good or evil'.⁹⁷ The solution could be to explain the true meaning of the term, but the propensity of man to falsehood is such that the error dormant in one word can outweigh the truth in a whole discourse of clarification. Calvin's advice is to drop the term in order to avoid the danger, but if any wish to retain the term without the error, they are free to do so.⁹⁸

In his reply to Pighius Calvin was even more emphatic about avoiding disputes over mere words. He repeatedly affirmed that he was not scrupulous about words as long as the substance is correct.⁹⁹

If one speaks of liberty in opposition to coercion (*coactio*), I confess and constantly affirm that the will is free (*liberum esse arbitrium*) and regard as a heretic anyone who thinks otherwise. If, I repeat, one calls it free in the sense that the will is not coerced (*coagatur*) or drawn violently by some external motion, but acts of its own accord (*sponte agatur sua*), I have no objection.¹⁰⁰

But Pighius and others understood the term to mean that man 'has good and evil in his own power, such that of his own capacity (*virtus*) he can choose the one or the other'. In this sense Calvin firmly rejected the term and it was because of this abuse that he preferred to see it dropped. 'Freedom and bondage are opposed to one another so that to affirm the one is to deny the other. Therefore if man's will is bound it cannot also be said to be free, except improperly.'¹⁰¹

To avoid any possible confusion, Calvin carefully defined his terms. There are four different states of the will to be distinguished: free (*libera*), coerced (*coacta*), spontaneous (*spontanea*) and bound (*serva*). According to the popular understanding (followed by Pighius) a free will has it in its power to choose good and evil. A coerced will 'is not inclined hither and thither of its own accord, or by the motion of internal choice, but is violently carried along by an external motion'. Such a will cannot exist for it would be a contradiction in terms. A spontaneous will turns itself of its own accord and is not dragged unwillingly. Finally, a bound will is enslaved to evil lusts on account of its corruption and can only choose evil. But it does so freely (*sponte et libenter*), not driven by an external motion. According to these definitions, fallen man has a will (*arbitrium*) which is spontaneous and does evil by the choice of his own will (*voluntariae suae electioni*). Coercion and violence are excluded as these are inconsistent with the nature of the will. Freedom

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is also excluded as the will necessarily chooses evil, because of its innate depravity.¹⁰²

Calvin defined very clearly in what sense the sinner's will is free. Fallen man is a slave of sin in that he cannot but sin, he sins inevitably and of necessity. But this bondage is not due to force or coercion. Man is not an unwilling captive held by violent coercion or external force.

⁹⁷ *Inst.* II.ii.7.

⁹⁸ *Inst.* II.ii.7f.

⁹⁹ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.279f., 303, 310f.).

¹⁰⁰ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.279). When Augustine defended freewill he meant simply that men do good and evil 'spontanea voluntate' (OC 6.329). Augustine's affirmation of freewill is acceptable if freely (*libere*) is understood in the sense of voluntarily (*sponte*) (OC 6.313).

¹⁰¹ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.279).

¹⁰² *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.280).

On the contrary, he sins freely in the sense that he sins voluntarily, spontaneously, of his own accord and his own will. His sin is the expression of his true character and in that sense he is fully free. But he is not free in the sense of being poised between good and evil in some sort of moral neutrality. The sinner is totally committed—to sin.

Did Calvin believe in freewill? Some authors have portrayed him as holding to formal but not material freedom, psychological but not ethical freedom. These terms are acceptable as long as it is recognised that they are not Calvin's own and as long as their meaning is derived from Calvin's own teaching and not imposed violently upon it from an alien external ideology.

Did Calvin believe in freewill? G. C. Berkouwer maintains that Calvin's psychological freedom is not worthy of the name freewill.¹⁰³ A modern psychologist has recently reached a similar conclusion.¹⁰⁴ But to answer the question is to presuppose that the term has a clearly agreed meaning. This is not so. The answer must be that Calvin did believe in freewill in one sense (which he clearly defined) and did not believe in it in another sense (which he equally clearly defined). It is for the reader to decide for himself whether or not this accords with his own understanding of 'freewill'.

(4) Responsibility?

