

The dual story line of Calvin's sense-making approach

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Abstract

Calvin's sense-making approach, which is embedded in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), can be construed as a story embodying two reflexive realms, one of creation and the other of redemption. In each of these realms, two trajectories operate closely together. The first is a "vertical" mirroring trajectory with God and human beings facing each other. The second is a "horizontal" trajectory consisting in a process that begins with God approaching human beings and the natural cosmic world. Calvin, who was at times very eclectic but could be very consistent too sometimes, contradicted what usually made sense to him (e.g. his instrumentality in the death of Servetus).

Introduction

Traces and clues of a dual storyline are found throughout Calvin's actions, reflections and writings. His sense-making story is told through two constructed realms of creation and redemption in which God, as the all-initiating agent, leads Calvin's reflection about the actions and dealings of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world with each other. In establishing the two biblical realms of creation and redemption for his reflection within the biblical storyline from Genesis to the Book of Revelation, Calvin follows Luther's strategy of salvation history. By doing so, he bypasses the speculative strategies of the scholastics, whose starting point was firmly located in their question-and-answer technique about the essences of God, human beings, the church and the sacraments. In many parts of Calvin's works, the two realms of creation and redemption – nature and grace in the classic sense – operate in strict conjunction with each other. When Calvin's focus of reflection is specifically directed at one of his constructed realms, his whole pattern of assumptions that underscores both realms appears momentarily within the realm he is currently discussing.

Calvin is continuously elaborating a dual storyline in his works through his theologistic role as initiator of God's dealings with human beings

and the natural cosmic world. In order to play this theologistic role, Calvin invokes calls upon the Spirit of God throughout his works. It is Calvin who leads God reflexively as the all-initiating agent of a “vertical” *mirroring* strategy between God and human beings in strict conjunction with a “horizontal” *processual* strategy (ie of God proceeding to human beings and the natural cosmic world). In this article, Calvin’s mirroring strategy is called his theo ↔ anthropic reflexive trajectory, and his processual movement his theo ↔ anthropic ↔ cosmic reflexive trajectory.

Calvin: theologian, philosopher, divine historian or biblical scholar?

In this article Calvin’s dual storyline is seen to revolve around how he makes sense of the linkages and differences between God, human beings and the natural cosmic environment. Making sense of the mystery of how God, human beings and the natural cosmic environment are connected is a cumbersome exercise. Highly problematic in modern theology are the bridge-building exercises between the threesome pointers of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world that are one of the following, that is either construction schemes of the Platonic mirroring types or attempts to establish analogical syllogisms of Aristotelian origin or the modern divine revelational initiatives which hide behind the notion that God-self is establishing the bridge that links up with human beings and the natural cosmic world. The last option expresses an extreme theologistic construct of God’s self-revelation, a construct that has haunted modern Christianity since the 18th century Enlightenment (Wilckens 1979:57).

Calvin employs and sustains a dual emphasis of two closely-tied reflexive movements twinning each other through the twists and turns of his reflections in the 1559 edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin has no problem with using the terms ‘theology’ and ‘Christian philosophy’ interchangeably when he describes the reflexive operations conducted in his *Institutes*. In the Letter to the Reader of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), Calvin says that the purpose of his *Institutes*, is to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word so that they can not only have easy access to but can advance in it without stumbling. Thus, in one sense, his *Institutes* can be viewed as a pastoral and instructive theology, while in another sense, his *Institutes* is an exercise in Christian philosophy which, according to Calvin, bids reason relinquish its independent operation and submit and subject itself to the Holy Spirit (*Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 7, section 1) (hereafter the format Inst. III,7,1).

Calvin thus uses both the designations “sacred theology” and “Christian philosophy” for his bicameral approach of the two conjoined reflexive realms of creation and redemption in his *Institutes*. In post-Reformation history, the underlying struggle between “theological” and “philosophical”

approaches manifests as a vehement battle between a “theological” and “orthodox” stream – usually pretending to hark back to a pristine biblical-theological Calvin - and a “philosophical and broadminded” stream, joining forces with philosophies of the day and by that token viewing themselves as directly in line with Calvin’s approach of openness and flexibility, embracing notions from “pagan” theologians and philosophers.

Referring to the strong distinction some people still advance between a Calvinist theology of the Word and philosophy, Paul Helm asserts (2003-07:5):

the days are past when Calvin could be seen as a purely “biblical” Reformer, a theologian of “the Word”. As if he wrote his *Institutes* and his voluminous commentaries, preached and carried on controversy in a way that was uncontaminated either by Renaissance or scholastic influences, and instead delighted in paradox and mystery in a way that made him a forerunner of many a “dialectical” theologian.

Calvin leads the reflection and designs the schemes that emerge in his reflexive realms by referring to verses and sections from the Judaeo-Christian Bible, anecdotal snippets, and quotations from Renaissance humanist philosophers, scholastic theologians, lawyers and scientists.

Calvin and Michael Servetus

Michael Servetus, who died in 1553 as a result of Calvin’s direct involvement in his trial, was an unamiable and arrogant man. In his 1546-47 correspondence he wrote all in all thirty letters to Calvin under the name Villeneuve. In the 1540s, both Calvin and Servetus were engaged in setting down their views, Calvin in various editions of his *Institutes* and Servetus in the early drafts of his *The Restitution of Christianity*. As part of his drive to correct Servetus’ views, Calvin sent him a copy of the *Institutes*. Servetus read the work carefully, found it untenable and took it to pieces on the basis of both Scripture and Patristic authority (Willis 1877:167). Servetus returned the book to Calvin copiously annotated in the margins, not only in dissent, but generally with an arrogant freedom of expression that Calvin also indulged against his opponents. Calvin was outraged and, in writing to a friend, he commented that “there is hardly a page that is not defiled by his vomit” (Willis 1877:168).

