

CALVIN ON THE *LEX NATURALIS*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Virtually all twentieth century study of Calvin's view of natural law has been a footnote to the monumental 1934 debate between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.¹ In 1946, the great American Calvin scholar, John T. McNeill, published what has become the standard article defending substantial

¹Prior to the Barth-Brunner conflict E. Troeltsch correctly argued that Calvinism identifies natural law with the Decalogue. See "Calvin and Calvinism," *Hibbert Journal* 8 (1909) 116. He also said incorrectly, however, that Calvin held "firmly to the old rationalistic interpretation of natural law" (117). A. Lang reacted by saying that Calvin's doctrine of depravity precluded his use of natural law ("The Reformation and Natural Law" in *Calvin and the Reformation* [New York, 1909] 71). The dialogue between Barth and Brunner was translated by P. Frankel as *Natural Theology* (London, 1946). Among the works which have substantially agreed with Barth's "Nein!" position are: P. Barth, *Das Problem der natuerlichen Theologie bei Calvin* (Munich, 1935); Marc-Édouard Chenevière, *La pensée politique de Calvin* (Geneva, 1937); T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh, 1949); T.H.L. Parker, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (London, 1952); Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans., H. Knight; London, 1956); A.C. Cochrane, "Natural Law in Calvin" in *Church-State Relations in Ecumenical Perspective* (ed. E. A. Smith; Pittsburgh, 1966); D. Little, "Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural Law" in *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics* (New York, 1968); J.B. Torrance, "Interpreting the Word by the Light of Christ or by the Light of Nature? Calvin, Calvinism, and Barth" in *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* (ed. R.V. Schnucker; Kirksville, 1988) 255-267. Some of those who have disagreed with Barth include, E. Brunner, *Natural Theology*, in *loc. cit.*; E. Doumergue, *John Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps* (Lausanne, 1917); G. Gloede, *Theologia naturalis bei Calvin* (Stuttgart, 1935); K.S. Kantzer, "Calvin's Theory of the Knowledge of God and the Word of God" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard, 1950); E.A. Dowey Jr., *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in Calvin's Theology* (New York, 1952); G.J. Postema, "Calvin's Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (1971) 423-434; E.D. Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology. The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden, 1966) 120-130, 147-151; D. Steimetz, "Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God" in *Via Augustini. Augustine in the Later Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation* (Leiden, 1991); S.E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His*

continuity between Calvin's view of natural law and that of the natural law tradition.² In the decades which have passed since the Barth-Brunner debate and the publication of McNeill's essay, major trends have emerged in reformation studies which give us reason to re-examine this question. The first is the re-appraisal of Calvin's relations to key medieval theologians. The second is the recent revision of the heretofore widely accepted Barthian account of Calvin's relations to Calvinist orthodoxy.³ A third theme of long-

Glory. Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin (Durham, NC, 1991); J. Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford, 1993). Dowey reviews the controversy (*Knowledge of God*) 247-249. W. Klempa and I.J. Hesselink attempt to find a *via media*. See W. Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," *John Calvin and the Church. A Prism of Reform* (ed. T. George; Louisville, KY, 1990) 72-76 and I. John Hesselink, s.v. "Natural Theology" in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (ed. D.K. McKim and D.F. Wright; Louisville and Edinburgh, 1992) [hereafter, *Encyclopedia*].

²J.T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion* 26 (1946) 168-182. Hereafter cited as "Reformers."

³Since the the 1930's the dominant thesis has been that scholastic Calvinism, because of its non-biblical rationalism, departed substantially from Calvin. For the literature see D.A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford, 1990) 160-223; P.A. Lillback, "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (April, 1994) 42-74; R.W. Letham, "Faith and Assurance in Early Calvinism: A Model of Continuity and Diversity" in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives* (ed. W. Fred Graham; Kirksville, 1994). Not included in these bibliographies is W. Klempa "The Concept of the Covenant in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Continental and British Reformed Theology" in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (ed. D.K. McKim; Grand Rapids, 1992); or the particularly valuable A.A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (2 vol., Ph.D. Diss.; Glasgow, 1988); J.L. Farthing, "De Coniugio Spirituali: Jerome Zanchi on Ephesians 5:22-33," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993) 621-652. On Calvin and Calvinism generally see B.G. Armstrong, "Calvin and Calvinism" in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research II* (ed. W.S. Maltby; St. Louis, 1992); R.A. Muller, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition" Inaugural Address, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1995; idem, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids, 1988); idem, "Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy part I and II," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1992);

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standing interest to Calvin scholars concerns the influence of renaissance humanism and through it the influence of Classical philosophy on Calvin.⁴ In the question of how Calvin understood natural law, all three areas of interest converge.

