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# THEOLOGIAN OF THE SPIRIT: RE-EXAMINING WARFIELD'S JUDGEMENT ON CALVIN

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## THE SHAPE OF THE QUESTION

B. B. Warfield's judgement that Calvin 'above everything [...] deserves [...] the great name of *the theologian of the Holy Spirit*' is familiar.<sup>1</sup> How did Calvin earn it? Answer: he worked out in detail the whole experience of salvation in terms of the work of God the Holy Spirit in the individual soul. Warfield's judgement implicates ecclesiology as well as pneumatology, since he tells us that Calvin's greatness lay in his substitution of Spirit for Church as God's instrument for saving the soul. However, Calvin's individual soul does not supplant the church. In his introduction to Abraham Kuyper's volume on the Holy Spirit, Warfield again pronounced that '[t]he doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is a gift from John Calvin to the Church of Christ', but this time picked out 'the manner of His [the Spirit's] working in the congregation of believers'.<sup>2</sup> Calvin's greatness lies in so ordering pneumatology that the church, alongside the individual, is the recipient, and not the instrument, of the saving work of God the Spirit.

In what follows, I less challenge this judgement on Calvin directly than place a question mark against it. Only a comprehensive study of Calvin's work will determine whether question should be commuted to challenge. As familiar as is Warfield's verdict is the lament that commentators on Calvin's theology have often plundered his *Institutes* at the expense of his other writings. Although I occasionally cite work outside the *Institutes*, my limited purposes in this article impel me to join the merry crew of misguided plunderers.<sup>3</sup> I make no attempt to provide a balanced view of Calvin's pneumatology or ecclesiology as a whole, because what generates my question to Warfield is what Calvin does in the *Institutes* in rela-

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<sup>1</sup> B. B. Warfield, 'John Calvin the Theologian', in *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1956), pp. 482-87. This observation is on p. 487.

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York, NY/London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), p. xxxiii.

<sup>3</sup> Only one whose intellectual conscience is totally seared can proceed thus without unease after Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

tion to both the substance and the relative ordering of pneumatology and ecclesiology. Prior to the chapter which closes book 2 on ‘The Knowledge of God the Redeemer’, the structure of Calvin’s exposition has been ruled by the Christological clauses of the Apostles’ Creed.<sup>4</sup> Possibly, the entire *Institutes* is structured along the lines of the Creed; its final Latin edition has been described as the ‘credal’ *Institutio*.<sup>5</sup> However, Calvin himself does not say as much in his last edition of the *Institutes*, and a variety of proposals about its structure have been offered.<sup>6</sup> Whatever our judgement on this, Calvin’s break with the credal order, as he moves out of book 2 and into books 3 and 4 of the *Institutes*, is conspicuous. The clauses of the Apostles’ Creed are ordered in the sequence: Spirit, Church, communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. However, Calvin treats forgiveness and resurrection in connection with the Spirit in book 3, before *ecclesia* and *communio* put in their

<sup>4</sup> I use the translation by Ford Lewis Battles of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960).

<sup>5</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (London/New York, NY: Continuum, 1995), p. 8. The credal interpretation of the *Institutes* was canonised by the inclusion of Olevian’s account at the beginning of Henry Beveridge’s translation of the *Institutes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972, repr.), pp. 27–30, which stated that Calvin adopted the arrangement of the Apostles’ Creed.

<sup>6</sup> For a brisk look at some of the principal options, see Anthony N. S. Lane, *A Reader’s Guide to Calvin’s Institutes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), pp. 21–22; see the additional note on p. 18 on the Apostles’ Creed. For longer discussion, see Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), pp. 35–43. In the same year, Gary Neal Hansen joined the company of those pitching for the significance of Romans as an influence on the structure of the *Institutes*, in ‘Door and Passageway: Calvin’s Use of Romans as Hermeneutical and Theological Guide’, in *Reformation Readings of Romans*, ed. by Kathy Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holder (New York, NY/London: T & T Clark, 2008), pp. 77–94. Certainly, Calvin regarded both Romans and the final edition of the *Institutes* as guides to the reading of Scripture: see *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1961), p. 5, and *Institutes*, pp. 3–5. See also Bruce Gordon, *John Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 23–36, for both several references to Romans and judgement on the structural alliance of Romans and the Apostles’ Creed; also, Gordon’s biography of *Calvin* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 92. For the structural evolution of the *Institutes*, see Franz H. Breukelman, *The Structure of Sacred Doctrine in Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

appearance in book 4. Nonetheless, the Apostles' Creed remains on Calvin's mind at the beginning of book 4 (see 1.2, 3). He also allows that we may speak of forgiveness after, and not before, ecclesiology, in the fashion of the Creed (4.1.20, 27).

