

10. HOW 'ETHICS' WORKS: AN ENGAGEMENT WITH
JOHN CALVIN

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A chapter about ethics would probably have bored Calvin as much as a chapter about Calvin, because he would not have accepted that right and wrong could be studied as 'ethics'. The subject of our behaviour could not, for Calvin, somehow be separated from an overall picture of Christ's cosmos and our place within it. Nor would he have considered it a particularly useful subject of enquiry, because we turn out not to be very good at it. Even when we half-see what might be right, we then go on to do whatever we wanted to do anyway.

Calvin was more interested in telling a different story. It gives us something to work with when it comes to deciding how to live, yet is not fixated on that. We come to know ourselves in this story; but in a neat judo throw, we receive that knowledge only as we come to know someone else. It explains how we may participate in life alongside this other, so that our surging emotions become something beautiful. Calvin would say that we can only know how 'ethics' works once *this* story becomes real.

Commentators suggest that Calvin's ethic includes many modes and derives from several sources. For Ronald Wallace, there is a broad outlook yet many narrow pronouncements. Calvin may closely attend to particular and specific contexts, or resort to an extreme 'other-worldliness'. The Christian life is sometimes specified as cross-bearing and following Jesus, or sometimes as a response to general ethical principles derived from a natural

order.¹ In dialogue with the Western tradition, Calvin attends to the ends of action, to acts in themselves, and to motives for action.² Even just the analysis of acts includes ‘several notions: nature and natural law, conscience, humanity, equity, the rule of love and moderation’, as David Foxgrover puts it.³ William Keesecker thinks that law is a fundamental concept in Calvin’s ethics.⁴ It would be easy to conclude that Calvin’s complex ethic is an eclectic scrapbook of whatever seemed convenient. (This conclusion particularly commends itself if we have already decided that ethics reduces to some simple tenet, such as a list of rights, or the dictates of ‘conscience’, or a principle of universality, or a test of satisfied preferences.)

The complexity of Calvin’s ethic is compounded by the variety of roles he lived out: pastor to average Christians, theological ambassador for the Reformation, civic leader in Geneva, and ‘consultant’ to other such leaders. Theologians are not often engaged across such a range of ecclesial and secular responsibilities, and Calvin’s various policies, rulings, initiatives and attitudes are on more public display than would be the case for most other pastors, theologians or statesmen.⁵ Scholars have examined many of the issues he addressed, including the use and abuse of legal systems; the logic and conduct of marriage and divorce; the proper ‘shape’ of cultural activities such as dancing, gambling, card-playing, alcohol consumption or the acquisition of luxuries; the evaluation of economic practices, including work, trade and interest payments; the validity and boundaries of war; gender relations in society; and childrearing. An examination of Calvin’s normative judgments would be a useful exercise if his conclusions became a laboratory in which to test the workings of our own moral reasoning and view of the world. Unfortunately, the tone of some

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1. R. S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959), v.
 2. D. L. Foxgrover, ‘A Scrap of Bread and a Right Conscience’, in *Calvin and Christian Ethics: Papers and Responses Presented at the Fifth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies*, ed. P. De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1987), pp. 126, 139 n. 8.
 3. Foxgrover, ‘Scrap of Bread’, p. 128.
 4. W. F. Keesecker, ‘The Law in John Calvin’s Ethics’, in *Calvin and Christian Ethics: Papers and Responses Presented at the Fifth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies*, ed. P. De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1987), p. 19.
 5. A compendium of Calvin’s norms, which also reviews some of the secondary literature, can be found in J. H. van Wyk, ‘Calvin on the Christian Life’, in *Our Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984), pp. 247–265.

engagements is not like that. Modern declarations against Calvin are not always sensitive to his reasoning in the situation, nor reflective about the processes of modern moral reasoning that drive these pronouncements.

The least we could say for Calvin's ethical complexity is that his theology and lived experience enabled him to recognize why moral deliberation needs to be variegated. His various modes of moral discourse each highlight something that needs to be noticed about morality and reflect the way our experience of our world is complex.

But as Robert C. Doyle puts it, ethics is for Calvin 'ever only a sub-set of the doctrine of God, and therefore of Christology'.⁶ This chapter will consider aspects of Calvin's moral complexity from the perspective of 'union' with Jesus Christ, a theological theme now regarded as central to Calvin's thought.⁷ Doyle regards this union as Calvin's 'central organizing principle', used by Calvin to 'stabilize' his doctrine and ethics.⁸ How does ethics spring from this 'union', and why does it generate some norms rather than others? Theologians can be broad or vague about the normative outcomes of the 'union'. I will try to examine these a little more closely.

Participation in a union with Christ can be hard to understand at first, for it requires some familiarity with the risen Son of God, whose unique person and work cannot be summarized under some generic concept. Also, the applicability to ethics of this union can be hard to understand in a milieu that immerses us in a quite different moral language of autonomous choice and personal 'values'. But, given time and close enough attention, we begin to see how a union with Christ can integrate some disparate ethical themes and is rich enough to generate a 'positive ethic for life in the world'.⁹ I will engage

6. R. C. Doyle, 'John Calvin, his Modern Detractors and the Place of the Law in Christian Ethics', *RTR* 41.3 (1982), p. 74.
7. See further C. Partee, 'Calvin's Central Dogma Again', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18.2 (1987), pp. 194f; online <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2541176> (accessed 4 March 2009).
8. R. C. Doyle, 'Decision Making at the Boundaries of Life: How Religious Beliefs Affect Ethical Judgments', in *The Ethics of Life and Death*, ed. Barry G. Webb (Homebush West: Lancer, 1990), p. 69.
9. O. M. T. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), p. 142. I cite O'Donovan because he seeks to outline how Christ, in his universality as Son of Man and in his particularity as the Risen Son of God, restores the 'authority' of creation's moral order to humanity. O'Donovan's optimism about a 'positive ethic' is opposed to the view that '[t]he

with these questions:

1. What governs humanity's immediate awareness of ethics?
2. How does 'union with Christ' work for ethics? What does it 'look like', here and now, for those who are 'in Christ'?
3. Is there a 'natural law' embedded in creation? If so, what relationship does it bear to ethics springing from union with Christ?
4. What are the laws and commandments of the Old Testament for, and to what extent should those 'in Christ' be guided by them?
5. If Calvin's ethic is based upon our participation with Christ, why did Calvinism often drift into the over-reliance upon rules that we call 'legalism'?

