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# THEOLOGIAN OF THE SPIRIT: RE-EXAMINING WARFIELD'S JUDGEMENT ON CALVIN (PART 2)

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## INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this article, we explored aspects of Calvin's approach to ecclesiology in the *Institutes* in the light of Warfield's assessment that Calvin 'above everything...deserves...the great name of *the theologian of the Holy Spirit*', because he worked out in detail the whole experience of salvation in terms of the work of God the Holy Spirit on the individual soul.<sup>1</sup> Since Warfield stipulated the ecclesiological correlate of that enterprise, we considered the rubric under which Calvin discussed ecclesiology, its topical placement, and items in the substance of that ecclesiology in the *Institutes*. The purpose was to place a question mark against Warfield's judgement. It could be no more than a question-mark because of my self-imposed confinement to the *Institutes*, although there was occasional reference to other writings by Calvin. In essaying his judgement, Warfield had the *Institutes* particularly in mind. My purpose in this second part is to bolden the question mark by turning directly to the pneumatology, again concentrating on the *Institutes*, but also making occasional use of Calvin's commentaries, particularly his first volume on Acts.<sup>2</sup> As Warfield drew Kuyper into Calvin's orbit, I shall draw Kuyper's study of the Holy Spirit into our discussion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Theologian of the Spirit: Re-Examining Warfield's Judgement on Calvin', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* (41.2) 2023, 137-53. For Warfield's words, see p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, tr., Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, Pa: Westminster, 1960); *The Acts of the Apostles*, 1-13, eds., David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1965). All editions of Calvin's commentaries from which I quote are edited by David and Thomas Torrance.

<sup>3</sup> See Benjamin B. Warfield, 'Introductory Note', in *Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York, NY/London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), xxv-xxxix. Warfield's essay was reprinted as 'On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit' in his *Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1970), pp. 203-19.

## BAPTISM WITHOUT WATER: THE CASE OF ACTS 19

In remarking on the order of Calvin's topical treatment, I noted in the first part of this article what is in plain view, namely, that Calvin followed the order of the biblical narrative in the Christological exposition which closed book 2 of the *Institutes*, embracing cross, resurrection, ascension and heavenly session, but broke with it in book 3 by treating pneumatology in terms of the work of the Spirit in the believer, and not by proceeding to the theological significance of Pentecost, as would have accorded with the biblical narrative. Calvin never committed himself programmatically to following in the *Institutes* either biblical order or the order of the Apostles' Creed.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, what happens instead is instructive. The title of the first chapter of book 3 is: 'The Things Spoken Concerning Christ Profit Us By The Secret Working of the Spirit'. In the Synoptic accounts, the first things spoken of concerning Christ as he steps into public light is that he will baptize with (or in) the Spirit, where John baptizes with water. Pentecost was Spirit-baptism on a grand scale, a public work, whereas Calvin begins his exposition in book 3 with the 'secret energy of the Spirit' (3.1.1). Near the beginning of book 3, Calvin does tell us that, in order that we become partakers of salvation in Christ, 'he baptizes us in the Holy Spirit and fire' [Luke 3:16], bringing us into the light of faith in his gospel and so regenerating us that we become new creatures...' (3.1.4). However, we have exited book 3 and are deep into book 4 before the Gospel language of baptism in the Spirit is given further attention.<sup>5</sup>

Its treatment in book 4 rather than in book 3 affects the theological profile of baptism in the Spirit in the *Institutes*. 'We experience sacraments', Calvin says at the beginning of book 4, as 'highly useful aids to foster and strengthen faith' (4.1.1). When Calvin eventually turns his attention to the question of the relation of John's baptism to that of Jesus, something exegetically unexpected happens.<sup>6</sup> After setting out the significance of baptism, Calvin impresses on us that 'John's ministry was exactly the same as that afterward committed to the apostles' (4.15.7). How could the apostles add to a baptism which was unto 'repentance...[and] forgive-

<sup>4</sup> With regard to Christology, Calvin observes that he is following the order of the Apostles' Creed, 2.16.18.

<sup>5</sup> There is a fleeting reference to 1 Corinthians 12:13 in 4.14.7. Herman J. Seldenhuis is surprised by the paucity of references in the *Institutes* to the Spirit in relation to baptism (as he is by the absence of reference to the Spirit at the beginning of Calvin's exposition of creation), *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 308 and 302.

<sup>6</sup> See also brief remarks in 2.9.5.

ness of sins', and 'into the name of Christ, from whom repentance and forgiveness of sins came'? That describes John's baptism, as well as theirs. Well, we might respond, they could add something rather large: after, but not with, John, you have baptism in the Spirit. Calvin will agree that they added something, but just how large was it? 'Richer graces of the Spirit have been poured out since Christ's resurrection' (15.8). That differentiates the two baptisms up to a point, but they signify the same thing. When John contrasted his baptism with that of Christ in terms of water as opposed to Spirit and fire baptism, he 'did not mean to distinguish one sort of baptism from another'. What John contrasted was persons, not ministries. The telos and significance of baptism remain one and the same across the board: repentance and forgiveness.