In response to the *Institutes*, Servetus sent Calvin a copy of his book. Calvin described it as “a large book stuffed with idle fancies, and full of arrogance. He says I shall find in it admirable things, and such as have hitherto been unheard of” (Calvin in Dibb 2001:74). In spite of several

requests from Servetus to return the manuscript, Calvin kept it. It only reappeared in 1553 among documents provided to the authorities at Vienne that led to Servetus' arrest (Dibb 2001:172)).

In 1552 Servetus published his *Christianity Restored*, in which he expressed a different view on nearly every accepted notion of the main Protestant leaders and Catholic orthodoxy of his day, ranging from infant baptism to the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Dibb (2001:82)

Neither Servetus nor Calvin acquitted themselves well during the trial. Both of them engaged in a hostile and defamatory interchange. While Calvin's intransigence hastened a verdict of guilty, Servetus' consistent abrasiveness and abusive language contributed to the outcome.

On the morning of 27th October 1553 the tribunal of judges found Michael Servetus guilty and condemned him to be burnt at the stake the same day. Wadkins (1983:432) claims that Calvin's intolerance towards heretics was determined by his concept of God, his concept of the role of the elect, and so of double re-destination, and his view that what he did was an expression of obedience to God's word.

Calvin's extra-Calvinisticum and Servetus

The notion of the **extra-Calvinisticum** (used by others to depict Calvin's approach) meant that Christ after his ascension still had his resurrected humanity, his full humanness with him in "heaven" (Weber 1962:153; Van Niekerk 2009:221). Christ is thus not present through his own actions, but through the Holy Spirit who applies God's main reconciliatory actions of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus as the saving tools of God in this world, in churches and in people's lives, all through the Word of God.

For Calvin the notion of the extra-Calvinisticum meant, firstly, that Christ could not be directly everywhere present through himself as other Protestants (such as his Lutheran counterparts) of his time asserted. Regarding the elements of bread and wine in the Holy Communion, Calvin claims:

For as we do not doubt that Christ's body is limited by the general characteristics common to all human bodies, and is contained in heaven (where it was once for all received) until Christ return in judgment [Acts 3:21), so we deem it utterly unlawful to draw it back under these corruptible elements or to imagine it to be present everywhere. (Inst. IV,17,12).

Secondly, the notion of the extra-Calvinisticum meant that Christ is not dwelling in a person's heart and life exclusively in a divine sense, but dwells through the Holy Spirit in the total bodily existence of a human being (the temple of the Holy Spirit – according to 1 Cor 6:19). Calvin continues with his argument about the elements of bread and wine in the context of Holy Communion by saying:

And there is no need of this for us to enjoy a participation in it (bread and wine – EvN), since the Lord bestows this benefit upon us through his Spirit so that we may be made one in body, spirit, and soul with him. The bond of this connection is therefore the Spirit of Christ, with whom we are joined in unity, and is like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has, is conveyed to us (Inst. IV,17,12).

In view of the above, Calvin's strong and consistent support of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity can be seen as a contradiction of his approach of extra-Calvinisticum. Servetus, who died at the stake, is ironically closer to the thrust of Calvin's extra-Calvinisticum than Calvin himself in his views of the Trinity. To be consistent with his idea of extra-Calvinisticum, Calvin's Trinitarian formula should have been something like the following: God the Father, God and human Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Calvin was closer to Plotinus (204-270CE) with his Trinity of three divine persons, who originally and determinatively influenced the first millennium's sweeping "logic" of dividing everything, even God into threesomes (Oosthuizen 1974:83-86). As One God with thousands of names, modes and dimensions, God has been imprisoned in a contextually designed web and doctrine of a triune God of three persons or three ways of being, acquired from people's experience over the years 200-450 CE, was more clearly understood by Servetus than by Calvin in his *On the errors of the Trinity in Seven Books (De erroribus Trinitatis, Septem Librum)* (Dibb 2001:88-115).

Thirdly, the notion of extra-Calvinisticum in Calvin's approach points to the all-initiating and embracing role of the Holy Spirit regarding God, human beings and the natural cosmic world. Centrally in Calvin's reflexive realm of redemption is the raising of Jesus from the dead by the Spirit of God, because it is the Spirit of God that keeps the divinity and humanity of Christ closely together in his theo-anthropic trajectory. In Calvin's reflexive realm of creation, the general knowledge of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world is given to all people as seen in his theo-anthropic-cosmic trajectory by

the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear,

unless we wish to dishonour the Spirit of God ... Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists ... the philosophers ... those who developed medicine... mathematical sciences? But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God? (Inst. II,2,15).