Is the degree of freewill that Calvin conceded to fallen man sufficient to uphold his responsibility?¹⁰⁵ Father C. Calvetti argues that Calvin reduced man's will to a mere instrument of God's will (a charge made by Pighius 400 years earlier)¹⁰⁶ and that mere spontaneity does not suffice for responsibility.¹⁰⁷ Calvin lent credence to the former charge when he compared man's will to a horse which is ridden either by God or by Satan.¹⁰⁸ But he quickly qualified the picture.

When it is said, then, that the will of the natural man is subject to the power of the devil, and is actuated by him, the meaning is, not that the will, while reluctant and resisting, is forced to submit (as masters oblige unwilling slaves to execute their orders), but that, fascinated by the impostures of Satan, it necessarily yields to his guidance, and does him homage.¹⁰⁹

The cause of sin is not to be sought in anything external to the will of man, in which the root of the evil lies.¹¹⁰

Calvin's ultimate defence of human responsibility is the fact that man sins voluntarily. He denied that responsibility requires that man should have the power to avoid sin. Such an argument would deprive the devil of responsibility.¹¹¹ It would also have the curious effect of making the most depraved people the least responsible and therefore the least wicked.

¹⁰³ G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, 1962), 318.

¹⁰⁴ P. W. Pruyser, 'Calvin's View of Man: A Psychological Commentary', *Theology Today* 26, 1969/70, 67.

¹⁰⁵ Objections related to God's predestination have already been considered in sections 11.2 and III.3, above.

¹⁰⁶ C. Calvetti, *art. cit.*, 307, 312. *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.350).

¹⁰⁷ C. Calvetti, *art. cit.*, 308, 311f.

¹⁰⁸ *Inst.* II.iv.1. Cf. *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.391). For Luther's use of this image and its origins, cf. H. J. McSorley, *op. cit.*, 335-40.

¹⁰⁹ *Inst.* II.iv.1. Cf. *Comm. Rom.* 7: 14.

¹¹⁰ *Inst.* II.iv.1. Cf. *Comm. Rom.* 1: 24; *De scand.* (OS 2.194f.).

¹¹¹ *Inst.* II.v.1 (mainly 1539). The whole of II.v is devoted to answering arguments against the bondage of the will. Cf. II.viii.2. Cf. A. Lecerf, *op. cit.*, 98-100.

A more serious question concerns man's responsibility for his present condition. Calvin forestalled any attempt to shift responsibility for sin onto God's decree by appealing to man's conscience as a witness to his guilty responsibility.¹¹² There is some validity in this argument in that man is shown to be guilty at the bar of conscience, but this proves that man is responsible and guilty, not that *Calvin's*

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doctrine of man is consistent with such responsibility. The weak point in Calvin's case lies not in his doctrine of predestination, since he could plausibly claim that God's decree and man's action function at 'different levels',¹¹³ but in his doctrine of original sin. Calvin asserted that Adam's sin brought a hereditary taint of corruption into human nature.¹¹⁴ As a result of the Fall, all Adam's descendants suffer from a corrupted and depraved nature.¹¹⁵ All men are guilty not for Adam's sin but for their own depravity. We are condemned as a result of the Fall not because we undeservingly bear Adam's guilt but because we are guilty ourselves, being depraved because of the Fall. Infants, for instance, are guilty not of Adam's fault but of their own corruption.¹¹⁶ Calvin seems here to be avoiding Augustine's teaching that all men sinned 'in Adam' and are therefore guilty of the Fall. But his change exacerbates rather than relieves the problem of responsibility. For Augustine, we are responsible for our present plight because in some mysterious way we sinned in Adam. Our ultimate responsibility is maintained, albeit by a mystery. For Calvin, we are guilty because we are in a depraved condition which is explicitly *Adam's* fault and not ours. Calvin removed the mystery but appears also to have removed any ground for our responsibility for our present plight.