According to Calvin, in giving the Spirit, Christ did not give something fundamentally missing in the ministry of John the Baptist. The background to this claim is indicated in the title of book 2: 'The Knowledge Of God The Redeemer In Christ, First Disclosed To The Fathers Under The Law, And Then To Us In The Gospel'. The forgiveness which Christ came to bring was experienced by saints of old before he came. Just so, in Christ, the Spirit comes in a new form, a form in which John the Baptist cannot mediate the gift, but the Spirit comes with and through Christ in order to effect the same thing as the baptism of John effected. John administered a baptism of repentance and forgiveness; it is the Spirit who works repentance and forgiveness; where repentance and forgiveness are, there is the Spirit; the Spirit is the Spirit of regeneration, and this is the heart of his work; indeed, repentance is regeneration.<sup>7</sup> We are not forced to infer from this that John's baptism was unto regeneration by the Spirit: Calvin says it explicitly (4.15.6).<sup>8</sup> So what does Jesus Christ have to bring that John the Baptist had not?

Here, Calvin tells us, the Fathers stumbled (15.7). They erroneously 'said that the baptism of John was only a preparation for the baptism of Christ' (15.8). What accounts for this mistake? Calvin picks out faulty exegesis of Acts 19: 1-6. This is where we arrive at the exegetically unexpected. This passage describes Paul's encounter with disciples at Ephesus who, in response to his question: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' aver that they have not heard of the Holy Spirit. A further query elicits from them the reason: they were baptised into John's

<sup>7</sup> 'We have nothing of the Spirit...except through regeneration' (2.3.1). That the Spirit is the author of regeneration is established as early as book 1 (1.13.14). For repentance as regeneration, see 3.3.9.

<sup>8</sup> See too the following passages, 4.15.7 and 8. For Abraham as regenerate and regeneration as spiritually foundational, see 4.16.3-4.

baptism. 'On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus', Paul laid hands on them, and tongues and prophesying ensued. Where, then, do the Fathers go exegetically and theologically astray? Is it not Calvin who will get into difficulties here? If, contrary to what the Fathers held, the baptisms of John and Christ are basically identical, then this passage strictly describes rebaptism. There is no way that Calvin will countenance this interpretation. Nor is there any way that he will thus get himself impaled on the horns of a dilemma. Woes beset him only if the baptism recorded in Acts 19 was baptism in water. It was not. The word 'baptise' does not in this instance denote water baptism when applied to what the Ephesian believers now undergo. It is the baptism of the Spirit (15.18). That is, the Ephesian believers now received 'the visible graces of the Spirit through the laying on of hands.' Calvin affirms in his commentary on Acts on this passage that the Spirit of regeneration is not involved; as subjects of John's baptism, the Ephesian disciples would both have known about and received that.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, he says there, 'Paul would not have passed over in silence such a gross, even a monstrous error' as complete ignorance of the Spirit, 'about whom the Prophets everywhere proclaim'. What the Jews in the story are ignorant of is certain *visible graces* of the Spirit of the Pentecostal kind; that is what the clipped reference in the text to the Spirit signifies.<sup>10</sup> '[T]here is metonymy in the word *Spirit*.' Hence, Acts 19 does not threaten Calvin's belief that there is no difference between the baptism of John and the baptism we receive, 'except [the difference] that Christ has been revealed, and in His death and resurrection all parts of our salvation have been completed'.<sup>11</sup>

This is impossible exegesis, 'a striking example', as Wendel wryly understates it, 'of how adventurous Calvin's exegesis could be when he was using it in the service of his dogmatic preconceptions'.<sup>12</sup> There are plenty of things to argue about in the interpretation of Acts 19. That water baptism took place is not one of them. Calvin was not alone in his day in denying that water baptism took place in Ephesus. The relationship between the baptisms of John and of Jesus was a matter of renewed controversy in the Reformation. Zwingli also denied that water baptism took place in Acts 19, though he interpreted differently from Calvin exactly

<sup>9</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*, 14-28 (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1966), pp. 148-52.

<sup>10</sup> See too, *Institutes*, 4.3.16.

