The Distinctive Character of the Reformed Tradition*

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It is, I believe, in its doctrine of God that the really fundamental character of any church tradition becomes revealed. That is certainly true of the whole Reformed tradition from John Calvin to Karl Barth. Thus, right from the start, over against the Latin patristic and medieval notions of the immutability and impassability of God, often construed in Aristotelian terms of the Unmoved Mover, the theologians of the Reformed church laid the emphasis upon the sovereign majesty of the mighty, living, acting God, with a closer relation between the mighty acts of God in Israel and in the kingdom and church of Christ.

This has to be understood within the context of the whole Reformation movement, in which there took place a paradigmatic shift from dialectical to dialogical discourse, from abstract questions about essence to concrete questions about event, and thus from mainly static to dynamic modes of thought. Reformers made a concerted attempt to abandon a way of thinking from a point of absolute rest in favor of a kinetic mode of thinking that was appropriate to divine acts in space and time—hence the characteristic stress upon atonement and eschatology. The attempt was not entirely successful, for scholastic Calvinist and Lutheran dogmatics soon lapsed back into rather static patterns of thought. Nevertheless, the urgent concern of the Reformation with doctrines of redeeming and saving events have characterized the whole Protestant tradition ever since.

Built into the foundations of the Reformed tradition, of course, was the primacy given to the *Word of God*, which was regarded not as some communication about God detached from God but as God himself speaking to us personally. God is known only through God, on the actual ground of God's self-revelation and gracious activity toward us, for it is only through Christ and the Spirit that we have access to God. The God we know in this way is never mute or inactive.

Reformed theological thinking along these lines was determined from the very start by Calvin's reversal of the stereotyped medieval questions: *quid sit, an sit, quale sit.* That imported a rejection of the essentialist approach to God that had dominated the analytical and logical thinking of the great Schoolmen. For

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Calvin the primary question became, Who is God? Who is the One who acts in this merciful and loving way toward us in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? This is not a question in which the essence and the existence of God are held apart from one another, but one in which God is allowed to disclose who he is in actual relation toward us, and one in which we are cast wholly upon God's own reality in presenting himself to be known by us.

God is who he is in his Word of self-communication to us. God comes to us clothed with his revelation, for God and his revelation are indivisibly one. The Word of God *is* God, and God *is* his Word.

Here let us recall Karl Barth's point that twice in its long history the church has had to struggle for the central truth of the gospel. The first time was in the fourth century when the doctrine of the deity of Christ was at stake, and thus also the doctrines of the deity of the Holy Spirit and of the Triunity of the Godhead. It was a struggle to secure the identity of God's self-revelation with God himself, which the church achieved through its formulation of the *homoousion* in asserting that the incarnate Son of God is of one and the same being with God the Father. This secured belief both in the deity of the Holy Spirit and in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

The second time the church had to struggle for the central truth of the gospel was in the sixteenth century, when not only the objectivity of revelation but the primacy of justification by grace, and all the saving truths of the gospel, were at stake. It was a struggle to secure the identity of God's self-giving in grace through his Word and Spirit with God himself, which the Reformation achieved through its insistence upon the identity of the gift of grace with God the giver. That is to say, at the Reformation the Nicene *homoousion* was applied both to the Word and to the grace of God proclaimed in the gospel, for in them God has revealed and communicated, not just something about himself, but himself in his own personal being. Thus if the Nicene Fathers had to lay their main emphasis upon the *being* of God in his acts, the Reformers had to lay their main emphasis upon the *acts* of God in his being. It belongs to the great merit of Karl Barth that he has brought those two emphases together in a doctrine of the dynamic being of God, particularly evident in his identification of the electing and revealing act of the eternal God with the incarnation of his beloved Son in space and time.

Let us now consider some principal features in this Reformed tradition.