V. Conversion

(1) *Sola gratia*

The bound will cannot make any move towards goodness. 'Every such movement is the first step in that conversion to God, which in Scripture is entirely ascribed to divine grace.'¹¹⁷ Conversion comes by God's grace alone, it is solely his work.¹¹⁸ It involves a new creation in which our heart of stone is transformed into a heart of flesh. There is a total transformation and renovation of our wills. God does not merely assist the weak will, he works in us to will the good.¹¹⁹

We must make this our starting point, viz., that the mind of man is blind until it is illuminated by the Spirit of God [and] that the will is enslaved to evil, and wholly carried and hurried to evil, until corrected by the same Spirit.¹²⁰

¹¹² *Predestination* 155f., cf. 122 (*OC* 8.341f., cf. 314f.). A. Lecerf, *op. cit.*, 91-8 lists many other passages.

¹¹³ Cf. *Predestination* 156 (*OC* 8.342): 'The dispute between us is not whether men perish by the hidden judgement of God beyond their deserts. This we declare to be false and detest as a foul sacrilege. The dispute is whether the ungodly who voluntarily provoke the wrath of God upon themselves were before divinely reprobated by a cause which was just though unknown'.

¹¹⁴ *Inst.* I.xv.8 (1559); *Comm. Rom.* 5: 12.

¹¹⁵ *Inst.* II.i.5-8 (1536-1559). Cf. *Comm. Ezek.* 11: 19f.: 'Whatever Adam lost we also lost by the fall: because he was not created for his own self alone, but in his person God showed what would be the condition of the human race'.

¹¹⁶ *Inst.* II.i.6,8 (1536-1559); *Comm. Rom.* 5: 17.

¹¹⁷ *Inst.* II.iii.5.

¹¹⁸ *Inst.* II.iii.6-9,13 (1539-1559).

¹¹⁹ *Inst.* II.iii.6 (1539 and 1559).

¹²⁰ *Eccl. ref. rat.* (*CTS* 3.244; *OC* 7.594).

Grace is prevenient—it precedes every good work of man.¹²¹ 'God, therefore, begins the good work in us by exciting in our hearts a desire, a love, and a study of righteousness, or (to speak more correctly) by turning, training and guiding our hearts unto righteousness.'¹²² Grace is also efficacious. It is not that 'grace is offered to us and placed, as it were, in our midst, that we may embrace it if we choose' but God effects in us a good will.¹²³ 'The grace offered by the Lord is not merely one which every individual has full liberty of choosing to receive or reject, but a grace which produces in the heart both choice and will.'¹²⁴ To mix the efforts of our own will with grace is to pollute it. 'Everything good in the will is entirely derived from the influence of the Spirit.'¹²⁵

(2) *Destruction of the Will?*

If conversion is a new creation, does it involve the destruction of the will? In the 1539 *Institutio* Calvin came near to this position. God destroys (*aboleat*) our depraved will and substitutes a good will from Himself. It is wrong to suggest that the will obeys grace as a voluntary handmaid.¹²⁶ The heart of stone is replaced by a heart of flesh so that 'everything proper to our own will is abolished, and that

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which succeeds in its place is wholly of God'.¹²⁷ God does not merely assist the weak will but he makes (*efficere*) the will.¹²⁸ Chrysostom's statement that 'whom he draws, he draws willingly' is to be rejected.¹²⁹ In short, the beginning of regeneration is 'the abolition of what is ours'.¹³⁰ If Calvin was understood to teach that grace destroys the will he must himself bear much of the blame. But in fact he qualified this teaching. After the last-quoted passage he added that Augustine rightly taught that grace does not destroy the will but rather repairs it. This will is said to be made new (*nova creari*) inasmuch as its corrupt nature is entirely changed.

Despite these qualifications, Calvin was accused by Pighius in 1542 of teaching that grace destroys the will. Calvin retorted by accusing Pighius of wilfully misunderstanding him, but his explanation of his earlier teaching is so much fuller and clearer than the 1539 *Institutio* that Calvin must himself bear at least as much blame as Pighius for the misunderstanding. Calvin reaffirmed that in conversion 'all that is of our own will is destroyed and what comes in its place is wholly of God' and that 'conversion is the work of God alone'.¹³¹ Pighius had interpreted this to mean that God destroys the substance or faculty of the will itself.¹³² Calvin was angered by this interpretation and clarified his meaning at length. He held to less than the destruction of the faculty of the will and more than merely the destruction of evil acts of will. Pighius was very ignorant not to know that there lies something between the substance of the will or faculty of willing and its acts or effects, namely the habit (*habitus*) of the will. Calvin

¹²¹ *Inst.* II.iii.7.