This essay contends that Calvin did not make what James Barr calls “unguarded and unconditional” use of existing natural law theories; nor did he make no use of natural law, as many Barthians have argued.⁵ Rather Calvin believed in and taught natural revelation and the *lex naturalis*. Because however, he was, unlike Barth, a pre-Enlightenment theologian, and because he believed that *peccatum originiale* devastated human moral and epistemic abilities, he limited the role and effect of natural law. Like Thomas he was influenced by the classics, but unlike Aquinas, he defined natural law very precisely by identifying it with the decalogue or moral law.

II. THOMAS’ EPISTEMOLOGY

In reaction to Barth’s *Nein!* some scholars have suggested substantial continuity between the natural theology of Thomas and Calvin on the matter of natural law.⁶ A survey of the *Summa* will show that, while there is some formal identity, there are significant differences between Thomas and Calvin

idem, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, 1987); C.R. Trueman and R.S. Clark, ed., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, 1998).

⁴C. Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden, 1977) 30.

⁵Barr, *Natural Theology*. 8. More helpful is his distinction between two types of natural theology: a “traditional” type in which all men are thought to have some knowledge of God or at least some capacity for it. The second type posits human ability to know God by “pure reason” (ibid. 1). I understand Calvin to deny the latter and hold a version of the former. Q. Breen said Calvin, in his Commentary on *De Clementia*, took over Seneca’s “whole conception” of natural law “uncritically” (*John Calvin*, 142).

⁶“Reformers” 168, 180. See also Postema, “Calvin’s Alleged Rejection” 426. Schreiner argues for a direct link between Thomas and Calvin by reading Thomas as a voluntarist (idem, *The Theater of His Glory* 76-77).

on natural law. In Thomas' view, man by his constitution as *imago Dei*, i.e., a rational being, has an "inclination to the good" (*inclinatio ad bonum*) which is "properly" human, even after the fall.⁷ This *anima rationalis* is such that he has a "natural" tendency to act "according to reason" (*secundum rationem*) or "according to virtue" (*secundum virtutem*).⁸ Thus natural law is able to guide man with certain "common precepts" (*praecepta communia*) which everyone should observe, whether they be "advanced in virtue or not."⁹ Calvin was less optimistic about the ability of fallen humans to know and obey the truth.

III. THOMAS ON NATURAL LAW

As rational creatures, human beings are appropriate receptacles of natural law. "Natural law is promulgated by God's so instilling it into men's minds that they can know it because of what they really are."¹⁰ We have, "*ex parte rationis*," an awareness of certain general principles.¹¹ There was genuine continuity between Calvin and Thomas at this point, in that they shared with Abelard and virtually all Western theologians a belief in an innate or implanted awareness of the divine law. The discontinuity between Calvin and Thomas lay in their varying estimates of our ability to capitalize on this natural awareness and on the exact content of this law.

⁷"Homo autem Deo coniugitur ratione, sive mente, in qua est Dei imago" (*ST*, 1a2ae 100.2); "inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis quae est sibi propria" (*ST*, 1a2ae 94.2).

⁸"Unde cum anima rationalis sit propria forma hominis, naturalis inclinatio inest cuilibet homini ad hoc quo agat secundum rationem; et hoc est agere secundum virtutem" (*ST*, 1a2ae 94.3).

⁹"lex naturalis dirigit secundum quaedam praecepta communia, in quibus conveniunt tam perfecti quam imperfecti" (*ST*, 1a2ae 91.5).

¹⁰"ergo dicendum quod promulgatio legis naturae est ex hoc ipso quod Deus eam mentibus hominum inservit naturaliter cognoscendum" (*ST*, 1a2ae 90.4).

¹¹"Et ideo, sicut ex parte rationis speculative per naturam" (*ST*, 1a2ae 91.3). See also D.E. Luscombe, "Natural Morality and Natural Law," N. Kretzmann *et al.* ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1982) 712.