<sup>11</sup> *Acts* 14-28, p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> François Wendel, *Calvin: the Origin and Development of his Religious Thought* (London: Fontana, 1965), p. 323.

what happened there.<sup>13</sup> Dispute over Acts 19 was no theological or ecclesiastical side-show when Anabaptists turned up in land already witness to conflict between Catholics and magisterial Reformers. Admitting that the Ephesian believers, already baptised with the baptism of John, were now baptised with water, entailed denying the unity of the covenant and the unity of the Testaments. Sacraments are signs of the covenant (4.14.6). A theologically fundamental question is at stake. Because my agenda is narrowly set by Warfield's judgement, and further pared down by the need to consider that judgement along rather narrow lines, we shall not pursue the question of entailment. Obviously, it is a question capable of penetrating the depths, even unsteady planks of Reformed theology.<sup>14</sup>

The problem with Calvin's exegesis of Acts 19 is his refusal to admit water baptism, not the impossibility of making germane distinctions in the scope or meaning of 'Spirit' in the New Testament. The account of the apostolic mission in Samaria, when Peter and John came from Jerusalem, so that believers 'baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus' should receive the Holy Spirit, has proved fertile ground for controversy (Acts 8:14-17). Calvin insists that Peter and John did not mediate the Spirit of regeneration in this instance, but 'special gifts' appropriate to the occasion and the time; 'the Spirit of adoption' had been 'conferred' on the Samaritans before the two apostles turned up, but with their arrival 'the extraordinary graces of the Spirit are added as a culmination'.<sup>15</sup> Whether or not we agree with his interpretation, Calvin's exegesis of Acts 8 involved no flagrant disregard for what the text is actually saying. It is different with Acts 19.

What Calvin says about the relation of John and Jesus' baptisms in his commentaries is entirely in line with what he says in the *Institutes*, just as

<sup>13</sup> See David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 11.

<sup>14</sup> Theologians in the Reformed tradition have affirmed that the Ephesian disciples were baptised with water, without covenant theology being remotely threatened. To take an easy and major example, Herman Bavinck adopted a position which Calvin rejected, and explained Paul's baptism of the Ephesian disciples in water on the supposition that the initial baptism received by these disciples had been wrongly administered. It was a plausible enough supposition for Bavinck, taking into account the fact that baptismal practices in the early church had not yet settled down into tidier order. See *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, volume 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 502; also a brief remark in volume 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 500. Whether or not we agree with Bavinck's interpretation, it involves no violation of the text.

<sup>15</sup> *Acts 1-13*, p. 236.

is his interpretation of Acts 19. He maintains that the reasons standardly given for differentiating between John's baptism and Christian baptism exhibit arrant stupidity.<sup>16</sup> Calvin is wonderfully and consistently Christocentric in his account of what the Spirit ministers to us, but the explicitly known grace of Jesus Christ fills out or enhances rather than alters the substance of John's baptism. The contrast can certainly be stated more strongly: John had made but a beginning in the administration of what Jesus Christ fulfilled when he baptised with the Spirit. But it was no 'vain beginning', and, however we describe the contrast, we cannot posit a distinction in nature between the baptisms.<sup>17</sup> Formally, 'John stood between the law and the gospel, holding an intermediate office related to both'; he is 'numbered among the preachers of the gospel for', materially, 'he actually used the same baptism as was afterward entrusted to the apostles' (2.9.5). If John must decrease in his person, his baptism must not decrease in its significance.

My excuse for craven refusal to track Calvin to his lair in a theological investigation of the question of John and Jesus' baptisms, and to judge whether an attempt should be made to beard him there, is that this would be a long pursuit which would swallow up the space allocated to what is already just a *prima facie* examination of Warfield's claim. Suffice to say that if we believe that Calvin seriously plays down the pneumatological distinctiveness of Jesus' baptism, this potentially rebounds on Warfield's judgement. 'If' and 'potentially' are the watchwords of cravenness. Our discussion surely at the very least places us on alert. The terms of Warfield's judgement, as I have set them out, compel us to attend to further dimensions of our picture in the making. To these we turn.

## THE SIGN OF PENTECOST

I have not pounced on a relatively inconsequential exegetical mistake in noting what Calvin says about Acts 19, still less specialised in the peripheral when noting what he believes about the relation of the two baptisms. If we are uneasy about what he is doing with baptism in the Spirit, then, given the connection between baptism in the Spirit and Pentecost, it is surely not a hyper-sensitive nose, trained to sniff out theological error, that scents the possibility that there is something amiss with Calvin's Pentecost as well. It is the topical absence of Pentecost at a prominent junc-

<sup>16</sup> See Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, volume 1 (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1972), p. 127. For similarly robust language, see Calvin, *The Gospel according to St John, 1-10* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1959), p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> *Acts 1-13*, p. 27.

ture which initially set us scurrying off on the trail of Calvin and the two baptisms – that is, the fact that the pneumatological account following the description of Christ's ascension and session in the *Institutes* is oriented to the 'secret energy' of the Spirit working within us, rather than to the public coming of the Spirit, as recorded in Acts. Of itself, this tells us nothing except about how Calvin orders his instruction in the *Institutes*, and only the buzzing of an unhistorically dogmatic bee in our bonnets about the structure of doctrinal exposition will draw much attention to it. However, does the orientation actually tell us something important about theological substance?