¹²² *Inst.* II.iii.6.

¹²³ *Comm.* Phil. 2: 13.

¹²⁴ *Inst.* II.iii.13. Cf. II.iii.10.

¹²⁵ *Inst.* II.v.15 (1559).

¹²⁶ *Inst.* II.iii.7 (OS 3.281).

¹²⁷ *Inst.* II.iii.6. Cf. II.iii.8.

¹²⁸ *Inst.* II.iii.9 (OS 3.284).

¹²⁹ *Inst.* II.iii.10.

¹³⁰ *Inst.* II.v.15 (OS 3.315).

¹³¹ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.375f.).

¹³² A. Pighius, *op. cit.*, f.89a-b.

followed Bernard who distinguished between the will in itself, an evil will and a good will. The first of these signifies the faculty or substance of the will. The other two signify qualities or habits of the will. The (faculty of) will itself is permanent in man, but the evil will comes from the Fall and the good will from regeneration. The will remains, as created, the change takes place in its habit, not its substance.¹³³ It is true that 'all that is of us is destroyed' but this means 'that which we have in us outside of God's creation', i.e. 'a corruption which cleaves not merely to some part of us but to the whole of our nature'. Sin has affected the whole of man, understanding and will, all of the soul and its faculties so that man cannot think, choose, will, attempt or do anything but evil. It is in this sense that all that is ours is destroyed and renovated.¹³⁴ Calvin also qualified his earlier rejection of Chrysostom's saying that God draws us willingly. He accepted the statement of Ambrose that those who serve Christ or Satan do so voluntarily, while quickly adding that those whom Christ wishes to will the good he causes to do such by his Spirit. Christ does not draw us violently or unwillingly, says Augustine, and we therefore follow him voluntarily (*sponte*), but of a will which he has made in us. Chrysostom's mistake was not to teach that we follow voluntarily but to suppose that we follow of our own accord (*proprio motu*).¹³⁵ Finally, in conversion 'it is certain when we will that we will,' but it is he who causes us to will the good; it is certain when we act that we act, but it is he who causes that we act, by giving to the will the most efficacious powers.¹³⁶ It is 'not that we do nothing ourselves, or that we are brought to work by his impulsion without any motion of our will, but that we act, being moved by him'.¹³⁷

The fuller teaching of Calvin's reply to Pighius leaves its mark on the 1559 *Institutio*. (Although Calvin's reply to Pighius *appeared* shortly before the 1543 *Institutio*, the latter was completed nearly a year earlier and thus could not be

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influenced by the former.) The statement about the destruction of the will is qualified:

I say the will is abolished, but not in so far as it is will, for in conversion everything essential to our original nature remains: I also say, that it is created anew, not because the will then begins to exist, but because it is turned from evil to good.¹³⁸

Augustine is quoted with approval to the effect that when God acts upon us we also act. 'He reminds us that the agency of man is not destroyed by the motion of the Holy Spirit, because nature furnishes the will which is guided so as to aspire to good.'¹³⁹

Though everything good in the will is entirely derived from the influence of the Spirit, yet, because we have naturally an innate power of willing, we are not improperly said to do the things of which God claims for himself all the praise.¹⁴⁰

In his commentary on Ezekiel Calvin again explains his position carefully:

¹³³ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.377f., cf. 381,392).

¹³⁴ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.380f).

¹³⁵ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.395f.).

¹³⁶ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.330). Cf. OC 6.367.

¹³⁷ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.337).

¹³⁸ *Inst.* II.iii.6 (1559). Cf. *Act. trid.* (CTS 3.148; OC 7.473).

¹³⁹ *Inst.* II.v.14 (1559). Cf. *Act. trid.* (CTS 3.112; OC 7.446).

¹⁴⁰ *Inst.* II.v.15 (1559).