Predestination and Providence

Predestination means the anchoring of all God's ways and works in his own eternal being and will. While the term "predestination" refers everything back to the eternal purpose of God's love for humankind, the cognate term "election" refers more to the fulfillment of that purpose in space and time, patiently worked out by God in the history of Israel and brought to its consummation in Jesus Christ. Thus predestination is not to be understood in terms of some timeless decree in God, but as the electing activity of God providentially and savingly at work in what Calvin called the "history of redemption." Behind it all is to be

discerned the unvarying faithfulness or dynamic constancy of God, for in choosing humankind for fellowship with himself the electing God thereby wills to set aside everything contrary to this eternal purpose. In his faithfulness, God never says "yes" and "no" to us, but only "yes." That is the way in which Calvin understood the couplet "predestination" and "reprobation." If predestination is to be traced back not just to faith as its "manifest cause" but to the "yes" of God's grace as its "hidden cause," so reprobation is to be traced back not just to unbelief as its "manifest cause" but to the "yes" of God's grace as its "hidden cause" as well, and not to some alleged "no" in God. There are not two wills in God, but only the one eternal will of God's electing love. It is by the constancy of that love that all who reject God are judged.

The gospel tells us that it is only in Jesus Christ that election takes place. Christ embodies the electing love of God in his own divine-human person. That is why, to refer to Calvin again, he insisted that we must think of Christ as the "cause" of election in all four traditional senses of "cause": the efficient and the material, the formal and the final. Christ is at once the *agent* and the *content* of election, its *beginning* and its *end.* Hence it is only *in Christ* that we may discern the ground and purpose of election in God's unchanging being, and also how election operates in God's creative, providential, and redemptive activity. In Christ the whole electing and covenanting of love of God is gathered up to a head and launched into history. Before Christ, apart from him, or without him God does not will or do anything, for there is no God behind the back of Jesus Christ.

This identity of eternal election and divine providence in Jesus Christ generated in the Reformed tradition its well-known conjunction of repose in God and active obedience to God in the service of Christ's kingdom. However, if that repose in God is referred, as has happened only too often in the history of Reformed churches, to an inertial ground in the eternal being of God, then there opens up a split in people's understanding between predestination and the saving activity of Christ in space and time, e.g., in the notion of election as "antecedent to grace." That would seem to be the source of a tendency toward a Nestorian view of Christ that keeps cropping up in Calvinist theology. This is very evident in misguided attempts to construe the "pre" in "predestination" in a logical, causal, or temporal way, and then to project it back into an absolute decree behind the back of Jesus and thus to introduce a division into the very person of Christ. It is one of Karl Barth's prime contributions to Reformed theology that he has decisively exposed and rejected such a damaging way of thought.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

It was well known during the Reformation that in his doctrine of the Trinity Calvin took his cue from Gregory the Theologian—that is why Melanchthon nicknamed Calvin "the Theologian," after Gregory. But it was also the case that in formulating his doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Calvin operated with a concept of person ontologically derived from the eternal communion of love in the

Godhead, which had been put forward by Richard of St. Victor and Duns Scotus, rather than with a concept of person analytically derived from the notions of individual substance and rational nature, which had been set out by Boethius and Thomas Aquinas. This difference was to give Reformed theology one of its most important features.

Calvin's understanding of the nature and role of the person was to have very far-reaching implications in the whole course of the Reformed tradition—not least in respect to the doctrines of the knowledge of God and of justification by grace through personal union with Christ, together with the cognate doctrines of Eucharistic Communion and of the church as the body of Christ. But it also had a wider application to the social structure of humanity and even a startling relevance to physical science in generating insight into the fact that the relations of things to one another may belong to what things really are in themselves.

(1) We turn first to the fact that knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are found to have a relation of profound mutuality, yet one in which the divine Subject and Agent always retains priority. We cannot cut off knowledge of God from the fact that he has addressed us in his Word so that our knowledge of God must include within it the proper place given by God to the human subject, but this place is one in which the human subject refers everything to God and nothing to itself. As Calvin regarded it, this reference to knowledge back to God reflects the doctrine of election, which insists that we do not know God by acting upon him but by being acted upon by God. Hence we must learn to distinguish what is objectively real from our subjective fantasies.