In breaking with the creedal order, Calvin breaks with the order of the biblical narrative, though he has not committed himself to following it. Calvin sets out on the pneumatological trail in book 3 by apparently orienting his account of the Spirit to the individual, opening the pneumatological discussion which follows his Christology (book 2) with reference to the 'secret energy of the Spirit' (3.1.1).<sup>7</sup> Under this rubric, Calvin expounds the work of the Spirit in the individual soul. However, in Luke-Acts, the account of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, which Calvin tracks in book 2, is followed by the account of the Pentecostal Spirit. Contrast Kuyper with Calvin. Kuyper arranged his material more closely along the lines of Scripture and Creed. He did not write an *Institutes*, but in treating the Holy Spirit, he devoted the first of his three volumes to 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church as a Whole', and the second and third volumes to 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Individual'. He reversed Calvin's order. Adding to his original preface a 'Postscript for American readers', he drew attention to his campaign against 'individualism and subjectivity' in relating the work of the Spirit to the Church as community.<sup>8</sup>

Kuyper's order not only highlights Calvin's break with biblical as well as credal order in book 3; it also highlights the question of how Calvin theologically relates individual and church. Despite the substantial treatment of ecclesiology in Book 4 of the *Institutes*, Calvin has been charged with a theologically deficient individualism on account of both what he says substantively in book 4 about the church, and the rubric under which he says it. All the above constitutes an invitation to examine Warfield's judgement. Is the charge of individualism justified? If so, does Warfield's judgement need to be corrected? In the first part of this article, I focus on ecclesiology; in the next on pneumatology.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> On this terminology as a technical description of the 'special work [...] of the Holy Spirit', see Benjamin Charles Milner, Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of The Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), p. 28, and his Appendix, where he nuances, as well as documents, the claim. François Wendel titles the chapter in which he deals with book 3, 'The Hidden Work of the Holy Spirit', in *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. by Philip Mairet (London: Collins, 1965), chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup> Kuyper, *The Work*, pp. xii-xiv.

<sup>9</sup> The second part is anticipated in the next issue of *SBET*. (Ed.)

## ECCLESIOLOGY: A SIGN OF INDIVIDUALISM?

A stark charge of individualism issued forth from Emil Brunner, and remarking on it nicely launches our discussion.<sup>10</sup> He focussed on Calvin's description of the church as an '*externum subsidium*', an external aid, a means, an institutional framework for faith to be fostered and to flourish, the rubric under which the church is treated in book 4 of the *Institutes*. Brunner believed this to be theologically mistaken. In truth, the church is the new covenant community, not principally a means of nurturing individual faith, and 'the New Testament *Ecclesia* [...] has nothing of the character of an institution about it [...]'<sup>11</sup> 'Institution' is a wide-ranging term in Brunner's account. Its vagaries are not our concern. Suffice to say that, for him, individualism and institutionalism are mutually implicated. In Calvin's case, an institutional view of the church is the implicate or correlative of individualism.<sup>12</sup> In the chapter of the volume containing the celebrated statement that '[t]he church exists by mission, just as the fire exists by burning', Brunner also lambasted individualism in the name of

<sup>10</sup> For an overlapping version of the first part of this article, see Stephen N. Williams, 'Calvin on the Church: Why Is It in *Institutes* Book 4?', in *Engaging Ecclesiology: Papers from the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, 2021*, ed. by A. T. B. McGowan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023), pp. 57-74. The emphasis and documentation in this present offering is different, and it is ordered to Warfield's judgement.

<sup>11</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, trans. by Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1952), p. 17. Later, Brunner distinguished between the possession of institutional features and being an institution, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation, Dogmatics, volume III* (London: Lutterworth, 1962), p. 22. Here, he described *The Misunderstanding of the Church* as a 'preliminary study' for its first part (p. ix), and repeated his previous criticisms of Calvin (pp. 19-20).

<sup>12</sup> Others contrast the individual and the institutional. Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger observe that Calvin's 'definition of the church is more individualistic than institutional', in *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos), p. 302, n. 29. Hendrikus Berkhof also contrasts the individualistic and the institutional in his discussion of Calvin in *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 342. However, his contrast is apparently grounded in the judgement that a free church approach is individualistic, a judgement persuasively challenged by Alan P. F. Sell with special reference to Bernard Lord Manning, in 'Rectifying Calvin's Ecclesiology: The Doctrinal and Ecumenical Importance of Separatist-Congregational Catholicity', in *John Calvin's Ecclesiology: Ecumenical Perspectives*, ed. by Gerard Mannion and Eduardus Van der Borgh (New York, NY/London: T & T Clark, 2011), pp. 143-68.

community and communion.<sup>13</sup> In this individualistic worry, Brunner was not alone in the Reformed tradition. Barth, while dissenting from aspects of Brunner's constructive ecclesiology, was markedly sympathetic.<sup>14</sup> Hendrikus Berkhof, while critical of Brunner for oversimplifying, agreed that he was onto something.<sup>15</sup>