In their rejection of the continuation of the gifts of the Spirit beyond the era of the apostles, Calvin and the total Reformed/Presbyterian tradition are similar to the proverbial lonely eagle on the edge of the roof in the Christian world. Calvin's rejection of a continuation of the gifts of the Spirit in the post-apostolic era goes directly against his notion of the extra-Calvinisticum, in which Christ is depicted as still having his resurrected humanity, the Spirit's greatest gift, miracle and wonder ever occurring in the world. By questioning why it is not possible that gifts, miracles and wonders, similar to the raising of Christ from the dead by the Spirit, are actualised and eventuated (intra-naturally) by the Spirit in people's lives, is striking at the heart of Calvin's notion of the extra-Calvinisticum.

On collapsing the historical into the systematic?

In the 20th century, the historical, socio-political, socio-biographical, historical-psychological and metaphoric-historical investigations of Calvin, his works, and his times, the times before and after him, emerged as a fruitful addition to, and in many instances a replacement of the customary theological and philosophical readings of Calvin. Heiko A Oberman, the historian, investigated extensively the centuries before the 16th century Reformation and construed, suggested and linked together an array of historical matrices regarding the lives and works of the reformers Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Melancthon and others. Besides being an example of an individual historical matrix, Oberman's publication *Initia Calvini: The matrix of Calvin's Reformation* (1991) also presents us with an overview of the new phases of 20th century investigations of reading Calvin primarily not as a theologian and a "thinker", but

as a real historical person of flesh and blood, who in the decisive stages of his development responded not only to currents of thought, but also and especially to religious needs and political challenges, to personal encounters and social experiences (Oberman 1991:10).

Historical evidence linked in Oberman's approach into an interpretational network of historical matrices is of the utmost importance. Although in all his works Oberman is an extremely careful and balanced reader of texts in their

historical and socio-political setting, he does not always interrogate the modernist “either-or” gap between an approach directed at the historical-past and a metaphysical-systematic approach directed at the phenomenological present. Continuing in the no longer accepted gap between the systematic-metaphysical and historical-past tense, Oberman asserts that, though Thomas T Torrance’s 1988 study *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* is exemplary, rich and helpful, making

at times precious observations in the realm of metaphysics, this abstract “grit” proves to lack the specificity which one likes to find in historical evidence (Oberman 1991:16-17).

Oberman’s distinction between “precious observations in the realm of metaphysics” and the lack of “the specificity which one likes to find in historical evidence” points specifically to the dilemma of the metaphysical-systematic present and historical-past that haunts the majority of modern readings and investigations of Calvin. Theologians and philosophers belonging to the group who draw Calvin into the realm of a praesentia metaphysical reading are usually intellectualised, dry and self-serving, and the investigators of the socio-political, socio-biographical, historical-psychological and metaphoric-historical specificities of historical evidence are the sleuths of the past who deliver a myriad of data from the past that supposedly describe “the real historical person of flesh and blood” without presenting us with the sense making regularities – the systematic patterns – of Calvin’s writings and doings.

In consensually negotiating with Calvin’s sense-making patterns, one acquires *regularities* – the systematic pattern in our investigation – embodied in the exchange and fusion and rejection of links of the historical *processual matrices* – the historical consciousness in our investigation of the past, present and future sort – embedded in Calvin’s writings and doings. Generally, by collapsing the so-called systematic into the so-called historical, an abundance of sense-making clues, cues and hues are delivered about how God, being human, and the natural environment can make sense in one’s daily experience and life-world.

Interpretation or negotiation?

The interpretation paradigm introduced and set on track by Renaissance humanist and Calvinist strategies of the 16th century is in crisis. Susan Sontag (1967:6) articulates the “soft underbelly” of the interpretation approach as follows:

Interpretation thus presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. It seeks to resolve that discrepancy ... Interpretation is a radical strategy for conserving an old text, which is thought too precious to repudiate, by revamping it. The interpreter, without actually erasing or rewriting the text, is altering it. But he can't admit to doing this. He claims to be only making it intelligible, by disclosing its true meaning.

The majority of ardent historical-critical and rational-critical protagonists of the interpretation approach are not fully aware that multiple “disclosed and actual true meanings” of the same text by different interpreters vying for the “number one spot” are exacerbating, rather than alleviating, the problem.

An all-round emphasis on consensible negotiation within the ambience of the mystery of the simultaneity of the closeness and the difference of God, being human and the natural cosmic world is to transcend the specificity of Calvin's extreme theologistic strategy of setting God as all-initiating agent on a divine pedestal as the only one people have to negotiate and deal with in everything they do from beginning to end in life (**negotium cum Deo**) (Inst. III,3,6; III,3,16; III,7,2; III,20,29). Calvin's very low regard for the human self, inversely set in correlation with his extremely high regard for God, has to be transcended too. Calvin's exclusive negotiation and dealing with God as the all-initiating agent of everything in the world has to be extended to include human beings and the natural cosmic world. We are bound to negotiate and deal in terms of the mystery of simultaneous closeness and difference of God, ourselves as human beings and the natural cosmic world from the beginning to the end of our lives. Thus, in terms of the mystery through a radical and embracing commitment, we negotiate and deal with the experience of the *Godness* of God – (**negotium cum Deo**), our own and other people's *humanness* (**negotium cum humano**) and the natural world's *naturalness* in every nook and cranny (**negotium cum natura**), every corner and stretch of life through the mysterious workings of the Spirit of God (Van Niekerk 2006:368). In this sense the typical theologistic formulation of Calvin of **solus Deo gloria** has to be extended with the formulation of **solus Deo, genti humanae et naturae gloria**. Thus, glory and thanks to God and human beings and the natural cosmic environment.