Apart from such self-critical testing, a gross personalism easily takes over in which the people obtrude themselves into the place of God, making their own relations with God constitute the actual content of theological knowledge, thereby recasting all theological statements into anthropological statements. That is what happened in European thought with the Cartesian and Lockean notion of the autonomous reason when Western theology followed Boethius and Aquinas in their concept of the person as the individual substance of rational nature, instead of following Richard of St. Victor and John Calvin in their very different concept of the person in accordance with which the objective relations of persons with one another were regarded as belonging to what persons are.

(2) Of quite central importance in the Reformed tradition was the emphasis placed by Calvin upon union with Christ. It was typical of Calvin to stress the fact that union with Christ must be thought of as coming *first,* for it is only through this union that we may partake of Christ and all his benefits. For Calvin, this concept of union with Christ was inseparable from his doctrine of the Holy Spirit, for just as incarnation and Pentecost belong together in the saving acts of God, so our life in union with Christ and in the communion of the Spirit belong savingly together. The concept of a union with Christ had played an important role in the medieval Franciscan tradition, as is evident in the popular hymns of Bernard of Clairvaux. But into that tradition Calvin introduced two far-reaching changes.

The first change has to do with what was known as the *ordo salutis.* As expounded by Alexander of Hales, the teacher of both Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura, union with Christ comes at the end of a saving process mediated through the administration of grace, in the course of which justification and sanctification were thought of as "graces" successively infused into the faithful, deepening their relation with Christ. With Calvin, however, that *ordo salutis* was inverted, for it is only through union with Christ first that we may partake of all the saving benefits embodied in him; union with Christ thus precedes justification and sanctification. This was another way of stating that Christ himself is not only the agent but also the actual matter or substance of election—a concept well understood by people as diverse as David Brainerd and Karl Barth. It was otherwise, however, with the Westminster Confession, in which there was a reversion to the Halesian notion of the order of salvation, and indeed to a medieval framework of thought governed by primary and secondary causes. The strange idea that, while the death of Christ is sufficient for all, it is efficient only for some, also derives from Alexander of Hales; this cannot be attributed to Calvin, for it was explicitly rejected by him, although it was reintroduced into a scholastic form of Calvinism by Theodore Beza.

The second change has to do with the place given by Calvin to the *vicarious humanity* of Christ. To be united with Christ is to be joined to him in the human nature that he assumed from us and within which he took our place throughout the whole course of redemption, which he fulfilled from his birth to his crucifixion and resurrection. The implication of this for an understanding of the saving life and activity of Jesus is immense. It laid the emphasis not only upon what was called Jesus' "passive obedience," in which he submitted to the divine judgment upon us, but also upon his "active obedience," in which he took our place in all our human activity before God the Father, such as our acts of faith, obedience, prayer, and worship. To be united with Christ is to be joined to him in his life of faith, obedience, prayer, and worship, so that we must look away from our faith, obedience, prayer, and worship to what Christ is and does for us in our place and on our behalf. This focus upon the vicarious humanity of Christ is a concern that ever since the Reformation has been found at the heart of theological debate in Scotland. One of the main issues at stake here has been the effect of the doctrine of "active obedience" in pointing up the saving significance of the human life of Jesus, and thus opening the way for a proper theological assessment of what has come to be called "the historical Jesus." It is rather strange, however, that this doctrine of the active obedience of Christ tended to be rejected by the Heidelberg, Bezan, and Westminster traditions of Calvinism but was taken up by Albrecht Ritschl in Lutheran theology, although when its relation to the deity of Christ became loosened, as in a defective appreciation of the Nicene *homoousion,* it tended to further a liberal, moralistic approach to Christ and his saving significance. Nevertheless, the doctrine of union with Christ in his vicarious human nature and priesthood remains central to the

Reformed tradition and is surely one of its most helpful contributions to the ecumenical church.

This evangelical conception of union with Christ governed Calvin's teaching about justification and sanctification, Holy Communion, and the church as the body of Christ. With reference to Paul's words that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, Calvin pointed out that a union in being is involved here beyond the relation of faith. For us to *be* in Christ or for Christ to *be* in us has to be understood in an ontological way, and not just in a figurative or spiritual way. It is through a real union with Christ in his vicarious humanity that all that Christ has done for us in himself becomes ours and we are made to share together what Christ is. That was Calvin's doctrine of "the blessed exchange," which he took over from the Greek Fathers. It was in that incarnational and atoning way that justification has to be understood, not just in terms of imputed righteousness but in terms of a participation in the righteousness of Christ which is transferred to us through union with him.