The will is naturally implanted in man, whence this faculty belongs equally to the elect and the reprobate. All therefore will, but through Adam's fall it happens that our will is depraved and rebellious against God: will, I say, remains in us, but it is enslaved and bound by sin. Whence then comes an upright will? Even from regeneration by the Spirit. Hence the Spirit does not confer on us the faculty of willing: for it is inherent to us from our birth, that is, it is hereditary, and a part of the creation which could not be blotted out by Adam's fall; but when the will is in us, God gives us to will rightly, and this is his work.¹⁴¹

In the 1539 *Institutio* Calvin came dangerously close to teaching the destruction of the will, in that such a misinterpretation is at least excusable. Pighius' challenge on this point, so vehemently rejected by Calvin, did cause him to qualify his teaching, first in his reply to Pighius and later in the 1559 *Institutio* and other works. Calvin was indebted to Pighius in that the latter moved him to clarify his position and to remove its ambiguities.

VI. CHRISTIAN MAN

(1) *Liberty*

Calvin was reluctant to concede that the sinner has freewill since he saw freedom primarily in ethical terms, as freedom to do the good. It is only as a Christian that man attains this freedom. As Augustine put it, the will of the unbeliever 'is indeed free, but not freed—free of righteousness, but enslaved to sin'.¹⁴² 'The will is not free except inasmuch as it has been freed.'¹⁴³ The believer enjoys freedom from the dominion of the flesh.¹⁴⁴ He has been set free from sin and the flesh and has become willingly obedient to righteousness.¹⁴⁵ It does not detract from this freedom that we serve God. The alternative to his service is not pure autonomy but bondage to the law, sin and death.¹⁴⁶ It is the willing obedience of righteousness that is the only true freedom.¹⁴⁷

Christian freedom is not fully attained in this life. Regeneration frees us from the bondage of sin but we do not enjoy the full possession of this freedom. While sin no longer reigns over us it remains in us.¹⁴⁸ The remnants of the flesh struggle

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against the Spirit and so the Christian life is marked by a daily struggle against evil.¹⁴⁹

[The godly] are so divided, however, that although they aspire to God with the special desire of their hearts, seek heavenly righteousness, and hate sin, they are drawn back again to the earth by the remnants of their flesh. Accordingly, in this state of distraction, they fight against their own nature and feel their own nature fighting against them. They condemn their sins, not only because they are compelled by the judgement of reason, but because they abhor them with genuine feeling of the heart and detest their conduct in committing sin.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴¹ *Comm.* Ezek. 11: 19f.

¹⁴² *Inst.* II.ii.8.

¹⁴³ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.298).

¹⁴⁴ *Comm.* Gal. 5: 24.

¹⁴⁵ *Comm.* 2 Cor. 3: 17; *Comm.* 2 Pet. 2: 19.

¹⁴⁶ *Comm.* Rom. 7: 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Comm.* Jn. 8: 32.

¹⁴⁸ *Inst.* III.iii.10f. (1543).

¹⁴⁹ *Inst.* III.iii.14; *Comm.* Rom. 7:15.

¹⁵⁰ *Comm.* Rom. 7:15.

(2) *Cooperation with Grace*

Medieval Catholic theology, following Augustine, distinguished between operating and cooperating grace. Initially (operating) grace converts the will from evil to good. The converted will then desires the good and so works together with (cooperating) grace. Calvin was extremely suspicious of the concept of cooperating grace, as he found it in Peter Lombard.¹⁵¹ Why was he so suspicious? There were three errors that Catholic theology had built on the concept.

First, the idea of cooperating grace could suggest that grace is not efficacious. He feared the view that 'it pertains to us either to nullify the first [operating] grace, by rejecting it, or to confirm it, by obediently yielding to it'.¹⁵² He was totally opposed to this since he believed most strongly that salvation is of grace alone. So concerned was he to make this point that he resorted to a most implausible interpretation of Augustine. Augustine distinguished between the 'first liberty' given to Adam, that of being able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) and the 'last liberty' to be given to us, that of being unable to sin (*non posse peccare*).¹⁵³ Calvin understood the latter to refer not to the age to come (the natural interpretation) but to the state of the believer *now*.¹⁵⁴ This interpretation would seem to imply that Christians have already attained to sinless perfection, but this Calvin vigorously rejected.¹⁵⁵ His aim was not to suggest that Christians never sin but rather to stress that *when grace moves us* we cannot but follow. 'The grace offered by the Lord is not merely one which every individual has full liberty of choosing to receive or reject, but a grace which produces in the heart both choice and will: so that all the good works which follow after are its fruit and effect; the only will which yields obedience being the will which grace itself has made.'¹⁵⁶