Is this line of criticism fundamentally correct? Bernard Cottret is broadly right to warn that it 'would [...] be anachronistic to give him [Calvin] too individualistic an interpretation' in the *Institutes*, though this formulation is a little too vague.<sup>16</sup> If individualism there is, whatever form it may take, much in the first two books of the *Institutes* belies it, on the surface. There is much talk of the church in book 2.<sup>17</sup> Book 3 is neither entirely individualistic, nor starts on an entirely individualistic note. At the beginning of 3.1, where we read of the 'secret energy of the Spirit', we encounter reference to Jesus Christ as the head of the church. In the last chapter, we read that he 'was raised by the Father inasmuch as he was Head of the church' (3.25.3). Between these two points, we find robust statements on the significance of ecclesial fellowship (3.4.6) and the corporate nature of faith as expressed in prayer, subject of the longest chapter in the *Institutes*, and one which has attracted the judgement of being its effective climax (3.20).<sup>18</sup> David Wiley concluded that '[b]ook 3 portrays not the individual's Christian life so much as the inner life of

<sup>13</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1932), chapter V. The celebrated statement is on p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), p. 615; *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3.1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), pp. 766-67. Barth expressed his ire when we 'relate' the work of the Spirit 'directly to the personal appropriation of salvation by the individual Christian', as was the methodological way in traditional Protestant dogmatics', *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), pp. 149-50. He himself distributed his ecclesiological discussions amongst the various parts of this volume of *Church Dogmatics*.

<sup>15</sup> Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964), pp. 47-49.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. by M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 325.

<sup>17</sup> This should be picked up from 6.4, and see 7.16; 8.14, 21; 15.3, 5; 16.9, 15. In the same breath as he speaks of the church in 2.6.4, Calvin speaks of God's adoption of the elect, and 'elect' can be ambiguous between Israel according to the flesh and the Lord's own. Of course, talk of the church is found in book 1 as well: it is 'God's dwelling place', 1.17.6. See too, e.g., 1.6.1.

<sup>18</sup> So Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction*, p. 107.

the church.<sup>19</sup> If the charge of individualism (as understood by Brunner) is to stick, it must negotiate counter-evidence in the first three books of the *Institutes*. It is when we get to the fourth that things begin to heat up with individualistic potency.

When pondering the location of Calvin's ecclesiology in book 4, we must guard against the danger of sliding into our own dogmatic expectations of the structure of what is billed as an *Institutes*, heedless of the historical context of this particular specimen.<sup>20</sup> In warning us against false expectations, Bouwsma is so determined to oppose the use of dogmatic language that he baulks at referring to what goes on in Book 4 overall as 'ecclesiology' at all.<sup>21</sup> Be that as it may, Calvin regarded it as a matter of pastoral urgency to underline the relationship of the individual to God in a late-medieval context where the church had apparently usurped the place of God, and we must reckon with the potential impact this had on the way he structured his treatment of theological topics. Although we cannot be sure that Calvin personally authored the title of the Latin title of the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536), it is described as *Containing almost the Whole Sum of Piety and Whatever it is Necessary to Know in the Doctrine of Salvation*. Correspondingly, in his final edition, Calvin will say that 'spiritual insight consists chiefly in three things: (1) knowing God; (2) knowing his fatherly favour in our behalf, in which our salvation consists; (3) knowing how to frame our life according to the rule of his law' (2.2.18). Concern for soteriology and the Christian life are at the heart of his doctrinal presentation.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Church as the Elect in the Theology of Calvin', in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. by Timothy George (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), pp. 96-117, quotation from p. 111. Ranging over the whole of Calvin's corpus, Ronald S. Wallace describes *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd, 1959) in ecclesiological terms; see the structure of his accounts in, e.g., Parts 1 and 2, Chapter II. Even so, we have arrived at Part IV of his book before we read of 'Nurture and Discipline within the Church', and Wallace speaks of 'the assurance of being within the Church' as 'an *important* element in our sanctification' (p. 200). The italics are mine, provided in order to highlight the fact that he does not use the word 'necessary'.

<sup>20</sup> In his excursus on 'The Place of Ecclesiology in the Structure of Dogmatics', Pannenberg, citing both Brunner and Berkhof, noted attempts within the Reformed tradition to correct a dogmatic order which prioritized the individual over the corporate, *Systematic Theology*, volume 3, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans/Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 21-27.

<sup>21</sup> William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York, NY/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 214. See also p. 5.