It was also in this ontological way that Calvin thought of baptism. There is "one baptism common to Christ and his Church," which Christ underwent in his own life, death, and resurrection, on our behalf when he made our human nature his own. And it is that one objective baptism, in which Christ has associated us with himself that every act of baptism in the church presupposes, and from which every baptism derives its significance and efficacy. It is in a similar ontological way through personal union with Christ that the Eucharist has to be understood—that is, in terms of Christ's personal self-giving to us in which we partake of the whole Christ crucified and risen who mediates to us his *real presence*, not just in his body and blood but in the indivisible reality of the Savior's personal being and atoning self-sacrifice. It is the presence of the crucified and risen Lord in the reality of his divine-human person clothed with his gospel and clothed with the power of his Spirit. Thus Holy Communion has to do with a personal union with Christ of the most profound kind, for in it the real presence which Christ grants to us in space and time is objectively grounded in the presence of God in Christ to himself. The nature of this real presence in the Eucharist is to be respected as a mystery grounded in the mystery of the hypostatic union of divine and human natures in the one person of Christ. That is why the Reformed church has always rejected any attempt to offer an interpretation of the real presence in terms of substance and accidents, and why it rejected any explanatory appeal to container notions of space but reverted to the relational forms of thought developed by the Greek Fathers of the fourth century out of respect for the inexplicable nature of the incarnation and the ascension.

Once more, it is basically in the same realistic and ontological way that the church is to be understood as *the body of Christ;* that is, not just in a figurative or spiritual way, but as an ontological reality, in which the faithful are made to share together in the mystery of Christ, the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God. Calvin rejected the idea of a two-fold or two-headed church, the church as "mystical body" and as "juridical society," for Christ is not divided. As the body

of Christ, the church is one indivisible reality in him. It is that one actual church in space and time that we know by faith to be the body of Christ. At this point Calvin was probably more influenced by Cyril of Alexandria than by Augustine or Luther. Incidentally, this conception of the church known through faith alone is to be traced in the statements about the church as the body of Christ found in the Tridentine Catechism, where we have the earliest anticipation of the Constitution on the Church promulgated by the Second Vatican Council. It was, of course, this essentially Reformed doctrine of the church as the actual, and not just the mystical, body of Christ, that has informed so much of our ecumenical thinking this century. This applies also to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which was heavily influenced by Karl Barth in his profoundly christocentric and christological account of the church as the body of Christ, that is, as "the earthly-historical form of the existence of Jesus Christ."

(3) It was largely in the Reformed tradition that there developed the concept that the interrelations between persons are part of what persons are; this is what I call "onto-relations," a concept that goes back ultimately to the teaching of Athanasius and Gregory-Nazianzus about the *perichoresis* of the substantive relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the eternal Godhead. While these onto-relations apply to our understanding of the Triunity of God in a unique and transcendent way, they also apply in quite another way on the creaturely level to the interrelations of human persons whom God has created for communion with himself, and which in their created way reflect the uncreated relations within God.

Reformed Conceptuality

With the whole movement of the Reformation, there took place through the rediscovery of the mighty Word of God a profound epistemological shift from optical to acoustic modes of knowing and thinking. Thus Martin Luther drew a clear contrast between the "audible kingdom" and the "visible kingdom," with the insistence that knowledge of God is mediated to us through hearing rather than through seeing. In order to "see" God, he declared, you must "stick your eyes in your ears!" This new approach to *auditive knowledge of God* had already been worked out by John Reuchlin on the ground of what he called "Hebrew truth" impressed upon him particularly through his study of the Old Testament Scriptures. From him it passed through the teaching of John Major in Paris to John Calvin with whom it took the form of intuitive evident knowledge that arises through the obedience of faith to the Word of God speaking to us in person in the Holy Scriptures. While this outlook permeated the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations alike, our immediate concern is with the particular mode of conceptuality to which Calvin's emphasis on the inseparable relation of Word and Spirit gave rise in the Reformed tradition. Let me single out several of its main ingredients.