Secondly, cooperation with grace can imply that man has merit. 'That which cannot be done without the cooperation of the Spirit is imputed as merit to those whose will might have made it otherwise.'¹⁵⁷ I Corinthians 15: 10 has been quoted to support this erroneous view but Paul 'transfers the whole merit of the labour to grace alone'. He 'does not say that grace was a fellow-worker with him, but that the grace which was with him was sole worker'.¹⁵⁸

Thirdly, cooperation with grace can imply that the gift of perseverance is given according to how we cooperate with earlier grace. This would imply that it is man who is the master of his destiny rather than God alone. 'As to perseverance, it would undoubtedly have been regarded as the gratuitous gift of God, had not the very pernicious error prevailed, that it is bestowed in proportion to human merit, according to the reception which each individual gives to the first grace'.¹⁵⁹

Despite these misgivings, Calvin was not totally opposed to the concept of

¹⁵¹ *Inst.* II.ii.6, II.iii.11-13 (mainly 1539); *Comm.* Jer. 32: 40; *Comm.* 1 Thess. 5: 23.

¹⁵² *Inst.* II.ii.6. Cf. *Comm.* Jer. 32: 39; *Comm.* Ezek. 18: 22.

¹⁵³ *De correptione et gratia* 12.33 (P. Schaff (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 5, 485).

¹⁵⁴ *Inst.* II.iii.13, where Calvin is opposing Peter Lombard. Pighius took issue with Calvin on this point (*op. cit.*, ff.104b-105b) and Calvin responded in *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.401-4), where he did concede that this gift is only *fully* ours after the resurrection. Cf. *Comm.* Jeremiah 32: 40 where there is a similar discussion.

¹⁵⁵ *Inst.* III.iii.14.

¹⁵⁶ *Inst.* II.iii.13.

¹⁵⁷ *Inst.* II.ii.6, citing Pseudo-Ambrose, *De vocations gentium*, inaccurately.

¹⁵⁸ *Inst.* II.iii.12 (the second quotation is from 1543).

¹⁵⁹ *Inst.* II.iii.11.

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cooperating grace. He was prepared to accept it in Augustine's sense: 'that God, by cooperating, perfects what he begins by operating,—that both graces are the same, but obtain different names from the different manner in which they produce their effects'.¹⁶⁰ 'If it is meant that after we are once subdued by the power of the Lord to the obedience of righteousness, we proceed voluntarily, and are inclined to follow the movement of grace, I have nothing to object.'¹⁶¹ While Calvin disliked the term merit, he was happy to concede that God rewards our good works. 'The Lord, while he daily enriches his servants, and loads them with new gifts of his grace, because he approves of and takes pleasure in the work which he has begun, finds that in them which he may follow up with larger measures of grace.'¹⁶² But this concession must be qualified.

It must not be said that the legitimate use of the first grace is rewarded by subsequent measures of grace, as if man rendered the grace of God effectual by his own industry, nor must it be thought that there is any such remuneration as to make it cease to be the gratuitous grace of God. I admit, then, that believers may expect as a blessing from God, that the better the use they make of previous, the larger the supplies they will receive of future grace; but I say that even this use is of the Lord, and that this remuneration is bestowed freely of mere good-will.¹⁶³

Calvin disliked the concept of cooperating grace. He rejected the idea that man needs to supplement the grace of God or that he can do good *independently* of grace. But he did not deny that man, moved by grace, willingly obeys righteousness, does good and is rewarded. In this sense he did believe in cooperation with grace.