It turns out that Calvin's interpretation of Pentecost, if not as startling as is his interpretation of Acts 19, nonetheless (mildly?) startles. Peter proclaims the Pentecostal event as the eschatological fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel, the outpouring of the Spirit (2:17). In connection with the prophetic phrase cited by Peter - 'I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh' - Calvin says: 'It may be asked why God promises to His people, as though it were some novel and unheard of thing, what he was wont to bestow upon them through all ages from the beginning, for there was no age that did not have its share of the grace of the Spirit'.<sup>18</sup> The answer has to do with quantity. Qualitative matters obtain only in a restricted and minimal way. Any knowing participation in the Spirit was the lot of far fewer under the old than under the new covenant. '[A]ll godly men from the foundation of the world were endowed with the same Spirit of understanding, of righteousness, and of sanctification, with which the Lord today illuminates and regenerates us; but there were only a few who then had the light of knowledge given to them...'<sup>19</sup> God now gives understanding more abundantly than he did before, because the understanding of the Old Testament saints 'savoured...of the tutelage of the Law'. However, we shall not find here a radically new qualitative dimension more than we did in the case of the two baptisms. Calvin is consistent. Further, Calvin is consistent in his commentary on Joel with what he says elsewhere about there being a great difference between old and new covenants when we consider the number of those experiencing Spirit-blessing and the richness and depth of knowledge in the new covenant; but the covenants are one in substance, with no qualitative novelty.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Acts 1-13*, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Acts 1-13*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> *Joel, Amos and Hosea* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), Lecture 45. Despite his acknowledgement of the importance of this passage from Joel in the *Institutes* (3.1.2), little is made of it over the course of its four books.



Reference to that commentary brings us to the question of what it is about Calvin's Pentecost that startles. A reductionist conclusion to discussion of the outpouring in the Spirit in the lecture preceding the one to which I have referred invites the question of whether or not he has purchased his covenant theology at the price of salvation-historical or eschatological deficiency in interpreting Joel's prophecy. This is the startling interpretation of Pentecost: '[T]he sending of the Holy Spirit in so spectacular a manner was a symbol of the hidden grace wherewith the Lord continuously inspires His elect...' <sup>21</sup> This is to get things backwards. If the language of symbol be deployed, we should be tempted to say that it is the other way around: hidden grace is the symbol of the manifest grace outpoured at Pentecost. The reason for resisting temptation is that talk of invisible symbol is odd, so we should abandon Calvin's terminology in order to oppose what it conveys, and say that, just as the cross of Christ is the ground and not the symbol of the forgiveness which marks hidden grace, so Pentecost is surely the event in salvation history to which hidden grace is related as foretaste or as effect, if we want to find some way of relating hidden grace and Pentecost. Together with the cross, resurrection, ascension and session of Christ, Pentecost is the new era, no more a symbol of what is going on all the time, continuously hidden, than they are. Tongues are most significant, but the outpouring of the Spirit which they manifest is not contained within this manifestation.

Calvin makes much of the signifying nature of Pentecost. The whole is a visible event because such is our spiritual dullness that 'unless He [God] first aroused all our senses His power would pass us by and vanish unrecognized'. <sup>22</sup> It is all for our benefit, not for that of the apostles, '[f]or God was able to have furnished them with the power necessary for preaching the Gospel without the addition of any sign'. There is certainly an abundant pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost (2.16.14), and it is the inauguration of the Kingdom of Christ. <sup>23</sup> Yet, in old covenant times, that Kingdom could be experienced within, so inauguration is marked by outward manifestation of and a wider catchment for the Spirit, plus the demonstrable regulation of personal spiritual life, which is the goal of regeneration, and not by basic spiritual novelty. <sup>24</sup> When Peter concluded his Pentecostal address by calling his hearers to repentance, baptism, and

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<sup>21</sup> *Acts, 1-13*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Acts 1-13*, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Acts 1-13*, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> Pentecost demonstrates that 'we are never rightly prepared to receive the grace of God unless the vain confidence of the flesh has been mastered', *Acts 1-13*, p. 50.

receipt of the gift of the Spirit, let us recall that the remission of sins, the heart of God's gift, possible only through the Spirit, was already available under the old covenant.

Just how far Calvin is willing to go in the service of consistency appears in his discussion of what has been described as the 'Pentecost of the Gentiles', the encounter of Peter with Cornelius, narrated in Acts 10. Calvin berates those who suppose that, with his 'prayers and alms', the 'words of Cornelius were acceptable to God before he had been enlightened by faith'.<sup>25</sup> Not only did Cornelius possess faith before he met Peter; 'his fear of God and his piety clearly demonstrate that he was born again of the Spirit'.<sup>26</sup> What Cornelius receives after hearing Peter's word is not faith and regeneration, but special, visible gifts. Commenting on Peter's report to the church in Jerusalem on this event (Acts 11:4-17), Calvin reminds his readers that the baptisms of John and Jesus, to which Peter alludes in his report, are one and the same baptism, the difference of persons being the salient difference.<sup>27</sup>

As in the case of Acts 19, though perhaps less dramatically, to interpret Cornelius' piety before meeting Peter as shaped by his being born of the Spirit, is impossible exegetical theology. In the history of theology, the position has been taken that, just as we distinguish between the conception of life in the womb and the birth of a child, so we should distinguish between spiritual regeneration and new birth, and the time lapse might be considerable. It is perfectly in order to speak of the Holy Spirit's work in Cornelius before he met Peter, preparing him for the new birth. However, Calvin has attributed *new birth* to Cornelius before meeting Peter. Calvin does no justice to the fulness of what Cornelius received through Peter's ministry. Something has gone wrong with the pneumatology, here.