First, knowledge of God derived from his Word must be regarded as objectively grounded in God, for the Word which God addresses to us in Jesus

Christ is not some Word detached from God but is consubstantial with God and belongs as Word to God's eternal being. This was the point upon which Reuchlin had insisted. In the dominant medieval tradition, the Thomists had criticized Anselm's teaching that there is a "speaking" as well as an "understanding" in the innermost being of God, but Reuchlin argued that this was to contradict the doctrine of the *homoousion* in the Nicene Creed. Like the Son of God, the Word is divine reality and resides as Word in the eternal being of God and proceeds from God as Word without being less than God. That was precisely Calvin's point: the Word which we hear in the Holy Scriptures derives from and reposes in the inner being of God; and that is the objective ground, deep in the life of God, upon which knowledge of God mediated through God's own self-witness rests. In his own eternal being God is not mute or dumb but Word communicating or speaking himself. That is the Word that we hear in the Holy Scriptures, for God personally resides in that Word even when he communicates it to us, and when by the presence of the Spirit God effects in us intuitive, auditive, evident knowledge of himself.

Second, it follows from this that authentic knowledge of God, which derives through the conjoint operation of the Word and the Spirit and takes root in us through the hearing of faith, is *never nonconceptual.* While knowledge of God is essentially spiritual and requires spiritual understanding to be grasped, this does not mean that it is mediated to us in some merely spiritual, nonconceptual way and requires to be converted into concepts if it is to be grasped and understood. On the contrary, just as the Spirit and the Word are indivisibly one in God, so they are indivisibly one in God's self-revelation to us and in our knowledge of him. That is the essence of Calvin's doctrine of "the internal testimony of the Spirit," which has been so cherished in Reformed churches. This gives expression to the fact that our knowledge of God emanates from a testimony inherent in God. The Spirit, as Calvin used to say, inheres in the truth of God's own being. Through the Spirit and the Word functioning together we are given to share in God's own self-knowledge or self-witness. That is the Word which we hear through the testimony of the Spirit, but it reaches us already in the conceptual form of Word, not as something vague and non-conceptual which we must transpose into cognitive form before it can be apprehended or expressed. By the term "internal testimony," Calvin did not refer primarily to what is internal to us but to what is internal to God, i.e., to the self-witness inherent in God's own being, but which God makes by the action of his Holy Spirit, the unique causality of his divine being, to echo within us. Hence, in forming our acts of cognition we are led by the Spirit of truth, who acts critically upon the forms of thought and speech we bring to the understanding and interpretation of the Word of God and transforms them through his creative power so that they may be appropriate to the nature of God's self-revelation.

Third, knowledge of God governed by the Word and Spirit of God eschews intelligible as well as sensible images. Here Calvin found he had to face a double problem inherited from the development of Latin patristic and scholastic

theology. On the one hand, through Augustinian and Aristotelian metaphysics there had grown up the habit of thinking of objective realities not directly but by means of media between the mind and what it apprehends, called "images in the middle" or "significants." This reminds us of the doctrine of "representative perception" that was later put forward by the British empiricists. Thus it was widely held that when people apprehend or speak of things, they are more sure of subjective states in their minds than what lies beyond them. The primacy that this gave to images greatly accentuated the allegorical exegesis that prevailed in the Middle Ages, but it also had the effect of accentuating the habit of the human mind in projecting out of its imagination false conceptions upon God. At the same time, matters were made rather worse by the decision of the Roman church to abolish the second commandment, which condemns the fabrication of graven images of God. It was distinctive of Calvin's thought, even in contrast to that of Luther, that he insisted on restoring the second commandment with its prohibition of images and set about working out its epistemological implications. All the images we invent or ideas we devise for ourselves are idols of the mind, the products of our own diseased imagination, which we project upon God.