However, the location of Calvin's ecclesiology is most pointedly methodologically explained by his description of the church as an 'aid'. This has sometimes been judged infelicitous when measured by the substance of the ecclesiology adumbrated in book 4. Thus, Brian Gerrish reckons that Calvin described the Lord's Supper, treated in book 4, 'a little misleadingly as an "appendage" to the gospel'.<sup>22</sup> Probing the question of Calvin's sacrament as 'external aid' is a demanding affair.<sup>23</sup> It certainly gives us pause for thought when what John William Nevin, in his celebrated exposition and defence of Reformed eucharistic theology, took to form 'the heart of the whole Christian worship' and to constitute 'the entire question of the Church [...] the great life-problem of the age', is treated as an 'aid' to faith in the *Institutes*.<sup>24</sup> While it takes quite an effort to think of Calvin using terminology 'casually', we may experience a momentary pang of sympathy for that sentiment, born of the fact that much of what he said about the church in book 4 apparently makes it something more than an aid to faith.<sup>25</sup> Yet, consistency and clarity are particularly important if the judgement that '[t]he unity of Calvin's thought becomes apparent in his doctrine of the Church' has any traction.<sup>26</sup>

To come to solid conclusions on the question of whether or not Calvin, in describing the church as an aid, is wording things infelicitously by his own substantive standards, we need not only to study Calvin's Latin usage throughout the *Institutes*, but also to interpret the relevant terminology in book 4 in meticulous accordance with the substance of Calvin's theological account of the church there. Arguably, Brunner fell short here.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 158. Keith A. Mathison, who defends the ecclesial importance of Calvin's Eucharistic theology, fails to alert us to the status of sacraments as 'aids' in *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2002). Calvin also describes baptism as, 'so to speak, the appendix of faith', *The Acts of the Apostles 1-13* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1965), p. 253.

<sup>23</sup> For example, the question of the nature of secondary causality gets wheeled in: see Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church, and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 167.

<sup>24</sup> *The Mystical Presence and the Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper*, ed. by Linden J. DeBie (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> See Elias Dantas, 'Calvin, the Theologian of the Holy Spirit', in *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology: Legacy and Prospect*, ed. by Sung Wook Chung (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), pp. 128-41, remark on p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p. 194.

<sup>27</sup> Brunner's ill-health precluded any possibility of a rigorous reappraisal of *The Misunderstanding of the Church* when it came to writing his *Dogmatics*. Alister E. McGrath, who notes the ill-health, compares the broad structure



Yet, when all is said and done, Calvin's visible church is an aid, if a vitally necessary aid. It is there on account of our weakness. Of course, this encompasses the sacraments. In his commentary on Malachi 1:12, Calvin observes that we come to the Lord's table 'on account of our common infirmity'.<sup>28</sup>

In modifying Brunner's judgement, Berkhof pointed to the prominence of Calvin's description of the church as *mater ecclesia*, 'mother church', a not exactly individualistic designation.<sup>29</sup> It certainly is prominent. It is also problematic. Potential trouble brews here, as the question of institutionalism pops up alongside individualism, impinging on Warfield's verdict. Because we remain within the orbit of Warfield's claim, I am not tracking every attempt to identify putative institutionalism in Calvin's work, just attempting to come to preliminary grips with that claim.<sup>30</sup>

#### ECCLESIOLOGY: A CASE OF INSTITUTIONALISM?

For the language of 'mother church', Calvin is scripturally dependent on Galatians 4:26, 'The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother'. Calvin takes Paul to be referring here to the visible church (4.1.4).<sup>31</sup> He is not. Maternity is ascribed to Jerusalem *above*, *mother* of the *visible* church in Galatia, just as Sarah, whom Calvin describes as 'the mother of the people of God', is the mother of Israel.<sup>32</sup> If Jerusalem above is appropriately described as a church, it is a heavenly church, the 'true church of God', not identical with the visible church here below, whose membership

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of Brunner's *Dogmatics* to Calvin's *Institutes*, *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 219.

<sup>28</sup> John Calvin, *Zechariah & Malachi* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986).

<sup>29</sup> See footnote 15.

<sup>30</sup> Nor am I distinguishing between varieties of individualism. For example, in his influential study of *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, volume 2 (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1931), Ernst Troeltsch judged that his doctrine of election shaped Calvin's individualism differently from the way Luther's individualism was shaped, p. 589.

<sup>31</sup> See Calvin's commentary on Galatians 4:26 in *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1965), and his *Sermons on Galatians*, trans. by Kathy Childress (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), chapter 29.

<sup>32</sup> For this description of Sarah, see Calvin's observation on Genesis 16:1, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965). Abraham is 'the father of the whole Church', *The Gospel according to St John 1-10* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press), on 8:56.

is not exclusively composed of heavenly citizens.<sup>33</sup> In his 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin ascribed maternity to the *invisible* church.<sup>34</sup> At all events, Jerusalem above is not the visible church.<sup>35</sup> If there is biblical support outside Galatians for describing the visible church as mother church, it will be slim pickings.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> E.g., J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997), pp. 440-41. It is certainly a heavenly 'presence', to borrow Karl Rahner's mundane but germane formulation when he seeks to integrate various facets of the church in *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. by William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), p. 338.