Much has been written on each of these questions, both in relation to Calvin and more generally. I will not survey all of that writing, nor will I sum up everything Calvin has to say. I simply want to offer a small 'package tour' of Calvin's landscape, traversing it lightly, so that we may begin to see 'how ethics works'. For the story Calvin wishes to tell is that Christ himself reveals and fulfils something about each of these questions and, through a 'participation' with him, humanity can begin to respond to and experience some of what Christ fulfilled and lived.¹⁰

Immediate awareness

According to Calvin, our normal state is to be 'blinded and drunk with self-love'.¹¹ But we ought to spare a thought for the drunk and the blind. What do their values contribute, and what perspectives do they offer?

The blind move through a world that makes coherent and orderly sense for them. So also do drunks, who muddle along well enough despite their difficulties with physics and social relations. To be 'blinded and drunk with self-love' is utterly compelling. After all, there is a lot to love. The self is, as Calvin

gospel always bowls' but 'never goes in to bat' (xiv) – that is, the view that a Christian ethic is only able to deconstruct error rather than to supply an alternative moral vision. O'Donovan contends that a constructive, substantive ethic can be found in a proper Christology.

10. Doyle, 'Detractors', pp. 74–80; Wallace, *Christian Life*, vi and *passim*.

11. *Inst.* 2.7.6.

puts it, ‘a workshop graced with God’s unnumbered works . . . a storehouse overflowing with inestimable riches’.¹² Calvin thinks this ‘storehouse’ should point us to its Creator; but in saying so he also shows why loving ourselves is not particularly inventive or novel. We simply respond to the miracle of our embodied existence, and defend and promote it accordingly. To be ‘blinded and drunk’ with this love is to live in a way that is self-evidently reasonable to the resident of that embodied existence.

Calvin’s metaphor neatly summarizes the Augustinian account of human self-awareness. Self-love is an internally consistent form of rationality, and there is no obvious alternative rationality from which to challenge the self-lover. (‘For, since blind self-love is innate in all mortals, they are most freely persuaded that nothing inheres in themselves that deserves to be considered hateful.’¹³) On this basis, Calvin disagrees with a popular local diagnosis of what it is to be human, according to which we all share a general moral rationality, but are sometimes tricked into error by false perceptions. This diagnosis is ‘pointless and foolish’, for ‘not only did a lower appetite seduce [Adam], but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind, and pride penetrated to the depths of his heart.’¹⁴ As a result, ‘the whole man is overwhelmed – as by a deluge – from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin’.¹⁵ This is Calvin’s way of describing our rationalizations and self-deceptions – our regular capacity to become blind to the realities that surround us, due to our self-love. (We will see below that Calvin slightly moderates his account of ‘general moral rationality’. He concedes that people can sometimes agree about some ethical matters, but the vagaries of self-love make these agreements erratic and unpredictable.)

To modern ears, Calvin’s attack is much too extreme. If self-love is an internally consistent rationality for those who rate it among their ‘values’, who is he to pronounce against it? And should we take ‘self-hate’ to be preferred? Why should Calvin denigrate ‘self-love’ in a world where ‘self-hate’ gives way to self-harm, self-destructive behaviour, abuse of others and suicide? At best, say some, Calvin’s anthropology is an overstatement; at worst, it is misanthropic and life-denying.

We could easily ‘correct’ his excess by discussing what makes for a well-

12. *Inst.* 1.5.4.

13. *Inst.* 2.1.2.

14. *Inst.* 2.1.9.

15. *Ibid.*

lived life. We might discern what makes for human flourishing, from which we could denote a pattern of authentic humanity. In time, we would arrive at a nuanced account of the well-lived life – a life, say, that pays some attention to the people and the world around us, while also paying due regard to the needs of the self. Ethics would then become a set of recommendations based upon this account. These recommendations might be lists of various duties or rights that should generally be respected; or statements of goals that we should act towards; or those settled patterns and habits of action and feeling we call ‘virtues’. The Western philosophical tradition, both ancient and modern, has proceeded more or less along these lines – and Calvin is quite aware of it. He opposes Plato’s anthropology and is milder towards the Aristotelian version of it, but on the whole he refuses to play the game.¹⁶

His logic parallels that of the proverbist: ‘Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control’ (Prov. 25:28).¹⁷ For him, philosophical descriptions of humanity are highly suspect. The philosophers face ‘great obscurity’ by ‘seeking in a ruin for a building, and in scattered fragments for a well-knit structure’.¹⁸ Calvin does not seek with them a denotative definition of the good human, the good life, or human flourishing. He also believes that those who do are not any further advanced in the task of ethics. Commenting on the corrupted remnants of humanity’s ability to distinguish between right and wrong, Calvin agrees with Themistius’ observation about the way our self-love sabotages our ethical conclusions (a pattern that can also be argued from recent social psychology and behavioural economics):

[T]he intellect is very rarely deceived in general definition or in the essence of the thing; but . . . is illusory when it goes farther, that is, applies the principle to particular cases. In reply to the general question, every man will affirm that murder is evil. But he who is plotting the death of an enemy contemplates murder as something good. The adulterer will condemn adultery in general, but will privately flatter himself in his own particular adultery. Herein is man’s ignorance: when he comes to a particular case, he forgets the general principle that he has just laid down.¹⁹

Only an external perspective can supply blind drunkards with the news of their alienation from wider reality. What supplies Calvin with his settled

16. Cf. *Inst.* 1.15.6–7.

17. Biblical quotations in this chapter are from the NIV.

18. *Inst.* 1.15.8.

19. *Inst.* 2.2.23.

judgment about our blindness, drunkenness and ruin? It comes from an ostensive definition of humanity, like that woman who ran, pointing to a figure at a well, and shouted, 'Come, see a man . . .!' (John 4:29).