The simultaneity of the theo-anthropic duality and the theo-anthropo-cosmic triadic trajectories

Calvin structured his 1559 edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in terms of the overarching rubrics of the *Knowledge of God the Creator* (Book I) and *Knowledge of God the Redeemer* (Book II) set in two realms.

Book III revolves around *The way we receive the grace of Christ* and Book IV around the *The means of grace: Holy Catholic Church* (Muller 2000:118-139).

Calvin's dual scope of God's act of creation and redemption demarcates the scene in which nearly all later Reformed reflection about God, human beings and the natural cosmic world took place. In viewing God's grand acts of creation and redemption as reflexive areas in which knowledge of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world are acquired, Calvin, was influenced by other 16th century Reformers, Renaissance humanism and even the Scholastics; my suggestion is that Calvin operates with a dual or a double sphere of consciousness in which a *particular mirroring "vertical" theo-anthropic* trajectory is fused with a *general processual "horizontal" theo-anthropic-cosmic* trajectory.

In Calvin's Institutes the fused duality and triad of the two trajectories is sustained and maintained whether he operates and departs from the pointer of God, discusses human beings or reflects on the natural cosmic world in the mirroring theo-anthropic and the processual theo-anthropic-cosmic sense. In reading Calvin his writings seem to suggest that the simultaneous connection and difference between the dual and triadic trajectories run right through his views of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world.

The natural cosmic environment as add-on in the second trajectory and not intrinsic part of the first trajectory is expressive of the idea that there is a tendency in Calvin's approach to place the natural cosmic environment on a lower plane than the pointers of God and human beings. Even if we accept that the link Ganoczy (1982:46, 49) suggested between the influence of Stoicism on Calvin on the degrading of the natural cosmic world, in comparison to the weight given to the pointers of God and humanity, is well established, the historical link does not really help us to make good sense of the extent and the degree to which the natural cosmic realm is so-called degraded in Calvin's overall God-human-and-nature view.

Calvin's reflexive realms of creation and redemption are not enough but they show us the way of sense making reflection

Calvin, adhering to and being enclosed as a man of his times to the realms of creation (nature) and redemption (grace) as the main reflexive spheres of his dual reflexive consciousness of God, being human and the natural cosmic world, points to a non-speculative operational way, on the one hand, to which we may add the full array of God's grand acts of creation, reconciliation (redemption), renewal and fulfilment in the role of pushing, guiding and pulling 'energy pointers' of our daily experience. On the other hand, by experiencing in a reflexive non-speculative way the grand acts of God as reflexive spheres, the mystery of the simultaneous close connection and

radical difference of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world comes to the fore. This mystery can also be described in reference to the meanderings of God's Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood and Prophetdom, etc.) coming to expression in the events and processes of "the creation and quality of creatureliness of the many universes", "the reconciliation events of the cross, the tearing of the veil of the temple and the resurrection of Jesus", "the renewal through God's life-giving Spirit of the whole of reality", and the "processes of pulling, drawing and fulfilling of everything towards a future fulfilment and consummation of everything" (Van Niekerk 2006:315).

The complex intertwinement of "vertical" and "horizontal" reflexive directions

Karl Reuter (1963:9-28) in his work *Das Grundverständnis der Theologie Calvins* sees a bi-polar scheme of God and human beings as the outline of a basic understanding of Calvin's theological views. According to Reuter (1963:21), Calvin deals with God and human beings as persons in the bi-polar way which Calvin acquired from the scotistic personalism of Duns Scotus through John Major who was for more than two years Calvin's lecturer until early 1528. The "horizontal" processual to and fro movements of Calvin's reflexive consciousness from particular-special to common-general play a small role in Reuter's investigation. Though Reuter views his investigation in the light of gaining a basic understanding of Calvin's theology, the main question still haunts negotiators of Calvin's overall sense making scheme of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world, namely why Calvin's two reflexive realms of creation and redemption, internally and externally linked in the broadest sense possible, are mainly viewed as theological realms of reflection.

While Calvin is focussing on "the knowledge of God the creator" as the main heading of his first book as the reflexive realm of creation in the *Institutes*, by way of a secondary focus he already reflects in different sections of the first book on the essence of what the second book with its heading of "the knowledge of God the redeemer" is about. In his reflexive focus on the realm of redemption he links secondary foci retrospectively to what is reflexively dealt with in the first book on the realm of creation and prospectively to what he deals with in book three as "the way we receive the grace of Christ" and book four as "the means of grace: Holy Catholic Church". Conversely, each book refers back and points forward in terms of the dual story line to preceding and later subsequent books. With his main focus within a particular realm of reflection, Calvin's eyes wander in a processual way to themes, topics and things he is dealing with in preceding and ensuing books, chapters and sections.

In the *realm of creation* Calvin's "vertical" double-mirroring, reflective consciousness is directed at the dispersion and expansion of images in the background and dome of creation as the theatre of God's glory (Inst. I,5,8; I,6,2; I,14,20; II,6,1), the school of the universe (Inst. II,6,1) through which knowledge of God and simultaneously also knowledge of ourselves as human beings is acquired (Inst. I,1,1-3). Thus, a level of consciousness of "heavenly things" and a level of "earthly things" continue through the reflexive realm of creation (Inst. II,2,13). Simultaneously, a "horizontal" reflexive *processual* consciousness opens itself throughout the realm of creation in that the mode of a particular contracted and concentrated human/divine duality regarding Christ, faith, the church and Holy Scripture which is mainly dealt with in the realm of redemption is already dealt with through reflection on Holy Scripture as one of the contracted dual human/divine modes of the reflexive realm of redemption (Inst. I,6-16).