<sup>34</sup> See *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*, ed. by David F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 37. Calvin saw the question of whether the church always has to take visible form as a significant bone of contention with Catholicism: see from the outset of chapter 2 in Jon Balserak's *Establishing the Remnant Church in France: Calvin's Lectures on the Minor Prophets, 1556-1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1979), p. 248; Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 303. The exegesis I reject here does have the occasional modern defender; see Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 211-12. For a sympathetic and thorough nineteenth century commentator conversant with the history of exegesis, including patristic and Reformation exegesis, see Heinrich A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians*, 5th edition, trans. by G. H. Venable (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1876), especially p. 274. A fuller picture of Calvin's thought here requires examination of the way he associates church and kingdom; see Frederik A. V. Harms, *In God's Custody: The Church, a History of Divine Protection: A Study of John Calvin's Ecclesiology based on his Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), chapter 5.

<sup>36</sup> See Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), originally produced in 1960. Minear noted the distinctive 'elect lady and her children' of 2 John 1, but identified this as a minor image, even if taken as an ecclesiological referent, p. 54. He connected it with the imagery in Revelation 12:2 of Israel as the Messiah's mother. Not even when referring to Galatians 4:21-31 in the context of discussing Jerusalem did Minear speak of 'Mother Church' (pp. 91-96), and his nose was keenly sensitive to anything remotely a candidate for being a New Testament image of the church.

Theological support is a different matter, and patristic support is particularly significant for Calvin.<sup>37</sup> Augustine is involved, of course, but Cyprian is prominent in book 4, and he is favourably referenced throughout much of that book.<sup>38</sup> A glance at Cyprian poses significant questions about Calvin's ecclesiological approach. In his discussion of mother church, Cyprian combines an ecclesiology that is strongly 'institutionalist' with rich spiritual warmth. Peter Hinchliff described Cyprian's *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, standardly cited as a charter of episcopal institutionalism in Western ecclesiology, as 'a book about the need to love'.<sup>39</sup> Cyprian's correspondence, frequently cited by Calvin, sounds this note.<sup>40</sup> It is sounded more strongly here than it is in the *Institutes*. Obviously, we cannot draw conclusions just from the *Institutes* about how Calvin intertwines love and institution, but it is hard to forget that Calvin never once in the *Institutes* quoted the Johannine: 'God is love', and although he does speak of 'God's fatherly love toward mankind', love is not on his short list of the most signal divine perfections (1.10.2).<sup>41</sup> It is at least a

<sup>37</sup> Noteworthy theological support for the proposition that the 'assembly of believers remains our mother' comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, trans. by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, ed. by Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), p. 228. Admittedly, Bonhoeffer develops differently from Calvin the notion of the mother in terms of 'the church-community as the community of saints', p. 241.

<sup>38</sup> However, Anthony N. S. Lane picks up the 'revealing comment' in Calvin's commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:15 where Calvin charges Cyprian (*inter alia*) with error: *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 3, n. 10. Calvin's wording most certainly is 'revealing'; see *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1960), p. 77. How theologically rich the thought of ecclesial motherhood is when we step outside the Western patristic tradition surfaces in John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Hinchliff, *Cyprian of Carthage and the Unity of the Christian Church* (London: Chapman, 1974), p. 116.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Letter 46 in Cyprian, *Letters 1-81* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1964). Calvin does not refer to this letter in the *Institutes*, but he does to the previous one (in 4.7.3), which also refers to 'Mother Church'. In his correspondence, Cyprian's vocabulary in connection with 'Mother Church' is rich and varied; e.g., she 'glories' and sheds tears (Letter 10). See too, De Lapsis, 2 in *The Lapsed; the Unity of the Catholic Church*, trans. by Maurice Bévenot (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957).

<sup>41</sup> In his commentary on 1 John, *The Gospel according to St. John 11-21 and The First Epistle of John* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1961), p. 290, Calvin

moot question whether the atmosphere of love in Christian fellowship pervades Cyprian's institutionalism more obviously than it does the institutionalism of book 4 of the *Institutes*, though the literatures compared are not commensurable, and the purpose of comparison is to provoke, not to answer, the question.<sup>42</sup>

Such is the strength of Cyprian's maternal personification of the church, embracing its fellowship, that the possibility has been mooted that, for him, the church 'has become an individual self next to God'.<sup>43</sup> That possibility does not arise in Calvin. Where he ascribes motherhood to the church, it is in close connection with the leaders' discharge of their responsibilities. The office of ministry which they discharge is not only the glue which holds the church together; it is 'its very soul' (4.2.7; see also 4.3.2).<sup>44</sup> In his *Confessio Fidei Gallicana*, produced at around the time of the final Latin edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin applies the vocabulary of 'aides' to the divine provision of pastors. They conspicuously enter the picture, at the expense of the people, as soon as he talks about the church.<sup>45</sup> Ephesians 4 is ecclesologically key for Calvin. His first biblical reference in book 4 (1.1) is to Ephesians 4:11, and he frequently reverts to it. Once he has broached the distinction between visible and invisible church, subsequently explicated in 4.1.7, he pounces on Ephesians 4 to discuss the visible church (4.1.5). The teaching of doctrine lies at the heart