However, *God is not imaginable;* theological language is not to be regarded in any way as descriptive of God, but it is to be used in such a way as to *refer imagelessly* to God beyond what we can imagine or conceive. Thus, the kind of conceptuality developed in the Reformed tradition calls into question all the fabrications and inventions that we dream up and project upon God, for all authentic knowledge of God operates with appropriate modes of conception imposed upon us by the nature of God and God's self-communication through the Word and Spirit. This is another aspect of Reformed theology which in our own day has been powerfully developed by Karl Barth in drawing out the epistemological implication of election as the rejection of all anthropomorphic conceptions of God. Election speaks, not of the projection of the human into the divine, but of the divine into the human, and in so speaking has the effect of securing fundamental biblical and credal beliefs from mythologizing constructions and demythologizing reinterpretations. It is worth reflecting on the observation that modern problems about mythologizing and demythologizing have arisen only on soil where the second commandment, to say the least, has not been allowed to retain its critical epistemic force.

Reformed Hermeneutics

When Calvin reversed the order of the questions asked by the medieval Schoolmen, he gave priority to the question *qualis sit* over the questions *quid sit* and *an sit.* Thus, instead of beginning with abstract questions as to essence and possibility, he directed theological inquiry to the nature of God disclosed in God's self-revelation. In that event the question *quid sit* fell away altogether, and the question *an sit* became not a question about possibility but a critical question as to whether our modes of thought are appropriate to the nature of God. The effect of this was to change the character of the questions, for they were no

longer dialectical questions designed to clarify the logical structure of a set of propositions, but open *interrogative questions* designed to bring to light the distinctive nature of the realities under investigation, i.e., the kind of questions directed to witnesses, events, and reports in a court of law in order to force the truth out into the open. Rigorous interrogative questions have a critical effect upon the questioners themselves, for their hidden presuppositions and prejudgments must also be brought into question if the matter under inquiry is really to be understood objectively out of itself and in accordance with its nature.

It was just such sharp questioning that Calvin found thrust upon him by Jesus, who insisted that no one could be his disciple without renouncing himself, taking up his cross and following him. Early in his life Calvin had learned from the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas à Kempis that it was only in allowing himself and all his preconceptions to be called utterly into question before Christ and his cross that he could be genuinely open to the truth as it is in Jesus and be obedient to its directing of his mind. That was the nature of the critical, evangelical, and theological inquiry that Calvin applied to the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, all with a view to letting his mind be opened to the compelling claims and transforming power of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ that they are inspired to mediate to humankind.

What does this mean for hermeneutical inquiry? We recall that, due to the way in which God addresses us personally in the Holy Scriptures, a personal relation is set up between us in which knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are bracketed together. Within that situation it is incumbent upon us to put our knowledge of God to the test in order to distinguish it from knowledge of ourselves. The hermeneutical principle that Calvin deployed here was "the analogy of faith," a critical movement of thought in which we test the fidelity of our interpretation by referring the biblical statements back to their ground in the Truth of God. Thereby we let the Truth retain its own majesty and authority over us and allow ourselves to be questioned before it so that we may be delivered from distorting it through our own prejudices.

It has ever since been characteristic of Reformed theology that it here seeks to bring into play the great Reformation principle of justification by grace, in which we look exclusively to Christ, and thus look away from ourselves in order to live out of Christ alone. Properly understood, justification by the grace of Christ applies to the whole realm of human life, to the works of the mind as well as the works of the flesh, for it is whole persons with all knowing and doing who are questioned before God down to the roots of their being, and who precisely by being put in the right with the truth by the free grace of God are exposed as wrong and untrue in themselves. That is the epistemological relevance of justification; it tells us that theological interpretations and statements are of such a kind that they cannot claim to have the truth in themselves, for by their very nature they point away from themselves to Christ as the one Truth of God. In justification, as St. Paul taught us, "Although everyone is a liar, let God be

proved true." No one in the whole history of the Reformed tradition has felt that critical edge of justification in biblical interpretation or in theological exposition so keenly or expounded it so fully as Karl Barth—that is precisely what he was concerned with in his revolutionary commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans*!