In the *realm of redemption* the "vertical" double level of mirroring reflection revolves mainly around the particular contracted and concentrated human/divine duality of Christ's humanity/divinity (Inst. II,12-17,1-3), the contracted duality of earthly bread and wine/spiritual body and blood of Christ in the sacred supper (Inst. I,1,1-3) received and enjoyed through the contracted duality of faith as a particular divine/human mode of experience (Inst. III,1-10) within the church as a particular contracted divine/human sphere as the society of Christ, the mother of the believers, the pious and the godly (Inst. IV,1-7) and Holy Scripture, encapsulated as divine word/human words in its divine and human dimensions. Simultaneously, throughout the reflexive realm of redemption, Calvin's other operational mode of "horizontal" reflexive *processual* consciousness, moving retrospectively back to the general-common generalities of the reflexive realm of creation and anticipating the general-common generalities is dealt with in the reflexive realm of book three, in which the processual movement of grace, benefits and effects from Christ to us are described, while book four deals with the external means (aids) through which we are invited into and being held in the society of Christ (the church).

Divine accommodation of human capacity and incapacity

In taking up a double level mirroring focus in both reflexive realms of creation and redemption, Calvin's well known procedure of divine accommodation, emphasised by many Calvin scholars, has to be construed differently in the two realms. Firstly, God the Creator's ordered will is embedded in human beings' general experiential knowledge (reason) of God the Creator through sustenance of God's ordered will of providence. The title of an essay, "God was accommodating himself to human capacity" by Battles (1992) can be used as a description of God's general accommodation and embeddedness

in the human and creaturely world. Secondly, God the Redeemer's accommodated salvific will of grace is embodied in Jesus Christ the divine/human incarnated Word of God and Holy Scripture as the divine/human inscripturated Word of God. God's particular accommodation in the double sided sense of Jesus Christ as the divine/human being is to be expressed as: God was accommodating himself to human incapacity.

Thus, the *mirroring* reflexive procedure can be described firstly as God's general accommodative descent to the capacity of the creaturely human and natural cosmic world and a human being's elevation and ascent from the level of the divine sense (**sensus divinitatis**) of which traces and seed are embedded in human consciousness and which direct the mind to God-self beyond the images of God's glory, majesty and power portrayed across creation as the theatre of God's glory. Secondly, God's particular accommodative descent is directed to human incapacity in Christ through faith while a human being's elevation and ascent through faith as an acquired capacity of faith is directed to the eternal and spiritual reality expressed within a body, a thing, a word, a concept or an image.

Though Randall C Zachman does not account for the double level of consciousness in both the creaturely and the redemptive realm, he describes the two reflexive movements between the two levels of mirroring in general correctly by asserting

that Calvin is therefore best understood when he is seen as an analogical and anagogical theologian. Analogy stresses the similarity amid difference between the sign and the reality signified, whereas anagoge stresses the elevation from the temporal sign to the spiritual reality it represents (Zachman 2006:210).

Zachman indeed points to two reflexive movements within the theo-anthropic trajectory through what one may call a *particular contracted and concentrated divine/human duality* of the Calvinian sort expressing an inter-substantial intense closeness and radical difference. There is no trans-substantial transforming of the human by the divine or con-substantial permeation of the human by the divine or the divine by the human in Calvin's view of a dual particularity of the contracted and concentrated divinity and humanity of Christ: namely,

as God he is the destination to which we move; as man, the path by which we go. Both are found in Christ alone (Inst. III,2,1).

In Calvin's words, between us and Christ as God our destination, the trajectory is analogical and mirroring, and between us and Christ as man and our path, the trajectory is analogical and processual.

Similarly, the duality of bread and wine/blood and body of Christ within the spatial denominational area of the Holy Supper, the duality of the encapsulating of the divine Word and human words in Holy Scripture and the dual combination of the Church's divine and human dimensions are particularly contracted and concentrated as an unmixed and non-permeated inter-substantiality. In Calvin's use the words "holy, sacred and sacrament" in their positive application designates the particularity of the contracted and concentrated divine/human duality (Willis 1966:61-99). Calvin says of Christ's human body that it submits to the laws of common nature (Inst. IV,17,29). And of a body Calvin asserts within the sphere of graceful reflection of a particular concentrated divine/human duality that

it is the true nature of a body to be contained in space, to have its own dimensions and its own shape (Inst. IV,17,29).

Calvin is not declaring the humanity of Christ or any creaturely entity within the reflexive realm of redemption as something "divinely" sacred or sacramental. Jesus's humanity is not sacred and he is therefore not "the divine human being" as in the religious practice of many Roman Catholics of Calvin's day and not "the human God" as some Lutherans still tend to believe. The view of the contracted and concentrated divine/human inter-substantiality of Christ attracted the accusation from Lutherans that the relationship of the two natures of Christ in the Reformed tradition is similar to that of two glued planks (Korff 1940:260).