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informs us that love is not 'of the essence of God'. As a formulation, this expresses Calvin's general belief about our ignorance of the divine essence in contrast to our ability to describe our experience of him. Yet, is it unfair to detect an element of *relative* detachment in Calvin's treatment of that text, even when we read his discussion of surrounding texts?

<sup>42</sup> The provocative proposition that it is 'doctrine', and not love, which 'is the bond of brotherly fellowship' for Calvin, would require exploration here, *Acts 1-13*, p. 86. Cf., *The Acts of the Apostles 14-28* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1966), p. 22. Faith, not love, 'is the soul of the Church', *Acts 14-28*, p. 231. However, perhaps these are false alternatives.

<sup>43</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 143, quoting A. Adam.

<sup>44</sup> Leaders are the principal 'sinew' of the church, vocabulary replicated in Calvin's observation that '[n]ext to the magistracy in the civil state come the laws, stoutest sinews of the commonwealth', 4.20.14. Civil government affords assistance to faith (see e.g., 4.20.2, where the word *subsidiis* is used). In light of his ecclesiological emphasis on governance, it is interesting that it is civil government, rather than civil society, which absorbs Calvin's theological attention here.

<sup>45</sup> See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, volume III: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds with Translations* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1877), pp. 356-92, chapter 25. Talk of pastors is resumed in chapter 29.

of the leaders' task, shaping the spiritual life of the church, along with discipline, its 'appendix'.<sup>46</sup> If space permitted, exploring the connection between pneumatology and ecclesiology in the *Institutes* by attending to the claim that '[i]n his conception of discipline [...] we have the heart of Calvin's doctrine of the kingdom of Christ and thus his doctrine of sanctification' would be most profitable, where Warfield is in our sights.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, outside the *Institutes*, Calvin can ascribe maternity to doctrine as well to the church.<sup>48</sup> Anyone who not only reads Calvin's explicit statements on the church as our mother, but also notes how much attention Calvin gives to its governance in his treatment of the church in book 4, will realise just how closely tied the concept of maternity is to institutional, governmental, structure.<sup>49</sup>

I have introduced the subject of *mater ecclesia* in Calvin because it is potentially an antidote to an ecclesologically defective individualism. In the context of Warfield's judgement, reference to it throws up the question of whether Calvin's church occupies the subordinate soteriological place that Warfield welcomes because it is too heavily institutionalised. Emphatically, I am not doing justice to Calvin's whole counsel on the substantive matters at hand, considered independently of my Warfieldian agenda.<sup>50</sup> The *Institutes* is far from covering all the ecclesiological ground

<sup>46</sup> *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, volume 2 (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1972), p. 230, on Matthew 18:18. Discipline is also a sinew in the *Institutes* (4.12.1; 4.14.6). In a communication to the Duke of Somerset, Calvin observes: 'For as doctrine is the soul of the Church for quickening, so discipline and the correction of vices are like the nerves to sustain the body in a state of health and vigour', quoted in Gordon, *Calvin*, p. 255.

<sup>47</sup> Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp. 178-79.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, his *Commentary on Galatians* 4:24. Any surprise this ascription generates in us should be modified by reading what Calvin unfolds at more leisure in his *Sermons on Galatians*, chapters 29-30, on doctrine and the spiritual life.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin's firm conviction that Romans 12:8 is about public ecclesial offices (4.3.9) and that the 'light of the world' and 'salt of the earth' in the Sermon on the Mount are the apostles (4.3.3) is reflected in his commentaries. See *Romans* and *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, volume 1 (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1972), pp. 175-76.

<sup>50</sup> For example, I am not engaging with T. H. L. Parker's remark that, for Calvin, '[t]he maternal power [...] does not lie in the Church itself, but in the Christ who by his Spirit is present in his Church in preaching and Sacrament', *John Calvin: A Biography* (London: Dent, 1975), p. 134. Perhaps Parker separates too far here God as Father from Christ and Spirit when he picks out their maternal functions.

covered in the rest of Calvin's literature.<sup>51</sup> Further, I am not covering all the ecclesiological ground covered in the *Institutes*: the invisible church is also largely invisible in my account.<sup>52</sup> Nor am I denying that serious theological consideration should be given to the maternity of the visible church. The case for it is surely possible when we (a) stop fixing our minds on the members of the church at any given moment in time, and begin, instead, to consider the church as an historical entity to which we belong, or (b) take into account the nurture of little ones in the church.<sup>53</sup>