Participation

The self-referential internal consistency of our self-love, and the complacent ethic it generates, can be offset only when we 'come and see a man' who supplies a countervailing viewpoint (and, we discover eventually, *the* countervailing viewpoint) for how to be truly human. Participation in a union with Christ begins by simply seeing and responding to the magnetically attractive character of history's Jesus. He is celebrated as the truest human image of God, offering epistemic and existential access to those respects in which we ourselves are in God's image.²⁰ In Jesus, Calvin sees a man who acts in love, whose emotions are well ordered, who is moderate in adversity, who perseveres²¹ and who 'has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life'.²²

To mention Christ's 'example' risks wrecking the concept of participation before it begins. Modern ethics pictures us as autonomous choosers of our values and destiny. It follows that when Christ and 'imitation' appear in the same sentence, we immediately imagine ourselves emulating him, 'painfully seeking by ourselves and in our own strength to shape our lives after his pattern'.²³

But Calvin does not believe that moral reality can be accessed like this, 'since the apostle does not say that [Christ] was sent to help us attain righteousness but himself to be our righteousness'.²⁴ To sustain this point, Calvin offers a cascade of further allusions to Paul's epistles, describing redemption from condemnation, and reconciliation with and adoption by the Father, so that 'we are already, in a manner, partakers of eternal life, having entered into the Kingdom of God through hope.'

It seems safe to say that most Reformed Christians can picture and enjoy Christ as 'our righteousness', effecting freedom into a new relationship with

20. *Inst.* 1.15.4.

21. Doyle, 'Detractors', p. 75, who cites several of Calvin's commentaries and sermons.

22. *Inst.* 3.2.3.

23. Wallace, *Christian Life*, p. 47.

24. *Inst.* 3.15.5.

the Father. Many can also begin to perceive how 'we are already, in a manner, partakers of eternal life,' although Calvin regularly concedes that this status is somewhat hidden.²⁵

But it becomes much harder to picture what Calvin means when he outlines 'yet more' about the nature of our participation with Christ. I will dwell on the existential meaning of this 'yet more', because it is quite hard to understand at first; yet without its logic we cannot understand the way participation in Christ affects Christian ethics:

Yet more: we experience such participation in him that, although we are still foolish in ourselves, he is our wisdom before God; while we are sinners, he is our righteousness; while we are unclean, he is our purity; while we are weak, while we are unarmed and exposed to Satan, yet ours is [his] power . . . while we still bear about with us the body of death, he is yet our life.²⁶

This juxtaposition of opposites has exemplary biblical credentials. But what can it possibly mean? It confronts modern people as a series of incomprehensible riddles. We have become used to conceiving 'ourselves' and 'our identity' as one and the same thing; but this chorus of 'participations' seriously contends that our identity may somehow be formed by another. Modern Western adults even find this concept insulting (although children are more at ease with it); but putting aside whatever makes us despise the notion, how would we proceed? How may I perceive myself as foolish and, simultaneously, see Christ's wisdom as mine? How may I do so with his purity, his power and his life, while at the same time acknowledging that I have none of these?

My intention is not to challenge either Calvin or the theology of a participation with Christ. Rather, I am reminded of David Gouwens' comment that 'the basic task of the theologian is not to make Christianity understandable to moderns, but to train moderns in the capabilities that can allow them to understand the gospel.'²⁷ Nowhere is this 'training' more necessary than in the matter of a participation with Christ. For it confronts those drunk on self-love in two quite unanticipated ways.

First, we are confronted with the possibility that *whatever 'identity' we currently conceive for ourselves is alienated from reality, if not measured against Christ's 'identity'*

25. Wallace, *Christian Life*, pp. 83–86. Cf. Col. 3:3–4.

26. *Inst.* 3.15.5.

27. D. J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

as the Son of Man. His humanity is ‘universal’ in a way that encompasses and ‘decodes’ everyone’s diversity, all journeys, and every vocation.²⁸ This claim has become deeply shocking to modern minds, and there is no generally available logic by which we can defuse this shock, other than to ‘come and see a man’ who, as the woman at the well puts it, might be the Christ.

Second, to ‘participate’ flings us headlong into the deepest logic of personal relationship, whether or not we have learnt it elsewhere. Participation involves sharing, even where we have little to offer in return; for *our participation with Christ consists primarily in his sharing his life with us*. The letter to the Ephesians visualizes the manner of Christ’s sharing using human marriage at its best. Calvin reflects on this ‘living picture’ to conclude that ‘not only am I his, but also he is mine, so that his life belongs to me’.²⁹ What began as an attraction to Jesus culminates in his *sharing with us*, to the extent that *his entire life*, both on earth and while seated at the right hand of the Father, ‘belongs to me’.

Calvin also expounds that other facet of Christ’s making his life our own, where ‘the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself’.³⁰ Those moments when we are psychologically assured of Christ’s sharing are Spirit-mediated. But whether or not his sharing is psychologically evident to us, it is always evident to Christ. From his perspective, everything of his becomes ours:

Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are grafted into his body – in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.³¹

How does ethics work, once we participate with Christ? How does this

28. Intuitively, we think of Christ the Son of God as somehow ‘universal’ (since God is omnipresent) and Christ the Son of Man as a ‘particular’ (since Jesus was spatially limited). But in the Bible, Christ the Son of Man is presented as ‘universal’ humanity, and Christ the Son of God as ‘particular’ divinity. ‘As the one whom God has sent he is irreplaceable; as the new man he is the pattern to which we may conform ourselves’: O’Donovan, *Resurrection*, p. 143.

29. Calvin, ‘Sermon on Ephesians 5:28–30’, cited in Doyle, ‘Detractors’, pp. 75–76.

30. *Inst.* 3.1.1.

31. *Inst.* 3.11.10.

‘fellowship of righteousness’ proceed? Near the beginning of his treatise on the Christian life, Calvin gives a *tour de force* on the outcomes of participation, listed in terms of the ‘individual parts’ of salvation.³² The list takes the form of six ‘ever since’ statements, which describe some work of the Father, Son or Spirit, and a correlative ‘fitting’ response. These six aspects of salvation form ‘the most auspicious foundations upon which to establish one’s life’ and trump the virtues of natural ethics, which ‘never rise above the natural dignity of man.’