VII. MAN IN GLORY

In this life we begin to bear the image of Christ, through regeneration, but this image is not yet fully restored.¹⁶⁴ We press forward to perfection but we do not reach the goal before death. The struggle against sin is lifelong.¹⁶⁵ But in the age to come our salvation will be complete. It is then that our wills will be truly free. While Adam was created with the possibility of not sinning (*posse non peccare*) the believer has the much greater gift of being unable to sin (*non posse peccare*). This gift is already ours in part, but it comes fully after the resurrection, when there will be no more sin.¹⁶⁶

Calvin normally draws a contrast between deliverance from sin, which comes with death, and full perfection, which awaits the Last Day and the resurrection of our bodies.¹⁶⁷ Why is it that death brings final deliverance from sin? Primarily because it is the liberation of the soul from the prison of the body. 'If to be freed from the body is to gain full possession of freedom,

¹⁶⁰ *Inst.* II.iii.11 (1559).

¹⁶¹ *Inst.* II.iii.11.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* For Calvin's dislike of 'merit', cf. *Inst.* III.xv.1-4; for more on reward, cf. his doctrine of 'double justification' (*Inst.* III.xvii.5-10) (both sections mainly 1539).

¹⁶⁴ *Comm.* 1 Cor. 15: 49. Cf. *Comm.* Rom. 6: 11; *Comm.* 1 Cor. 15: 23; *Comm.* 2 Tim. 2: 10.

¹⁶⁵ *Inst.* III.iii.9-11,14, III.vi.5 (1539-1559).

¹⁶⁶ *Def. serv. arb.* (OC 6.401f.). Full freedom comes at the resurrection rather than death as Calvin was responding to Pighius (cf. n.154).

¹⁶⁷ *Comm.* 1 Cor. 1: 7f., 13: 12; *Comm.* Phil. 1: 6.

what is the body but a prison?'¹⁶⁸ Calvin was aware that the biblical concept of 'flesh' did not simply refer to the body. 'Everything, therefore, which we have from nature is flesh.'¹⁶⁹ The works of the flesh include sins like ambition which belongs to the highest faculties of the mind.¹⁷⁰ But nonetheless, he repeatedly identified the flesh with the body and saw the release of the soul from the body as its final deliverance from sin.¹⁷¹

The body, which decays, weighs down the soul, and confining it within an

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earthly habitation, greatly limits its perceptions. If the body is the prison of the soul, if the earthly habitation is a kind of fetters, what is the state of the soul when set free from this prison, when loosed from these fetters? Is it not restored to itself, and as it were made complete, so that we may truly say, that all which it gains is so much lost to the body?.... When we put off the load of the body, the war between the spirit and the flesh ceases.... Then the soul, set free from impurities, is truly spiritual, so as to be in accordance with the will of God, and not subject to the tyranny of the flesh, rebelling against it.... Then the soul, having shaken off all kinds of pollution, is truly spiritual, so that it consents to the will of God, and is no longer subjected to the tyranny of the flesh.¹⁷²

Thus full freedom of the will comes at death, following the liberation of the soul from the body.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Did Calvin believe in freewill? Even Calvin himself could not give a clear and unequivocal answer to this question. At different stages in man's history different degrees of freedom are conceded to the will.

Calvin's teaching on freewill is very close to that of Augustine. Perhaps the greatest difference is one of attitude. Augustine, while clearly teaching the bondage of the will and the sovereignty of grace, took great care to preserve man's freewill. Calvin was much more polemical in his assertion of human impotence and was reluctant to talk of freewill. What Augustine had carefully safeguarded, Calvin grudgingly conceded.

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¹⁶⁸ *Inst.* III.lix.4. Cf. *Comm.* 1 Cor. 1: 8; *Comm.* Phil. 1: 6; *Comm.* 1 Jn. 3: 2.

¹⁶⁹ *Inst.* II.iii.1. Cf. II.i.9 (1559); *Comm.* Ezek. 11: 19f.; *Comm.* Rom. 7: 14.

¹⁷⁰ *Comm.* Gal. 5: 19f.

¹⁷¹ *Inst.* III.vi.5; *Comm.* Phil. 1: 6; *Comm.* 1 Jn. 3: 2.

¹⁷² *Psych.* (CTS 3.443; OC 5.196). Cf. *Psych.* (CTS 3.439f.; OC 5.194).