However, in the round, the prospect has arisen that the price we pay for appealing to mother church in the *Institutes* in order to exculpate Calvin from the charge of individualism is to offer an alternative charge of institutionalism, thus giving Brunner the chance of getting it half right, even if he regards the charges as mutually implicative, not alternatives. Certainly, where institutionalism is pitted against community, then the prospect of individualism returns. In ecclesiological discourse, 'organism' is sometimes contrasted with 'institution'. Speaking generally, talk of organism

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., the material assembled in Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956). However, Torrance neglects the invisible church; see Stanley S. Maclean both on this and in his wider observations in the 'Conclusion' to his essay on 'Regnum Christi: Thomas Torrance's Appropriation of John Calvin's Ecclesiology', in Mannion and Van der Borght, *John Calvin's Ecclesiology*, pp. 185-202.

<sup>52</sup> The mutually implicative nature of a theologian's conviction about the invisible church, on the one hand, and theological order, on the other, emerges in the work of Charles Hodge. At the beginning of the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, he announced his intention of treating ecclesiology after what he called 'theology proper', i.e., anthropology and soteriology: *Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), Introduction, chapter 2, paragraph 4. Hodge said that, under 'Soteriology', he would treat the 'application of the redemption of Christ to the people of God', and his very brief discussion of the kingly office of Christ began with reference to the church as God's kingdom, *Systematic Theology*, volume 2, *Anthropology*, Part 3, chapter 11. But although Hodge believed that the church is visible as well as invisible, his interest at this stage was the 'spiritual kingdom', that is, the invisible church, because 'religion is essentially spiritual, an inward state', *Anthropology*, p. 604. It is not surprising that he planned to discuss an ecclesiology which involved the visible church after eschatology, let alone after soteriology.

<sup>53</sup> On the first of these, see Abraham Kuyper's lament that '[n]o voice from the depths, no word from distant history spoke in the daily life of the church', in the course of an exposition of his conversion to 'Mother Church', 'Confidentially' in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. by James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 45-61; 55.

has a biological root, connoting the spontaneous flow of life; talk of institution has a socio-political root, connoting the construction of structure. Clearly, the church can be both organic and an institution. *Prima facie*, the theologically proper way of relating these two notions is to say that the church is an organism whose flourishing and growth requires a governmental order which bestows on it some of the features of an institution.<sup>54</sup> It is a truism that ecclesiological trouble sets in — on the ground, not just in theology — when the institutional threatens to stifle rather than facilitate the organic. On point of theological principle, Calvin may steer clear of this trouble if he ‘thinks of the church as the order emerging out of the correlation of the *ordinatio dei* and the effectual work of the Holy Spirit [...]’.<sup>55</sup> In engaging the issue of institution and organism, Kuyper’s work repays close attention.<sup>56</sup> Comparison with Calvin is potentially fruitful when we consider Kuyper’s view that the institutional church is necessary but not essential — that is, the essence of the church can be defined without reference to its institutional nature, although it needs to be an institution in order to function.<sup>57</sup>

A dispassionate assessment of Calvin would need to take all this into account. If a consideration of individualism in the *Institutes* has led us onto institutionalism, and institutionalism onto the organic, the organic takes us back to pneumatology, since the life of the church considered as an organism is the life of the Spirit. We have thus come full Warfieldian circle. We heard the case for Calvin’s individualism made on the basis of his description of the church as an aid to faith. The case for Calvin’s insti-

<sup>54</sup> I am aware that I am leaving ‘institution’ (like ‘individual’) undefined, and using the vocabulary *ad hoc*. For an analysis of the concept of institution, see Jonathan Leeman’s study, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ’s Rule* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), chapter 2.

<sup>55</sup> So Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, p. 164. Milner begins his study of Calvin’s doctrine of the church by elaborating on the notion of the church as an organism, pp. 7–9.

<sup>56</sup> However, in his editorial introduction to Kuyper, *On the Church*, ed. by John Halsey Wood, Jr. and Andrew M. McGinnis (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Wood does not explain the conceptual relationship between organism and community.