Many of Calvin's statements tend to point in the direction of Christ as saviour in the unity of his divine and human nature. In many instances the humanity of Christ is veiling his divinity (Inst. II,13,2). Calvin however is giving full worth to the humanity of Christ for people's salvation and calls the human being Christ the mirror of God's grace, of the divine nature (Inst. II,14,5), sending rays and showing God's glory in his humanness by which God makes himself to a certain extent (**quodammodo**) visible (Inst. II,9,1) and therefore according to Calvin respects the unity of the person of Christ. The humanity of Christ is not only a veiling of his divinity but receives the function of being an instrument of God's revelation.

My problem lies not with the strong emphasis on the unity and the equity of the two natures of Christ in regard to people's salvation but with the arbitrariness with which Calvin as exegete allots mainly divinity to some and humanity to other activities and behaviours of Jesus in various texts of the New Testament (Korff 1940:246-250). A good example is Calvin's comments on Matthew 14:14: The expression of compassion by Jesus for the

multitude foregrounds the humanity of Jesus: therefore it is not consistent with the doctrine of predestination that everyone of the multitude belongs to the number of elected for whom Jesus would have compassion in virtue of his divinity. According to Calvin many of these difficulties can be fairly easily solved if only we carefully note the person in which Jesus is acting: the divine or the human (Korff 1940:248). Korff while discussing who gets Calvin's nod in a text, the humanity or the divinity of Christ, says ruefully of Calvin's strategy that it becomes really painful sometimes ("soms wordt het heel pijnlik") (Korff 1940:248).

What is extreme arbitrariness to us is to Calvin consistency in his grand scheme of things. What Calvin calls into his reflection as a determinative notion, idea or source depends on what he screens and filters in his reflection and is in the last instance a construct of his own reflexive making, strictly demarcated within his overall sense making approach, consistently revolving around God, being human, and the natural cosmic world.

The double story line of piety and experience

Piety (*pietas*) as a requisite for the knowledge of God functions in Calvin's work with an underlying double meaning. Firstly, in the realm of faith Calvin joins reverence and love of God as a prerequisite to any true knowledge of God (Inst. I,2,1). According to Calvin, piety in this sense is a "piety from which religion takes its source, which is instilled in the breasts of believers only" (Inst. I,5,4). The piety of the believing pious mind contemplates firstly the one and only true God and recognises God because it knows that he governs all things, trusts that he is its guide and protector, and therefore gives itself completely over to trust in him.

Secondly, because the believing pious mind acknowledges God as Lord and Father, he/she also considers it right to observe his authority in all things, reverence his majesty, take care to advance his glory, and obey his commandments (Inst. I,2,2). Calvin links piety of trust, belief and faith closely with piety of lovingly obeying and observing God's authority, majesty, glory and commandments. In describing the moral function of the law Calvin describes piety under two headings "one of which simply commands us to worship God with pure faith and piety; the other, to embrace men with sincere affection" (Inst. IV,20,15).

On the one hand, in his Commentary on Joel 3:17 and many other instances, Calvin emphasises with regard to his "vertical" scheme of things two-fold knowledge: the knowledge of faith which is received from the Word alone and the knowledge of experience which depends on the effect of the knowledge of faith. The faithful are grieved sometimes that they do not by effect feel God to be their Father. The prophet Joel assures them that through real knowledge they shall experience that they have a God (CO 42,596).

Calvin, on the other hand, speaking in terms of his “horizontal” differentiation, distinguished between “earthly things” which have their significance and relationships with regard to the present life and are in a sense confined within its bounds, and “heavenly things” such as the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly Kingdom. The first group of things includes government, household management, all mechanical skills and the liberal arts. The second revolves around the knowledge of God, God’s will and the rule to which people conform their lives (Inst. II,2,13). Similarly, between the natural gifts with which human beings are endowed such as reasoning and understanding, the will to desire and their social nature, are partly weakened and partly corrupted by sin, but not wiped out, and supernatural gifts such as faith, love of God, charity toward neighbours, zeal for holiness and for righteousness are stripped from human beings through sin. In the natural sphere of creation the light of human understanding (reason) and will is choked with ignorance and dimmed, but some sparks still glow. In the supernatural sphere of redemption and faith the light fully shines (Inst. II,2,12-13).

Calvin: theological fideist or philosophical evidentialist?

Paul Helm, reacting to the Reformed philosopher Plantinga’s argument of establishing arguments about God’s existence within the Christian community that will enable the believer to believe without reasonable argument that the existence of God and other theological claims are “properly basic”, asserts

Calvin is, I believe, an evidentialist rather than fideist or a “Reformed” epistemologist, with real but modest expectations as far as the natural knowledge of God is concerned (Helm 2008:7).

In modern terms Calvin is both a fideist and an evidentialist, in a sense that is permeated with late medieval and Renaissance Platonic as well as Aristotelian schemes. In gathering a rich variety of Calvin’s twofold knowledge trajectories, Partee (1977:29-41) does not seem to realise that the complex Calvinian Platonic “vertical” *mirroring* relationship of faith and its undercarriage of pious experience is intersected by an Aristotelian “horizontal” *processual* relationship of faith “experience” in its entirety with general sensory experience of the pious-reasonable kind. After collecting nearly all the references in Calvin’s works to Plato and Platonic matters as well as to Aristotle and related matters, Partee asserts:

Undoubtedly Calvin is influenced by Plato not only directly, but through Cicero, the early fathers, Augustine and the Christian humanists as various writers have sought to demonstrate. To the extent that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato or all men either Platonists or Aristotelians, then Calvin was a Platonist. It is likely correct, as Barth remarks, "From a philosophical point of view, Luther and Calvin were equally unmistakable Platonists; Luther more of a Neoplatonist, Calvin a classical Platonist" (Partee 1977:115).