Throughout his commentary on Acts, Calvin consistently focusses on the inward life of faith at the expense of God's outward works in history. In the time between resurrection and ascension, Jesus 'spoke the things concerning the Kingdom of God' (Acts 1.3). What were those things? According to Calvin, that '[t]he beginning of this Kingdom is regeneration, the end of it is blessed immortality'.<sup>28</sup> 'Christ spoke chiefly about the corruption of mankind, about the tyranny of sin, whose bondslaves we are, of the curse and condemnation of eternal death to which we are all subject: and also the means of regaining salvation, of the remission of sins, of the denying of the flesh, of spiritual righteousness, of the

<sup>25</sup> Acts 1-13, p. 288.

<sup>26</sup> See too *Institutes*, 3.17.4.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 1-13, p. 324.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 1-13, p. 24.

hope of eternal life, and other topics of that kind...<sup>29</sup> What is missing is much thought of history on the move. Even if immortality is attained in a kingdom rich and wide, to which we are destined (2.16.19), a sense of our human immortality eclipses our sense of God's new earth in Calvin's 'Meditation on the Future Life'; the contrast between present life and immortality, rather than the present and eschatological world-orders, is focal for him (3.9).

Calvin's relative ordering of Pentecost and hidden grace drives us back to the question of individualism, which came up in the first part of this article. 'Individualism' is patient of different meanings, and we considered one form of it there. For Calvin, the Spirit works his hidden grace in the elect, considered not simply as individuals, but as the invisible church.<sup>30</sup> However, individualism may aptly name an outlook where there is a preoccupation with what happens within individuals at the expense of what happens without, and in the light of what we have encountered, we seem to sight the spectre of individualism in Calvin's thought. Calvin obscures the truth of the fact that Pentecost is a new era. Pentecost is situated in the history of salvation and eschatological order in a way that does not come to light in either the *Institutes* or the commentary on Acts. When Jesus, in the interim between resurrection and ascension, speaks to his apostles about the kingdom of God, what Calvin hears is principally talk of the eschatology of personal immortality. At the end of book 3 of the *Institutes*, after working through faith, the Christian life, justification, prayer and election – all prior to ecclesiology – Calvin concludes with 'The Final Resurrection'. It is a brief discussion, chiefly comprehending the resurrection of the body and the lot of the reprobate. Weber was surely right to observe, with respect to the *Institutes*, that '[w]e might wish that he [Calvin] would have had a clearer grasp of the Spirit as the eschatological Giver of the eschatological reality than he seems to have had.'<sup>31</sup> Thus, in his pneumatology, he does not satisfactorily harness the power with which he is capable of speaking of the Kingdom of God and of Christ in the *Institutes*.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 1-13, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> For some discussion of this in an earlier iteration of the first part of the present article, see my 'Calvin on the Church: Why is it in *Institutes*, Book 4', in A. T. B. Mc Gowan, ed., pp. 57-74.

<sup>31</sup> Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, tr. Darrell L. Guder, volume 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 242. The second chapter of Neill Q. Hamilton's older work, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957), swiftly summarises the evidence for the claim that 'the Spirit is primarily an eschatological entity', p. 37.

I must boldly underline that no judgement is intended on Calvin's theology overall. In the first part of this article, I indicated the danger of concentrating on the *Institutes* in an exposition of Calvin, and made clear that my article was *not* about Calvin's thought *per se*. Supplementary reference in this part to his commentary on Acts does not greatly modify this state of affairs. However, if we mull over Calvin pneumatology along the lines I have attempted, especially in connection with features of his ecclesiology, a re-examination of Warfield's verdict on Calvin is surely in order. My aim has been to do this in a preliminary way. Ultimately, a theologian's interest must be in the life of the church, and, as far as theological and ecclesiastical influence go, the *Institutes* eclipses that of Calvin's commentaries and sermons. So while I plead not guilty to the charge of sniping from the edges, I am not concluding anything about Calvin's eschatology in his thought and writing overall, more than I am doing in the case of his pneumatology (or ecclesiology). This must be doubly underlined.