<sup>57</sup> See Wood’s *Going Dutch*, pp. 89–90, although perhaps he allows Troeltsch’s way of distinguishing between church and sect overly to steer his analysis, even if he does not bind himself to Troeltsch’s analysis. The first two excerpts in *On the Church* — from *Commentatio* and ‘Rooted and Grounded’ — disclose Kuyper’s dramatic change of ecclesiological mind. On the translational possibilities of the Dutch word ‘*instituut*’, including with reference to Calvin, see the editorial note in Kuyper, *On the Church*, p. 45, n. 2.



tutionalism is that he ascribes the ecclesologically controlling description of the 'church as our mother' to the visible church in its governmental structures, which threatens to overshadow the church as fellowship and as organism. I am eschewing a definitive judgement on Calvin on these counts. Bruce Gordon remarks on Calvin's belief in the 'essentially aristocratic structure of the church'.<sup>58</sup> The observation reminds us of the danger of trying to understand Calvin's ecclesiology in a historical vacuum, because it directly invites contextual as well as theological comparison with the ecclesiology which emerged from the political republicanism of Zwingli in Zurich, evincing a stronger sense of egalitarian community than Calvin apparently possesses.<sup>59</sup> Of Zwingli, it has been said that '[h]is priorities were: God, society, and the individual': does this description portend a contrast with Calvin which bears critically on Warfield's identification of Calvin's theological strength?<sup>60</sup> Perhaps. Gordon's description also invites comparison of Calvin's ecclesiology with that of Bucer, specifically in connection with what Bucer says about community.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the differences between Bucer and Calvin's ontologies of

<sup>58</sup> 'Introduction' to *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575*, ed. by Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> See G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 106, and Ulrich Gabler, *Huldrych Zwingli: Zwingli's Life and Work* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), pp. 66-67. See too Gottfried Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1981): 'John Calvin emphasizes the sanctity of ecclesiastical office to a far greater extent than Zwingli', p. 187 (*italics original*).

<sup>60</sup> W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 137. Stephens is a safe pair of hands when it comes to grasping the rudiments of Zwingli's theology, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), as is Bruce Gordon when it comes to following the trajectory of the whole Swiss Reformation, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). A Zwinglian dogmatics that took its shape from Zwingli's '67 Articles' of 1523 would have afforded ecclesiology a high profile, given the seventh and eighth articles. For text, see Schaff, *The Creeds*, pp. 197-207. Admittedly, producing a Zwinglian dogmatics would be a challenge; see Bruce Gordon, *Zwingli: God's Armed Prophet* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 163.

<sup>61</sup> See Gottfried Hammann, 'Ecclesiological motifs behind the creation of the "Christlichen Gemeinschaften"', pp. 129-43, in David Wright, *Martin Bucer*. Just how much Bucer's thorough Thomist training influenced his Reformed theology is a matter of dispute, but, as far as I can tell, everything in that theology is consistent with his deep conviction about the law of love and neighbourliness which he learned from — though not only from — Aquinas. See



humanity and society go deep, and Berkhof indicates the distinctiveness and merit of Bucer's ecclesiological aspirations here, compared with those of Calvin.<sup>62</sup> Once the door of comparative reformation ecclesiologies is opened in light of our questions to Calvin, it is difficult to prevent Heinrich Bullinger from muscling his way through as well.<sup>63</sup> His incorporation of love as one of the marks of the church returns to the gamut of issues which surfaced in connection with pneumatology, Cyprian and institution.<sup>64</sup> However, despite my advance notice and qualifications, I risk doing Calvin injustice here by stubbornly concentrating on the *Institutes*. For example, as Bullinger studiously incorporated 'beneficence or the community of goods for charitable purposes' within the scope of love in the *Decades*, when dealing with marks of the church in the longest section of his discussion of the Apostles' Creed, so Calvin, in his commentary on Acts 2:42, includes forms of brotherly fellowship amongst the marks of the church.<sup>65</sup>

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Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and His Times*, trans. by Stephen E. Buckwalter (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 56-57. For the centrality of Ephesians in Bucer's thought, see Donald K. McKim and Jim West, *Martin Bucer: An Introduction to His Life and Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023), p. 105.

<sup>62</sup> Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, pp. 361-98. W. P. Stephens also draws attention to the distinctive emphasis on love and fellowship in Bucer's thought, in *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), e.g., pp. 8, 65.

<sup>63</sup> See Peter Opitz on Bullinger's distinction between the internal and external ecclesiological working of God, and his teaching on the inner and outer marks of the church, 'Bullinger's *Decades*: Instruction in Faith and Conduct', in Gordon and Campi, *Architect*, pp. 101-16. As for Swiss ecclesiology, had Bullinger moved forward chapter 17 of the Second Helvetic Confession so that it immediately succeeded chapter 11, it would have been nicely located for those of us exercised by the order of the *Institutes*, with reference to ecclesiology and the Apostles' Creed!

<sup>64</sup> Paul Avis reveals an institutionalist ecclesiological bias when he discerns in Bullinger 'a clear example of the way in which the marks of the true Church were expanded so as to die the death of a thousand qualifications', *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> For Bullinger, see Gordon and Campi, *Architect*, p. 58; for Calvin, Acts 1-13, p. 86.

## CONCLUSION

Warfield's commendation of Calvin's pneumatology implicates ecclesiology, and I have noted those features of his ecclesiology which threaten to cast a shadow over the pneumatology. In the second part of this article, I turn directly to germane aspects of Calvin's pneumatology, as presented in the *Institutes*.