On the other hand, Partee (1977:99) categorically dismisses the possibility of significant Aristotelian insights in Calvin:

Thus the direct Aristotelian influence on Calvin is slight.

In both his books: *The unaccommodated Calvin* (2000) and *After Calvin* (2003), Richard A Muller appears to sit on the Aristotelian and Renaissance Aristotelian side of Calvin's approach in that he hardly mentions Plato while the Renaissance humanist filter in conjunction with Calvin's scholastic antecedents through which Aristotle was delivered in the times of Calvin is strongly evident in his reflection on Calvin and Calvinists after Calvin. Muller (2000:9) asserts that the distaste of many works on Calvin

for Calvin's medieval scholastic antecedents and Protestant scholastic successors, whose purported rigid dogmatism and "Aristotelianism" they were wont to contrast with Calvin's warm piety and humanism, as if Calvin could not be dogmatic or display profound influences of Aristotelianism even in the context of his piety – or, again, as if Calvin never criticized humanists with a vehemence comparable to that of his attacks on scholastics.

Operating with Renaissance humanist renditions of both Plato and Aristotle, Calvin rejects Aristotle's view of soul and body as a unitary substance, inferring that Aristotle has no aspect of immortality in his anthropology. Calvin regards Plato's view of the immortality of the soul (and thus the mortality of the body) as more correct because Plato considers locating the image of God in the soul (Inst. I,14,6).

Calvin and ancient and Renaissance God-human-world views

While being a trendsetter and co-maker of the new, Calvin held on to the older and ancient God-human-world views. A good example is Calvin's

cautious defence of astrology on grounds that it helps people to observe moderation in their lives while attacking it elsewhere on grounds of immoderate application. He also disapproved of the term astrology itself (Bouwsma 1988:73; 254). His main objection to astrology, with which he cannot make piece, is that it transfers God's governance of the universe to the stars (Inst. I,16,3). In the work *Contre l' Astrologie Judiciaire* he opposes "bastard astrology" with "true science", thereby rejecting everything not founded on "reason and the truth of science" (Torrance 1988:193).

For Calvin the idea that the earth was nearly six thousand years old is quite acceptable. Calvin asserts

once the beginning of the universe is known, God's eternity may shine forth more clearly, and we may be more rapt in wonder at it. And indeed, that impious scoff ought not to move us: that it is a wonder how it did not enter God's mind sooner to found heaven and earth, but that he idly permitted an immeasurable time to pass away, since he could have made it very many millenniums earlier, albeit the duration of the world, now declining to its ultimate end has not yet attained six thousand years. For it is neither lawful nor expedient for us to inquire why God delayed so long, because if the human mind strives to penetrate thus far, it will fail a hundred times on the way (Inst.[tr.FLB], I,14,1).

In view of the resistance to the new astronomy of Copernicus (and Galileo) in Calvin's time, Bouwsma (1988:71-72) comments:

The intelligible order displayed by the old science had been a source of comfort, and its subversion was tantamount to casting the human race adrift on an uncharted sea. But the attack on traditional culture could hardly have been effective had its foundations not been already massively eroded. Calvin participated in its erosion, but even as he did so he also clung to it.

Calvin's clinging to the "old science" is demonstrated in a reference to Plato's notion of a round globe in his discussion of the providence of God. In other instances in his Institutes Calvin agrees with Plato on nearly every point that matters, but regarding the philosophers and God's providence Calvin asserts

how volubly has the whole tribe of philosophers shown their stupidity and silliness! For even though we may excuse the others (who act like utter fools), Plato the most religious of all

and the most circumspect, also vanishes in his round globe (Inst. I,5,11).

The irony is that though Plato emphasised in his work *Timaeus* nearly two thousand years before Calvin the notion of a sphere in geometry, his three tier God-human-world view was basically geocentric and flat-earthly in nature. A geocentric (flat-earth) God-human-world view made still sense to the one side of Calvin, though living in a time in which a heliocentric, more spherical God-human-world view announces itself, many aspects of the geocentric G-h-w view could no longer make sense to Calvin who carried the new sense-making spirit of his age in his veins. Calvin's statement of Plato "vanishing in his round globe" is an utterance of frustration by someone realising that the heliocentric metaphors of sun, light and enlightenment of the Renaissance humanists and Copernicus in particular already eroded the "old science". It is as if we hear Calvin objecting that the most religious philosopher of the 'old science' operates with such a silly notion as a round globe.

The myth or popular notion that Calvin explicitly criticised Copernicus has been refuted with good grounds by Hooykaas (1972:12). Calvin did not mention and did not reject Copernicus explicitly in his works. Calvin in his commentary on Genesis already made a step in the direction of "new science", albeit very condescending towards the so-called common people. He points out in his commentary that the story of creation does not compete with the "great art of astronomy" but accommodates what he refers to as unlettered **idiota**, the common people (Oberman 1986:184).

The part of Calvin stuck in the "old science" had the full support of being schooled in the Old Testament sense-making "logic" of a three-tier God-human-and-world view. The three-tier *world view* of Exodus 20:4 which distinguishes between "the *sky above*, the *earth below* and the *waters beneath the earth*" expresses an *earth-centred or geocentric world view*. The respective views of human beings and God in the context of Exodus 20 correspond closely with the three-tier world view.