The fact that in the Holy Scriptures we come up against the sheer majesty of God in his Word made Calvin deeply conscious of a measure of "inadequacy" and even "impropriety" in all human speech about God, even the human speech found in the Bible, for all human terms and concepts fall far short of the nature of God. This forced Calvin to think through the relation of language to being in a thoroughly realistic way, in which he refused to identify statements about the truth with the truth itself. Like Luther, he found help in the Patristic principle that biblical statements are to be subordinated to the objective realities they serve, and not the other way round, for the truth of biblical statements lies not in themselves but in the truth to which they refer, independent of themselves. It is thus on the objective ground of the Word and Truth of God himself that all authentic knowledge of God mediated through the Holy Scriptures rests, and with reference to which all interpretation must be controlled. Hence the Scriptures are not to be understood simply in terms of their grammatical and syntactical patterns, but in terms of their intrinsic intelligibility derived from divine revelation.

For Calvin, as we have noted, proper hermeneutical activity operates through open interrogative questioning that allows the objective realities to disclose themselves to us in their own rationality and truth, so that under their impact upon our minds we may develop modes of thought and speech appropriate to their nature. It is formally not otherwise with biblical hermeneutics, but here interpretation is governed by the unique nature and activity of the living God who speaks to us personally in his Word, bears witness to himself, and allows that witness through the Holy Spirit to echo in our hearts and minds in such a way that it creates in us the capacity to recognize and obey God. It is thus that all our knowledge of God arises, through "the obedience of faith." For Calvin this meant that faithful interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is always *theological*, for biblical statements may be understood only as we discern the way in which they are locked into the truth of God's Word beyond themselves to which they are divinely inspired to direct us. Hence, evangelical theology is not built up through systematic construction out of biblical propositions, but through such a cognitive indwelling of the theologian in the Holy Scriptures that the objective truths of divine revelation become steadily imprinted upon the theologian's mind. It is then on the ground of those truths and their inner connections to which the Scriptures refer and under the guidance of the theological instinct which they generate in the mind, that the theologian must think it all out and bring it to coherent expression. That is why Calvin deliberately linked together his *Commentaries* on the Holy Scriptures and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in such a way that each supplements the other in instructing the faithful in the understanding of the gospel.

In concluding this discussion, I should like to show something of the wider impact of Reformed thought by referring to two important points in the development of scientific method.

The first has to do with an empirical approach to the discovery of the secrets of nature inaugurated by Francis Bacon in his rejection of the view that scientific knowledge can be reached through the application of logico-deductive processes to sense experience. Taking his cue from Calvin, Bacon put forward a new mode of active investigation through interrogative questioning and obedient interpretation designed to yield knowledge that could not be achieved otherwise, by letting nature impose upon it. It was the task of natural science, as he understood it, to interpret the books of nature by penetrating into their hidden patterns and developing modes of thought congruent with what was thus discovered. That is to say, he sought to transfer the kind of hermeneutics that Reformed thought had developed in interpretation of the books of God to the interpretation of the books of nature. With Bacon himself, however, that remained little more than a formal program, for he was not sufficiently familiar with the mathematical language of nature to grasp and bring to adequate expression the kind of intelligibilities embedded in the physical creation.

The second has to do with James Clerk Maxwell, who projected a "new mathesis" with which to grasp the dynamic mathematical structures embodied in nature and bring them to appropriate theoretic expression. That is what he sought to achieve through the partial differential equations he developed for a dynamic theory of the electromagnetic field. It is highly significant that, at this crucial transition in the scientific understanding of nature, he adapted the relational concept of the person that he found in his Scottish Reformed tradition to explain how particles bear dynamically upon one another in such an intrinsic way that their interrelations belong to what they essentially are. In doing so, he not only called a halt to a mechanistic and deterministic concept of nature, but he put forward the idea of the continuous dynamic field as an independent reality, which Einstein considered the most important change hitherto made in our understanding of nature and in the logical structure of science. The fact that onto-relations of this kind can be applied so successfully, although in this distinctive way, to physical realities, calls for a radical rethinking of interrelations in biological and social fields, but so far little progress has been made along those lines.

Throughout history there has been much more significant traffic between theological and scientific ideas than is often realized, but the lessons that Francis Bacon and James Clerk Maxwell teach us in their different ways is that Reformed theology may still have a very important part to play in our understanding of the kingdom of nature as well as the kingdom of God.