This list requires our close attention. It is important for ethics, because it lays out a pattern of *fitting responses* to participation. What makes the responses fitting is because in each case, participation expands our horizons beyond self-love. The self-lover may have his or her reasons; but like a blind person beginning to see or a drunkard becoming sober, participation with Christ brings the participant into proper contact with the structures of the universe, and elicits new loves. I will repeat Calvin’s list and offer some brief comments on each item:

1. *‘Ever since God revealed himself father to us, we must prove our ungratefulness to him if we did not in turn show ourselves his sons.’* Here is ‘family’ at its best, where the children cannot resist identifying their membership. The awesome character of an ever-impressive father elicits delighted attention from his children, who trumpet their identification with him using every means possible. Our attachment to this Father, and to his extraordinary character, changes what we love to express. (The term ‘must’ and the negative phrasing can distract us from Calvin’s main point.)
2. *‘Ever since Christ cleansed us with the washing of his blood, and imparted this cleansing through baptism, it would be unfitting to befoul ourselves with new pollutions.’* Our participation in baptism centres our attention on Christ’s motive in his work. We begin to see the horror of that from which we have been rescued. The activities of self-love seem entirely reasonable, until we see the lengths taken by Christ to pluck us from this form of life. His rescue highlights the Godhead’s evaluation and condemnation of it. Perceiving just a glimmer of his motives causes us to look again at our ‘old’ selves, in contrast to what this Son of God loves and stands for. We can begin to think, love and act accordingly.
3. *‘Ever since engrafted into his body, we must take especial care not to disfigure*

32. *Inst.* 3.6.3.

ourselves, who are his members, with any spot or blemish.' This item relies upon the excellence of Christ's person. Those who have been magnetically attracted to him and then participate with him begin to change who they are in awed deference to him. Our moral failure cannot really diminish Christ's excellence; yet the logic of participation acts as if it could (as least in so far as the watching world is concerned).

4. *'Ever since Christ himself, who is our head, ascended into heaven, it behooves [sic] us, having laid aside love of earthly things, wholeheartedly to aspire heavenward.'* Heaven is a kingdom of mutual love relationships,³³ and by ascending there to preside over it, Christ lives out the goal of human being. We 'lay aside love of earthly things' when we stop using them to serve our self-love, and we 'aspire heavenward' as we retrain according to heaven's logic of love. To do all this 'wholeheartedly' indicates that what we love has already begun to change.
5. *'Ever since the Holy Spirit dedicated us as temples to God, we must take care that God's glory shine through us, and must not commit anything to defile ourselves with the filthiness of sin.'* Ironically, this item throws attention upon a new kind of self-love. But this self-love no longer consists in fixation upon immanent natural necessities, or in the ludicrous projection of ourselves onto our world. In our participation with Christ, the Spirit begins to rearrange us into Christ's new pattern for humanity. It is entirely appropriate to love, protect and nurture the new kind of person that the Spirit is enabling us to become. The risks in calling this 'a new kind of self-love' are offset when we remember that the Son of Man is the pattern of new humanity that we love and respect. Effectively, we love him to whom we are becoming conformed.
6. *'Ever since both our souls and bodies were destined for heavenly incorruption and an unfading crown, we ought to strive manfully to keep them pure and uncorrupted until the Day of the Lord.'* This last item combines the previous two. When heaven's absence of 'corruption' begins to mean something to us, we become interested in experiencing it now. Participation with Christ supplies us with an understanding of what will last, and humans usually long for whatever lasts in preference to whatever we know will be destroyed. Calvin therefore pictures a straightforward response to the future.

In this list, participation with Christ brings us into contact with the moral

33. I have borrowed this term from M. Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2002), pp. 79–120.

‘order’ or ‘structure’ of the universe. The concept of a ‘moral order’ or ‘moral structure’ to the universe is not meant to imply that morality has some existence independent of God. Rather, morality consists (i) in a proper description of the relationships between the Persons of the Godhead, other persons, and things; and (ii) in our proper participation among all those relationships.³⁴ The Christian ethic is one of response to this ‘structure’. As we begin to see those relationships anew, our loves change, and we act accordingly.

The active verbs in Calvin’s list (‘show ourselves’, ‘befoul ourselves’, ‘disfigure ourselves’, ‘aspire’, ‘take care [to] shine’, ‘commit anything to defile ourselves’, ‘manfully strive’) distract a little from the logic of participation. Particularly if we are of an activist bent, these words throw the attention back upon a preoccupation with the operation of human will, which Calvin himself regards as quite feeble.³⁵ Nonetheless, Calvin more than succeeds in showing how participation with Christ opens out an entire new context from within which to see reality. Discovering Christ’s ‘interpretation’ of reality, we love it differently, and our surprising new reactions are what the biblical authors call ‘good works’.

If we do not ‘retrain’ in this logic of participation, Christian ethics can only go down a few well-worn paths. We have already glimpsed an overemphasis upon the imitation of Christ as the first of these paths. There is a place for imitating Christ, but only within the context of our union with him.³⁶ The example of Christ is best understood as one means by which Christ gives us a proper view of moral order. Participation with him creates a new and safe ‘space’ from within which we can regard and then ‘experiment with’ his example for ourselves. In the logic of participation, nothing hinges upon how successful an imitator we are. We are also freed to respond to the specifics of our situation that differ from those of the incarnate Son of Man.

The second of these paths is legalism. The motives for an over-reliance upon rules cannot all be listed or analysed here, and the place of ‘law’ will be considered further below. For the moment, I suggest that legalism results from various insecurities. We may doubt our capacity to discern right from wrong, or fear our incapacity to resist the seductions of self-love, or worry about our acceptance by God. Legalism offers to salve these insecurities; but the ‘fix’ is only ever temporary. Participation with Christ lays each of these insecurities to rest and relegates rules to much lighter roles (such as enabling community order, or transmitting wisdom easily and quickly).

34. Cf. O’Donovan, *Resurrection*, pp. 31–35 (and Part One *passim*).

35. *Inst.* 3.7.5.