The changeover to a solar perspective or heliocentric world view in the Renaissance period (1350-1550 CE) was accompanied by a changeover to new views of God and human beings revolving around the notions of light, illumination, sun, fire, flame, shine, spark and enlightenment. The sun as the physical and radiating centre of the Copernican cosmic world has its correlative in God as the all consuming divine light of all reality and correlatively aligned with the divine light of the human mind, intellect and reason.

Calvin's reflection in which keeping apart and distancing as well as mixing and fusing of the ancient geocentric and the Renaissance heliocentric God-human-world views proceeds right through his writings. Especially in his Institutes the amount of metaphors that revolve around sight and seeing, such as sun, light, illumination, mirror, image, radiation, fire, flame, shine,

spark, embers and enlightenment is remarkable. Though sun and light metaphors are found in many of Plato's works, the sun, light and illumination centred metaphors of the Renaissance era feature prominently in Calvin's work.

Human being, intellect and will

In many other instances such as Calvin's interpretational procedures as applied to texts, events and human doings, he mixes Aristotelian processual with Platonic mirroring schemes. For Calvin the notion of a mirror and image functions within the soul-and-body scheme, and the notion of a process operates as the predicate of the human will in the soul-to-body process. Calvin narrows the soul down to the mind, spirit (anima), reason or intellect as the true image of God (Bouwsma 1988:78-81). The intellect, spirit or mind is thereby elevated to the higher part of the soul which is sometimes relationally expressed as affective love or the will of a human being. In the latter sense Calvin asserts that the intellect (understanding) is the leader and governor of the soul (Inst. I,14,7). Between heaven and earth, soul and body and theology and philosophy, the human intellect operates in a dual sense of seeing and hearing, mirroring and processual understanding of the minds of other people whether embedded in the seeing of a text that one reads (in the sense of understanding the word) or embodied in someone's oratory (in the sense of understanding as impacting on one's hearing). The processual trajectory is implemented in the processed creation scheme and the redemptive process of God as seeing plus hearing (understanding) → explication (manifestation and saying) and application (affectation). Take into account that Calvin uses affection in two senses, namely affective effectuation of love and affections as passions of the lower level of the bodily world. While the intellect is moved in the Calvinian sense by the will of a human being in one sense, the intellect in another sense is governing the direction of the will (Inst. I,14,7).

According to Calvin, even Adam's intellect and will were composed to be obedient until he destroyed himself through sin, thereby corrupting his own blessings (Inst. I,14,8). The later expressed triad of the interpretational process of understanding → explication → application as typically carrying Calvin's sense making interpretational fingers of the moving hand is from Aristotle while the fingerprints as images of the interpretational hand are from Plato.

The early modern sola, solus and soli principle

Against the background of 16th century events and struggles John Calvin and Martin Luther and Huldreich Zwingli introduced the idea of faith as the

exclusive field of human experience of God's grace in slightly different, though significantly overlapping ways. The **sola fide** (faith alone) or religious faith principle is established as the exclusive and basic, and therefore reductionist, absolutising position of people's experience of God, human beings and the cosmic world. By expressing the sola, solus and soli principle the accessing and entrance point of the processual direction is implemented in the direction of the total width and depth of the creaturely world as the full spectrum of people's lives. Simultaneously, Calvin accesses all other adjoining fields, modes and dimensions of human experience as covered and overarched by the ceiling of the creaturely heaven in their creaturely "being-thereness" as the manifestation of God's glory, majesty and wisdom through the Holy Spirit.

The **sola fide** principle in Calvin's actions, reflections and writings in various parts of his works, is accompanied by a whole array of **sola gratia**, **sola scriptura**, **sola Christi** and **soli Deo gloria** principles (Ganoczy 1987:188-194; Rossouw 1963:149-200). The sola and soli part in each principle, in terms of Calvin's overall dual storyline, is to be read not as the indication of the sole and exclusive area, domain and mode of the knowledge and experience of God, human beings and the natural cosmic world, but as the special and particular avenue of access to the whole of his sense making story. Put differently, the sola and soli part is the special and particular initiating and active divine propagating agency which is used to initiate, still initiates and will keep on initiating various processes from special to general and from general to special in a harmonious fashion.

Calvin: trendsetter and co-maker of early modernity

Calvin's intricate "coordinate (vertical and horizontal) scheme" expresses a unique and highly complex "double consciousness". The emergence of a 16th century "double consciousness" in Calvin is not only discernable to the harmonising tendency of Renaissance humanism of the 15th and 16th century, that is, the widespread desire to harmonise the works of the noble pagans with the teachings of Christianity (Breen 1968:74), but should be linked to the "revivals" of Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism as well as a rejection of much of the "revived" Pythagorism, Epicureanism and Scepticism of the era (Battles & Hugo 1969:48).

The double-bookkeeping tendency of Calvin's approach is well known. Various writers have pointed to the double-structure of Calvin's approach. It is clear from the literature on Calvin since the sixteenth century Reformation that a particular reading of the double-structure makes sense in terms of how the two designated realms and trajectories of the double-structure make sense to the person reading Calvin. The dual pattern of "special" and "general" trajectories towards God, human beings and the

natural cosmic world demonstrates in Calvin's works all the signs of someone who is simultaneously very eclectic and very consistent.

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