#### A WORD ABOUT KUYPER

Warfield's judgement comes under further pressure if we reverse his procedure, and pull Kuyper into the discussion of Calvin where he pulled Calvin into an account of Kuyper. Introducing Kuyper's volume on the Holy Spirit, Warfield lauded both pneumatologies, positively connecting Kuyper with the Reformed tradition which Calvin scintillatingly inaugurated. A theological account, still more an assessment, of Kuyper's volume is beyond my remit. I confine myself simply to report and description of salient substance. In praise of the sophomore - whom, if foolish word-play be permitted, we might credit with more wisdom than we may be liable to do in following the method below - I proceed by picking my way like a scavenger through this and that in Kuyper's volume, Calvin perched unblinkingly on my frail shoulder.<sup>32</sup>

When Kuyper, following his 'Introduction', opens his account with the words: 'The work of the Holy Spirit that most concerns us is the *renewing of the elect after the image of God*', he seems to be on the same page as Calvin. Almost immediately, we shall suspend that judgement. He is simply informing us about what will take up most space. '[T]he work of the Holy Spirit consists in leading all creation *to its destiny*, the final purpose of which is the glory of God' (22) and by the time he has completed an early chapter on 'Creation and Recreation', Kuyper has put firmly in

<sup>32</sup> In what follows, page references to Kuyper's volume will usually be given in the text.

their place those who accord theological centrality to the regeneration of the elect at the price of the work of the Spirit in the world and in creation. As the word 'startle' was promiscuously flailed around in connection with Calvin, let it be equitably flailed: Kuyper could startlingly describe Sabellianism, mistaken as it is, as 'more reverent and God-fearing than the crude superficialities of the current views that confine the Spirit's operations entirely to the elect, beginning only at their regeneration' (45).<sup>33</sup>

What about Pentecost? Kuyper prioritises the question: 'How shall we explain the fact that while the Holy Spirit was poured out only on Pentecost, the saints of the Old Covenant were already partakers of His gifts?' (112). What the Old Testament prophecies show is 'that the dispensation of the Holy Spirit in those days was exceedingly imperfect...' (113-14). The apostles, explaining the Pentecost miracle as fulfilment of the prophecies of Joel and Jesus, 'see[ing] in it something new and extraordinary... show us clearly that in their day it was considered that a man who stood outside the Pentecost miracle knew nothing of the Holy Ghost' (115). That explains the 'naïvete' of the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19 when they say that they haven't even heard whether there is a Holy Ghost. 'Wherefore it cannot be doubted that the Holy Scripture means to teach and convince us that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was His first and real coming into the Church.'

Accordingly, the title of chapter 25 in Kuyper's first volume is: 'The Holy Spirit in the New Testament Other than in the Old'. In Old Testament days, the Spirit worked on individuals, but it all changes after Pentecost. 'For His particular operation, on and after that day, consists in the extending of His operation to a *company of men* organically united' (120). The implications are profound: '[U]nder the Old Covenant', the operation of the Holy Spirit 'came from *without*'; under the New, 'the body of the Church itself becomes the bearer of the Holy Spirit, who...works upon its members from *within*' (573). For Kuyper, Pentecost is most surely not a symbol of the hidden work of the Spirit. The human race is a single entity; correspondingly, this truth is reproduced in ecclesial form when the people of God are constituted at Pentecost as a holy priesthood 'organically one and partaking of the same spiritual blessing' (120). Such was not the case previously. The situation in Israel was different. There was union in Israel, but it was the union of love, not a spiritual and vital fel-

<sup>33</sup> It is not implied that Kuyper found Calvin guilty of this, but would Calvin would not have been outraged by this sentiment? Kuyper makes statements about the distinction between Christ and the Spirit which suggest that he would have made stronger distinctions between the persons than would Calvin in their shared opposition to Sabellianism (562).

lowship that sprang from the root of life and ‘made possible only by the incarnation of the Son of God’, who alone could ‘unite the spirits of the elect into one body’ (121). Even he could not do it during his earthly life, when he inhabits the aeon of John the Baptist and, thus, of the old covenant. Christ is only head of a body after his ascension, and thus the Spirit is imparted to the one body (122). Nor is love qualitatively the same across the covenants. ‘The newness of holy Love lies in the Church’ (575). ‘The newness of the commandment, “Love one another”, consists in the fact that, being freed from the bonds of the Jewish national character, love can effectually operate in the Church (576).’ The significance of this lies in the fact that the ‘cultivation of Love’ is the ‘greatest work’ of the Holy Spirit (579). The contrast of loves under old and new covenants is described in chapters 25 and 26 of Kuyper’s third volume in a way that is *prima facie* foreign to Calvin, although a comprehensive examination of his thought might overturn that conclusion. The difference between an operation of the Spirit on individuals from without and the operation of the Spirit on the organism from within secures the contrast.