36. Cf. Wallace, *Christian Life*, p. 47.

The third path is a kind of moral carelessness (as opposed by Paul in Rom. 6:1, 15) where the forensic structure of justification licenses the excesses of self-love. On this view, freedom from legal obligation to God is equated with freedom from the moral structure of reality. Calvin resolutely opposes this notion using spatial language. Those in union with Christ should regard him as being very near, never ‘far off’. ‘We do not . . . contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body – in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him’.³⁷ ‘We ought not to separate Christ from ourselves or ourselves from him. . . . Christ is not outside us but dwells within us. Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us’.³⁸ Sinning to increase grace becomes impossible to sustain under these conditions of a ‘fellowship of righteousness’ and a ‘wonderful communion’.

Finding moral order

It is absolutely basic to Calvin’s thought that ‘ethics’ is related to the orderly structure of creation. ‘The natural order was that the frame of the universe’³⁹ should be the school in which we were to learn piety’.⁴⁰ ‘Natural law’ describes our proper participation in the order surrounding us and, for Calvin, God’s commands often express natural law (see below).

Paul Helm has shown that Calvin accepted and worked with a concept of natural law not unlike that of Thomas Aquinas. Helm therefore opposes the theological voluntarism of some nominalist readings of Calvin, and the resistance among Dutch Reformed commentators even to admit the existence of natural law in Calvin. But Helm also shows how, for Calvin, our *epistemic access* to this moral order is more prone to negligence and error than in the tradition he inherited.⁴¹ I will now revisit the nature of this difficulty from the perspec-

37. *Inst.* 3.11.10.

38. *Inst.* 3.2.24.

39. For Battles’ summary of Calvin’s several Latin terms for this ‘frame’ or ‘structure’, see Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 96 n. 2.

40. *Inst.* 1.6.1.

41. Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 346–388.

tive of human self-love.

The misleading term ‘ethics’ does not connote what Calvin meant to include. Loving fellowship with God is essential to the proper consideration of right and wrong. Calvin’s engagements with philosophical ethics frequently press the point that human ethical enquiry seems to specialize in excluding fellowship with God as a relevant consideration. In his account of this penchant, human reason is competent for some ‘lower’ things, such as scientific enquiry, but has lost the ability to penetrate supernatural things. ‘[T]he natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin, but his supernatural gifts were stripped from him’.⁴² Humanity’s ethical performance falls halfway between the opacity that characterizes human knowledge of God and the relative clarity enjoyed in scientific enquiry.⁴³ Therefore ‘natural’ humanity entirely ignores the ‘First Table’ of the Decalogue, but has ‘somewhat more understanding’ of its second:⁴⁴

Since reason, therefore, by which man distinguishes between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift, it could not be completely wiped out; but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that its misshapen ruins appear.⁴⁵

Hence Romans 2:14–15 is uncontroversially regarded as evidence that Gentiles are not ‘utterly blind as to the conduct of life’.⁴⁶ Concerning this conduct,

I am thankful to my colleague Dr Mark Thompson for this reference.

42. *Inst.* 2.2.12.

43. *Inst.* 2.2.20, 2.2.13–16.

44. *Inst.* 2.2.24. As I read Battles’ translation, Calvin uses the term ‘natural’ with a morally variable sense. ‘Natural order’ is morally excellent, referring to God’s original design of creation. ‘Natural law’ is morally good, describing humanity’s proper appropriation of created order. Fallen and flawed ‘natural humanity’ is morally corrupted humanity. ‘Natural knowledge’ is (sometimes) a morally neutral description of standard human epistemic processes. Further discussion of the term is beyond our scope; but context usually makes Calvin’s evaluative intent quite clear.

45. *Inst.* 2.2.12.

46. ‘Natural law’ and ‘natural theology’ are commonly confused at this point. Calvin willingly concedes that reason can sometimes discern moral order (i.e. ‘natural law’); but it does not follow that people are capable of an adequate natural theology (*Inst.* 1.5.11–12). To put the same point in reverse: Calvin is sure that there

‘[t]he human mind sometimes seems more acute . . . than in higher things’, and in an interesting engagement with Plato over our access to natural law, Calvin judges (against Plato) that ethical ‘ignorance’ remains culpable, since ‘[t]he sinner tries to evade his innate power to judge between good and evil’.⁴⁷

But ‘natural’ human ethics are conspicuously arbitrary.⁴⁸ For Calvin, everyone acts the ethicist, picking and choosing between whatever mode of ethical deliberation suits our self-love. We adhere to principles until specific self-interested cases cause the principle to be forgotten. Conscience is overridden by agents fully aware of prospective evil. (Conversely, incontinence temporarily pressures people into a temporary experience of ‘ignorance’ that is later regretted.)

Our reason is overwhelmed by so many forms of deceptions [*sic*], is subject to so many errors, dashes against so many obstacles, is caught in so many difficulties, that it is far from directing us aright . . . [T]he reason of our mind, wherever it may turn, is miserably subject to vanity.⁴⁹

Moral order, then, is intimately connected to creation’s Lord and to the structure of his cosmos. No one can dissociate from their human embodiment in a morally structured habitat; therefore aspects of moral order continually become apparent to humanity. Yet, blinded and drunk with self-love, the moral coherence of our habitat hovers beyond our powers of recognition and analysis. In our preoccupation with self-love, we render ourselves unable to participate in proper relationship to whatever or whoever is next to us, unless we deem them to serve our self-love. The divine intervention into this state of affairs is finally effected through participation with Christ, who redeems us not only from the wrath of God, but also from our failed conception of our place in the cosmos. Through him, we begin to participate in the cosmos according to that set of proper relationships that we have called ‘moral order’.

Calvin’s sixfold list on union with Christ prefaces his brief ‘Life of the Christian Man’,⁵⁰ which does not intend to deal with the fine grain of ethics (such as ‘exhortations’ and ‘virtues’) but sets out to summarize an ‘ordered life’

can be no natural knowledge of God sufficient to save; but there can be some limited natural discernment of good.

47. *Inst.* 2.2.22.

48. *Inst.* 2.2.25.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Inst.* 3.6–10.

according to ‘some universal rule’.⁵¹ It is a global overview of Calvin’s ethic, although he does go on to show how his ‘universal rule’ brings new intelligibility to business practice, to the practice of suffering and to the way we handle the onset of death. These act as cameos of how ethical deliberation should proceed in participation with Christ.

The treatise relies upon an affectionate knowledge of Christ that ‘possesses the whole soul’ and ‘finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affections of the heart’, in contrast to knowledge that resides in ‘memory alone, as other disciplines are’.⁵² When such a reordering of the ‘inmost affections of the heart’ has taken hold, ‘we are not our own’, since this reordering occurs within the safety of our union with Christ.⁵³ We should pause to notice Calvin’s intense interest in the life of the affections, and their reordering. For humanity’s self-love is an affective disorder; therefore to ‘do ethics’ requires as much attention to the affections as to logical argument.

No denotative definition is offered for ‘heart’, but, ostensibly, it is the domain of commitments, values, ‘will’ and impulse (modern labels no less mysterious than ‘heart’). Calvin’s language is consonant with the NT’s use of *kardia* and the OT antecedents in *leb*, terms under which biblical authors gather the intersection of cognitive, emotional and volitional human awareness. In a recurrent contrast between ‘knowledge’ that either ‘flits in the brain’ (*cerebrum*) or ‘takes root in the heart’ (*cor*), Calvin’s emphasis upon the latter gives an ‘existential’ approach to knowledge with clear subjective elements.⁵⁴ Indeed, knowledge that is *not* affective is probably not ‘of the heart’, and therefore suspect. The necessity of reordered affection is seen in polemic against unnamed Christian opponents ‘who are content to roll the gospel on the tips of their tongues when its efficacy ought to penetrate the inmost affections of the heart, take its seat in the soul, and affect the whole man a hundred times more deeply than the cold exhortations of the philosophers!’⁵⁵

Calvin’s extensive treatment of self-denial shows participants in Christ addressing their own self-love.⁵⁶ We are ‘quite incapable’ of comprehending

51. *Inst.* 3.6.1.

52. *Inst.* 3.6.4.

53. *Inst.* 3.7.1; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20.

54. *Inst.* 1.5.9. See Battles’ note in Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 62 n. 29; and cf. *Inst.* 3.2.8, 3.2.33 and 3.2.36.

55. *Inst.* 3.6.4.

56. *Inst.* 3.7.1–10.

exhortations such as Philippians 2:3 ('consider others better than yourselves') until our affections change, 'such is the blindness with which we all rush into self-love'.⁵⁷ But in self-denial, old attachments (such as 'the yearning to possess, the desire for power, and the favour of men') begin to dissolve. Vices are displaced from the heart, and new affections form.

So we regain access to a moral order where the beautiful image of God, 'to which we owe all honour and love', becomes evident in other people and we respond to them accordingly.⁵⁸ It becomes possible 'not to consider men's evil intentions but to look upon the image of God in them, which cancels and effaces their transgressions, and with its beauty and dignity allures us to love and embrace them'.⁵⁹ On this ground Calvin rejects mere performance of the duties of love. When our affections are reordered, duties can proceed 'from a sincere feeling of love'.⁶⁰ Thus business practice ceases to be governed by the consequentialisms of either expansion or necessity.⁶¹ It exists in the service of people.⁶²

Robert Doyle has shown how a deeply humanitarian ethic arises from the logic of union with Christ. This form of life excels at regarding and acting upon the good of the other, in radical empathy and mercy. It is attentive to the 'household of faith', but liberally spills over into dealings with everyone.⁶³ Likewise, for Gunther Haas participation with Christ generates love, with equity the 'rule of thumb' by which love can be implemented.⁶⁴ Of course these results would not be ethical 'rocket science' – except that this species so prone to self-love is always surprised when it rediscovers equity and humanity. But because of the moral order of creation, it is no surprise that the Christian finds ethical common cause with others:

[S]ince man is by nature a social animal, he tends through natural instinct to foster and preserve society. Consequently, we observe that there exist in all men's minds universal impressions of a certain civic fair-dealing and order . . . [W]hile men dispute

57. *Inst.* 3.7.4.

58. *Inst.* 3.7.6.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Inst.* 3.7.7.

61. *Inst.* 3.7.8–9.

62. For an overview of Calvin's economic ethic, see Keesecker, 'Law', pp. 35–37.

63. Doyle, 'Detractors', pp. 78–80.

64. G. H. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), pp. 49–50 and *passim*.

among themselves about individual sections of the law, they agree on the general conception of equity.⁶⁵

God's law

If the Christian life is constituted by participation in union with Christ, how can Calvin also assert that the Spirit shows us 'how to frame our life according to the rule of his law'?⁶⁶ Calvin participates in a longstanding tradition where distinctions between moral, ceremonial and civil laws were used to map the conceptual logic of the biblical material.⁶⁷ Calvin's interpretation of biblical law deploys a nuanced version of this threefold set.⁶⁸

Moral law directs our love first to God and then to one another. It is 'the true and eternal rule of righteousness', and is 'a testimony of natural law'.⁶⁹ In contrast to today, it was not controversial to suppose that the morality of moral law pivoted upon a conception of the 'natural law'. Natural law is simply a name for the way the structure of the universe impinges upon humanity. As we have seen, Calvin believed that natural law does direct some common ethical agreements, and will go so far as to assert 'that in the arrangement of this life no man is without the light of reason'.⁷⁰ Of course, as we have also seen, Calvin also believes that self-love makes people completely error-prone in the use of this reason in relation to morality. Biblical moral law has no such ambiguity, for *it is the natural law according to the word of God*.

65. *Inst.* 2.2.13.

66. *Inst.* 2.2.18. For more analysis of Calvin and Luther on biblical law (in reference to the legal material of Exodus), see A. J. Cameron, 'Liberation and Desire: The Logic of Law in Exodus and Beyond', in *Exploring Exodus: Literary, Theological and Contemporary Approaches*, ed. B. S. Rosner and P. R. Williamson (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), pp. 136–142.