In sum: ‘Formerly isolation, every man for himself; now organic union of all the members under their one Head: this is the difference between the days before and after Pentecost. The essential fact of Pentecost consisted in this, that on that day the Holy Spirit entered for the first time into the organic body of the Church, and individuals came to drink, not each by himself, but all together in organic union’ (124). Saving grace is present before Pentecost, baptism with the Spirit only after it (125). For Kuyper, baptism with the Spirit is a richer *novum* than Calvin conceived of. To say that, at Pentecost, the Church ‘became the Church for the world’, hidden in Israel now manifest in world (179) is to say, if not the opposite of, at least, something in radical contrast to, saying that Pentecost is the symbol of hidden grace. Calvin’s ‘hidden in the heart’ and visible publicly in the church is Kuyper’s ‘hidden in Israel’ and visible publicly in the world. In the first part of this article, mention was made of Kuyper’s emphasis on the organic in ecclesiology. In his volume on the Spirit, we encounter the pneumatological root of this talk. Kuyper regarded Pentecost as the ‘third work of God the Spirit’, creation being the first, incarnation the second (519-520).

If Kuyper is right at those points where he stands in contrast to Calvin, the grounds on which Warfield lauds Calvin are not at all firm, although Warfield does not commit himself to wholehearted agreement with Calvin’s pneumatology. To be sure, the fulness of Kuyper’s pneumatological counsel cannot be derived from this volume, still less from my extracts from it, no more than can Calvin’s from the *Institutes* and commentary on Acts, although we are well guided into that counsel. What goes for

Calvin goes for Kuyper: the contours and merits or otherwise of his pneumatology can be rightly limned only if we are prepared to adumbrate a systematic theology that orders covenant, ecclesiology, eschatology - just for a start - alongside it. I placed 'covenant' first in this list, because, in discussing his exegesis of Acts 19, I noted that an underlying worry for Calvin was that allowing water baptism there would sunder the covenants. We now turn very briefly to his comments in the *Institutes* on the unity of the covenants. They have a bearing on his pneumatology.

## OF ISRAEL

Shortly after Luke tells us that, in the interim between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus spoke to the apostles about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), Luke records the apostles' question: 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' (1:6). Calvin comes down hard on them:

[T]heir blindness is remarkable, that when they had been so fully and carefully instructed over a period of three years, they betrayed no less ignorance than if they had never heard a word. There are as many errors in this question as words...they dream of an earthly kingdom, dependent upon wealth, luxury, outward peace and blessings of this nature...they desire to enjoy the triumph before fighting the battle. Before setting hands to the work for which they are ordained they desire their wages...<sup>34</sup>

They fail to grasp that the reign of Christ is spiritual, and is instituted by the preaching of the gospel.

Arguably, what happens here is that because Calvin universalises inward spiritual states and projects these too readily onto the apostles' hearts, he misrepresents the hope of Israel. Even if we quarrel with this way of describing the cause of his misrepresentation, misrepresentation there surely is. Calvin gives an account of relevant matters in *Institutes* 2:10-11. He informs us that it is somewhat in the way of an appendix to what he has already established, namely, 'that all men adopted by God into the company of his people since the beginning of the world were covenanted to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtains among us' (2.10.1). John the Baptist features in the final section of the previous chapter, where he began what the apostles 'carried forward to fulfilment', but it was the same baptism (2.9.5). We recall that Calvin's whole book aims to adumbrate the 'knowledge of God the redeemer in Christ' disclosed in two forms: under the law and under in the Gospel,

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<sup>34</sup> Acts 1-13, p. 29.

as the title has it. He keeps his eye steadily on the truth that it must be substantially the same knowledge.

It is not surprising, then, that although it is in book 3 that Calvin deals with 'The way in which we receive the grace of Christ', soteriological themes are treated in book 2 under the rubric of Christology. The work of the Holy Spirit is frequently referenced there. At one point, a range of the Spirit's work is touched on, all the way from inspiring the tabernacle craftsmen to regeneration (2.2.16-20), and the final chapter (27) demonstrates the centrality in Calvin's soteriology of the Holy Spirit as the agent of regeneration, which connects the end of book 2 and the beginning of book 3. 'Christ's Kingdom lies in the Spirit', in whom we can have victory (2.15.5). Like Kuyper, Calvin holds that '[i]f we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his [Christ's] anointing.' (2.16.19).

The benefits of Christ's kingdom are applied to the patriarchs. They sought a spiritual kingdom, a point that needs to be adumbrated because of the pernicious doctrinal error, sponsored by Servetus and a hoard of Anabaptists, consisting in the belief that Israelites had no hope of immortality, but merely earthly hopes. If that were so, what would it turn them into? 'Nothing but a herd of swine' (2.10.1). There is more in this vein. This is the context in which Calvin makes the celebrated and lapidary claim that the covenant with the patriarchs differs from the new covenant in 'mode of dispensation', not in 'substance' (10.2). '[T]he doctrine of the gospel is spiritual' (10.3). It was not intended only for the time of Christ. Are we really to suppose that the Israelites, the recipients of promise, were destined to seek 'fleshly pleasures like stupid beasts' (10.3)?