67. Calvin's hermeneutic for distinguishing moral, legal and civil material in the OT is unfortunately beyond our scope.

68. In the *Institutes*, biblical 'law' can refer to the morality of the Decalogue (2.6); or to the various collections within the Pentateuch (4.20.14–16); or simply to everything that Moses said (2.7.1). Each sense is generally made clear by definition or context. (See further Battles, in Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 348 n. 1.)

69. *Inst.* 4.20.15, 4.20.16.

70. *Inst.* 2.2.13.

Biblical *ceremonial* laws spring from moral law, which tutored the Jews in piety to God and toward their eschatological Messiah. Biblical *civil* laws were specific ‘formulas of equity and justice, by which they might live together blamelessly and peaceably’.⁷¹ According to Calvin, the ceremonial and the civil both expressed morality among the Jews, instantiating respectively reverent service of God and love for humanity.

Aquinas had already described how divinely ordered moral reality is experienced by humanity as a ‘natural law’, which is graciously ‘republished’ for humanity by God in the Bible.⁷² Calvin was sufficiently persuaded by this approach to deploy it in broad outline.⁷³ ‘Moral law’ expresses ‘natural law’; ceremonial law was a specific instance of the moral law to order worship of God; and civil law was a specific instance of the moral law to order human desires and human society. It follows that the specific instances (the ceremonial and civil laws) are no longer directly relevant to Christians (although there remains much to be learnt in them about Christ and about equity). But those in Christ are regaining access to moral order, so moral law remains relevant to them.

Controversy in the Reformation centred on the mode of this ongoing relevance, expressed as a debate about three so-called ‘uses’ of the law. These more uniquely Reformed distinctions do not easily map onto the older moral-ceremonial-civil divide, and the relationship between the uses and the older formulation can be confusing. This new triad is not discussing the whole Mosaic legal code, as the moral-ceremonial-civil distinction does. Rather, the ‘uses’ of the law are an argument about how we may take *only the ‘moral’ component* of biblical law.

In Calvin’s terminology, the moral law’s first use is a ‘theological use’: it acts as a ‘mirror’, convicting everyone of sin and driving us to repent and find grace through faith.⁷⁴ Its second use is a ‘civil use’, a ‘bridle’ upon wilful sinners, so enabling communities to live in relative harmony.⁷⁵ We must note that for Calvin what forms the basis of any modern system of justice is this second use of the biblical *moral* law, *not* the biblical civil law as such. He was quite clear that no biblical *civil* law is binding on later societies. Every nation is free to make whatever laws it considers profitable, as long as these are ‘in conformity to [the]

71. *Inst.* 4.20.15.

72. S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. M. T. Noble (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), pp. 171–185.

73. See further Helm, *Ideas*, pp. 368–378.

74. *Inst.* 2.7.6–9.

75. *Inst.* 2.7.10–11.

perpetual rule of love'.⁷⁶ For Calvin, particular societies in specific circumstances rightly enact such laws as are needed, provided they are made within boundaries of equity and natural law, and to promote gentleness and love.⁷⁷

There was a broad Reformation consensus upon these two uses of moral law. Even the antinomian John Agricola could agree to the second, *civil* use of moral law. (His complaint was against its theological use.) In contrast, we would probably find a less clear consensus among Reformed Christians today about either use. (It would be interesting to map the history of the change.)

But the main Reformation dispute was over a so-called 'third use' of the law. Calvin is in no doubt: 'The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers . . . Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will'.⁷⁸ Law used in this third way is, in Calvin's startling metaphor, 'a whip to an idle and balky ass' and 'a constant sting' upon the believer (always with the proviso, of course, that no one 'in Christ' can be condemned by law or justified by its works).

What could make intelligible Calvin's wholehearted promotion of this third use? The categories of his thought that we have examined make it so. Biblical moral law is God's own expression of 'natural law' – that is, of moral reality as it pertains to humanity. In that respect it remains 'good', and can function as an aid to self-denial and as an antidote to self-love. It serves to expand the moral horizons of the self-lover. When Calvin asks, 'what would be less loveable than the law if, with importuning and threatening alone, it troubled souls through fear, and distressed them through fright?' he is clearly aware of the potential for the moral law to devastate the conscience of the reader.⁷⁹ But it becomes readable and usable beyond its precepts, because of Jesus Christ:

[T]he Lord instructs by their reading of it those whom he inwardly instils with a readiness to obey. He lays hold not only of the precepts, but the accompanying promise of grace, which alone sweetens what is bitter . . . David especially shows that in the law he apprehended the Mediator, without whom there is no delight or sweetness.⁸⁰

76. *Inst.* 4.20.15.

77. *Inst.* 4.20.15–16.

78. *Inst.* 2.7.12.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*

In the same way that imitating Christ becomes thinkable within the safety of participation with Christ, so also does the reading of the law. Freed from its 'entire rigour', people 'hear themselves called' in it 'with fatherly gentleness by God'.⁸¹ The moral law becomes another means by which our proper contact with reality is rehabilitated, as we ponder the intent of each command, the features of its opposite and how self-love necessitates its sharp wording.⁸²

Unexpectedly (and perhaps unwittingly), Calvin has left the metaphor of 'whip' and 'sting' far behind. In outlining the law's third use, he has almost invented a 'fourth use' for it – as a kind of 'gymnasium' for training our discernment of moral reality.

Calvinist legalism

It is beyond my competence to judge which 'Calvinisms' were legalistic and when. But if we assume the charge to be correct for some instances, what in Calvin's treatment of ethics could account for this trend?

It would be easy to hold Calvin above the more 'small-minded' of his followers. After all, participation with Jesus Christ is able to settle the insecurities that can drive legalism. This union also generates Calvin's important treatise on Christian freedom,⁸³ where we are freed by justification from 'law righteousness';⁸⁴ freed with 'eager readiness' to respond joyfully to the Father's word;⁸⁵ and freed to 'use God's good gifts for the purpose for which he gave

81. *Inst.* 3.19.5.

82. *Inst.* 2.8.8–10. For excellent summaries of Calvin's way of reading the law 'in Christ', see Doyle, 'Detractors', pp. 81–82; and D. C. Jones, 'The Law and the Spirit of Christ', in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. D. W. Hall and P. A. Lillback (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), pp. 313–317.

83. *Inst.* 3.19.1–16. My engagement with Calvin's ethic is compromised by insufficient attention to this treatise. For a useful summary, see W. Edgar, 'Ethics: The Christian Life and Good Works According to Calvin', in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. D. W. Hall and P. A. Lillback (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), pp. 344–345.

84. *Inst.* 3.19.2.

85. *Inst.* 3.19.4–5.

them to us',⁸⁶ according to the rule of love.⁸⁷ Surely any legalist 'malfunction' must be the fault of the followers alone.

But without wishing to denigrate Calvin's achievement, we may point to three areas where his followers were likely to stray. The first two of these may be his fault.

1. Calvin's excoriating, ruthless and inexorable attack upon human self-love is one of the most striking features of the *Institutes*. It needed to be said, then as now. Again and again, his psychological descriptions of self-loving humanity evince rueful smiles of self-recognition. Here is a typical example:

The very vices that infest us we take pains to hide from others, while we flatter ourselves with the pretence that they are slight and insignificant, and even sometimes embrace them as virtues. If others manifest the same endowments we admire in ourselves, or even superior ones, we spitefully belittle and revile these gifts in order to avoid yielding place to such persons. If there are any faults in others, not content with noting them with severe and sharp reproach, we hatefully exaggerate them.⁸⁸

By the time this passage appears, late in the *Institutes*, Calvin has already made dozens of sharp statements against humanity. We do not need more. We need his treatise on the Christian life to push the horizons of our 'moral imagination' beyond our usual self-love. But this passage is so mesmerizing in its accuracy that the main point – how self-denial creates space for a new love toward God and others – is easily lost. Unfortunately, Calvin is so good at this invective that, ironically, it becomes easier to remain fixated upon our self-love.

We might compare with the letter to the Ephesians, where about ten verses describe human sin, perhaps sixty verses describe Christ and our union with him, and roughly eighty verses could be described as the expansion of our moral imagination arising from this union. The comparable ratio in the *Institutes* would be quite different.

In this respect, Calvin is prone to overstatement. His habit is to keep slipping into such invective. In his discussion of neighbour love, Calvin opines that the Lord 'had at hand no more violent or stronger emotion'

86. *Inst.* 3.19.8.

87. *Inst.* 3.19.11–12.

88. *Inst.* 3.7.4.

than our flawed self-love by which to ‘express how profoundly we must be inclined to love our neighbours’.⁸⁹ For David Jones, ‘surely [Calvin] goes wide of the mark. Instead of reading the commandment as “you shall love your neighbour as you [*now sinfully*] love yourself,” he could have made his point . . . by reading, “you shall love your neighbour as [*a person like*] yourself.”’⁹⁰

I suspect that this aspect of the *Institutes* heightens Christian insecurities about the seductions of self-love. We then rely too heavily on rules in a flawed attempt to curb it (cf. Col. 2:23). The better antidote is to recognize the excellences of God in Christ, of humanity in Christ, of the neighbour and of the good order of the world, so rekindling new love for them.⁹¹ When our affections are reordered in this way, our fixations upon self-love are unmasked as both demented and boring.

2. A ‘third use of the law’ is hard to sustain on Calvin’s terms of ‘whip’ and ‘sting’. Pastorally, retention of any distinction between third and first use is problematic. The existential experiences of moral instruction under its third use, and theological accusation under its first use, are too similar. In the third use, it comes to the hearer as ‘a whip to an idle and balky ass’ and as ‘a constant sting’.⁹² In its first use, ‘the wickedness and condemnation of us all are sealed by the testimony of the law’.⁹³ It is a lot to ask of most Christian people, particularly those weak in the faith, to retain the distinction when the existential similarity is so great. Very little prevents something being ‘lost in translation’, so that declarations from the law sound, to hearers at least, like ‘law righteousness’, replete with all the terrors of law that Calvin knows can trouble and distress people. When the first and third uses become confused – surely more often than not – doubts about God’s acceptance begin; and the preceding fixation upon law has set in place a paradigm of legalistic response.

It might be argued that mistakes in pastoral practice do not negate the third use *per se*. It simply sought to extract truth about moral order from the law, as one among many moral truth-bearing sources in Christ. But

89. *Inst.* 2.8.54.

90. Jones, ‘The Law and the Spirit of Christ’, p. 313; emphasis and square brackets original.

91. For an excellent analysis of this new kind of love (in contrast to self-love), see O. M. T. O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 18–35 and *passim*.

92. *Inst.* 2.7.12.

93. *Inst.* 2.7.8.

the moral truth-bearing value of Old Testament law should be accessed and explained in terms other than ‘whip’ and ‘sting’.⁹⁴ I have suggested that Calvin began this project, perhaps inadvertently, by almost inventing a ‘fourth use’.

3. Insecurities about how to determine right and wrong may drive an over-reliance upon law to describe the moral order. Legalism may arise for anyone who is yet to discern moral reality in participation with Christ. If Paul can describe this union as a ‘profound mystery’ (Eph. 5:32), it is no fault of Calvin’s that Christians regularly find it hard to comprehend. For Karl Barth, each Christian’s vocation consists of knowing and growing in this union. ‘How could they be what they are in Christ if they did not continually become it?’⁹⁵

Calvin’s understanding of his own union with Christ enabled him to respond to his own self-love, and to moral order, within a context of safety. The same can become true for all of us, and so my first two comments against Calvin need to be made in recognition of the inestimable service he has done to the church by conveying how we may participate with Christ. Christ releases us from our bondage to self-love, shares his own life with us and returns us to our truest humanity. He brings to us the moral structure of reality and enables us to join in fellowship with his Father at the centre of that reality. Calvin’s ethic springs from this astonishing news. It is the story he really wanted to tell.

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94. Andrew Sloane’s thesis – that the OT consists of instruction and narrative that alter our ‘moral vision’ – is an alternative worthy of consideration: A. Sloane, *At Home in a Strange Land: Using the Old Testament in Christian Ethics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), pp. 143–191, 218.

95. *CD IV/3.2*, p. 547.