Calvin expounds the hope of Old Testament saints with a sustained purple passage, starting in 2.10.11, designed to show the sad and miserable futility of their experience if they really set their sights on an earthly future. One covenant; one hope. It is in the context of established unity that the differences between the testaments should be understood – the old includes Canaan as a proximate, though not the ultimate hope; the old sets forth promise in the form of image and shadow; the law has a distinctive Old Testament function; there is greater sense of spiritual freedom under the New; in the old covenant, the covenant of grace is confined to one nation. Augustine aptly says that 'the children of promise...reborn of God, who have obeyed the commands by faith working through love... have belonged to the New Covenant since the world began' (11.10).<sup>35</sup> This

<sup>35</sup> He is not directly quoting Augustine here. There are signs that Calvin struggles in his commentary on Hebrews, a book which, if read on its own, will not readily yield a theology of a substantial unity of covenants differing in administration. See, e.g., his comment on the difficulty with talk in Hebrews



could not be the case if their hope was directed to ‘carnal, earthly, and temporal things’, but only if they sought ‘spiritual, heavenly, and eternal benefits’. What has happened pneumatologically is that ‘God’s call has gone forth more widely through all peoples, and the graces of the Spirit have been more abundantly poured out than before’ (11.14).

I have been repetitious in order to bring out what is surely striking in this exposition, namely, the absence of any middle ground between sensuality and spirituality. As far as Calvin is concerned, the sensual, Israel’s hope for the land, is only warranted as long as it is a form under which the spiritual, which is Christ, is temporarily apprehended. Otherwise, it is godless, sinful, directed at wealth, luxury and power. However, suppose that we grant both that land has the signifying function accorded to it by Calvin and that the hope of immortality was not absent in Israel. It remains important to explore how hope for land need not be as spiritually suspect as Calvin has it. While it may be too slick to detect immediately in Calvin shadows of Platonism and of Stoicism, the vehemence of his opposition to the proposition that the focus of Israel’s hope was earthly suggests that something extraneous to biblical sensibility, if not these philosophies in particular, is affecting his reading of Scripture. Thus, pneumatology is affected because the tie between the kingdom and history is loosened, and Pentecost viewed more in relation to what must permanently constitute the spiritual connection between God and his own than to the history of Israel in the context of world history. Of course, Christology and soteriology more widely are implicated in Calvin’s theology on this point. It is preoccupation with Warfield that has led me to test the fabric of Calvin’s theology from a little pneumatological point of view. So let us return to Warfield.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps there is an elephant in the room. More than one, indeed, but it seems right to pick out the fact that Warfield’s reference to Calvin on the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual and the church is impossible to explicate without reference to Calvin’s doctrine of election. This elephant must remain undisturbed here. In a more innocent day, the height of childish daring was to ring a stranger’s doorbell and run away. I confess to an uneasy sense that I belong – with apologies to Edith Wharton, whose name I should be the last to take in vain – to ‘the age of innocence’. None-

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8:6 of the covenant ‘proclaimed on better promises’: the faith of those who lived under the Law ‘ought to have rested on the same promises’, says Calvin. In the *Institutes*, Calvin insists that Hebrews cannot really be denying the efficacy of old covenant ceremonies (4.14.25).

theless, I trust that my ruminations verily ring a sonorous bell for readers. Questioning Warfield's judgement on Calvin is not just an exercise in historical or dogmatic theology. If generalisation be fair and the familiar be rehearsed, what is taught about the Spirit in many Reformed churches falls a very long way short of the fulness of what is said in Scripture, as Kuyper announced in his preface (xii). 'Pentecost (the feast of the Holy Spirit) appeals to the churches and animates them much less than Christmas or Easter...' (7). Yet, in opening his chapter on 'The Outpouring of The Holy Spirit', Kuyper confesses that '[i]n the treatment of this subject it is not our aim to create a new interest in the celebration of Pentecost. We consider this almost impossible. Man's nature is too unspiritual for this' (112). I trust it is the way of wisdom to record this observation without comment, at such a late stage.

Although it is a characteristically, if not distinctively, Reformed failing to overestimate the life-changing power of the bare communication of theological truth from the pulpit, it is also true that the failure to communicate from the pulpit the fulness of biblical teaching on the Spirit – of which, of course, I have given no theological account whatsoever – contributes significantly to the absence or minimal degree of changed lives in our congregations. Self-evidently, we cannot conclude from my discussion whether or not a flaw in Calvin's pneumatology has anything to do with this. In fact, I lament the impression given of general negativity towards Calvin, whose intellectual and personal achievement is the more remarkable the more it is studied, and whose theology so richly edifies.<sup>36</sup> Yet, I trust that posting the need for a re-examination of Warfield's judgement on Calvin's pneumatology provokes reflection on the possibility that the pneumatology has had an adverse along with an unquestionably and eternally beneficial and positive effect on the church. Surely such reflection can only be of service to the concrete life of the Church.

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<sup>36</sup> In this part of the article, I have had occasion to be critical of a portion of Calvin's writing which unforgettably ministered to me at an important moment in life, and I have had to reckon with the possibility of ungrateful disloyalty towards him personally.