IV. THE RELATION OF NATURAL LAW TO THE DECALOGUE

According to Thomas, for law to be law, it must be published and it has been. "Everyone according to his capacity knows about the Eternal Law."¹² Rational beings have a "notion of the eternal law" (*notionem legis aeternae*) and a *naturalis inclinatio* to "what is consonant with the eternal law."¹³ Natural law is nothing else than an "appointment of reason" (*ordinatio rationis*) for the "common good" (*bonum commune*).¹⁴ Put another way, law is nothing else but reason.¹⁵ Inasmuch as rational creatures exercise their "inclination naturally" (*inclinatio naturaliter*), they participate in the eternal, natural law.¹⁶ The eternal law is the idea which governs the governor of the universe.¹⁷ It is constituted "according to reason" (*per rationem*).¹⁸

Etienne Gilson and Alan Donagan both defined Thomas' view of natural law according to his *dictum*, "The first command of the natural law is that 'good is to be sought and done, evil to be avoided.'"¹⁹ Thus with respect to

¹²"legem aeternam etsi unusquisque cognoscat pro sua capacitate" (*ST*, 1a2ae 93.2).

¹³*ST*, 1a2ae 93.6.

¹⁴*ST*, 1a2ae 90.4.

¹⁵*ST*, 1a2ae 90.1.

¹⁶"Unde et ipse participat ratio aeterna per quam habet naturaliter inclinationem ad debitum actum et finem; et talis participatio legis aeternae in rationale creatura "*lex naturalis*" dicitur" (*ST*, 1a2ae 91.2). According to 100.1 there are those who are not *sapiens* who are unable to so exercise reason as to reach the proper conclusions. This is especially true about matters *circa credenda*.

¹⁷"lex aeterna sit ratio gubernationis in supremo gubernante" (*ST*, 1a2ae 93.3).

¹⁸"quod lex naturalis est aliquid per rationem constitutum" (*ST*, 1a2ae 94.1).

¹⁹"Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum" (*ST*, 1a2ae 94.2). See also *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (trans. L.K. Shook; London, 1961) 266. A.

common first principles natural law is the same for all. Because however, all men do not exercise their rationality to the same degree, the application of that truth is not always consistent.²⁰ Theoretically, “the law of nature is wholly immutable” (*lex naturae est omnino immutabilis*). It may be changed, however, by addition, but not by subtraction.²¹

The written law is said to have been for the correction of natural law because it supplied what was wanting there, or because parts of natural law were decayed in the hearts of those who reckoned that some things which were good by nature are evil. This called for correction.²²

When he spoke explicitly to the relationship between the Decalogue and natural law he followed the traditional *divisio triplex* of moral, civil and ceremonial in the “old law.”²³

He related the Decalogue and natural law more by way of overlap than identity. He said “human mores” (*humani mores*) depend for their validity, not upon their relationship to revelation but “to reason” (*ad rationem*). Those laws which are congruent with reason are good and those which are not are evil.²⁴

Donagan, “The Scholastic Theory of Moral Law in the Modern World” in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. A. Kenny; London, 1970) 325-382.

²⁰“Sic igitur in speculativis est eadem veritas apud omnes tam in principiis quam in conclusionibus, licet veritas non apud omnes cognoscatur in conclusionibus” (*ST*, 1a2ae 94.4).

²¹*ST*, 1a2ae 94.5.

²²*ST*, 1a2ae 94.5.

²³“praecepta moralia, a caeremonialibus et iudicialibus distincta” (*ST*, 1a2ae 100.1). Calvin, with all the major Protestant theologians agreed with Thomas on this basic point. See J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. J.T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles; Philadelphia and London, 1960) 4.20.15 [Hereafter, *Institutes*].

²⁴*ST*, 1a2ae 100.

All the moral precepts necessarily pertain to the law of nature but in diverse ways. For example, the commandments regarding honoring one's parents and theft obviously and absolutely belong to natural law. The command to honor the aged (Leviticus 19:32) is less obvious to minors who require "discipline by the wise" (*sapientibus*) before they are able to see that this command is natural. The ban on idol making, however, is not at all obvious without "divine instruction."²⁵

For Thomas, what has been revealed in Scripture is compatible with natural law, but is not necessarily synonymous and certainly not coterminous with it.²⁶ This brief survey seems to confirm Jeffrey Stout's description of Thomas' view,

Assume a biblical divine promulgator, plus various bits of metaphysics that Aquinas borrowed from Greek and Latin writers, and you can have the Thomistic higher law; otherwise not.²⁷

Turning to Calvin's epistemology and definition of natural law it will become evident that the most notable difference between Thomas and Calvin

²⁵*ST*, 1a2ae 100.1. Thomas repeated this argument in 100.3. There would seem to be a formal parallel with Calvin in *Institutes* 2.2.24: "Et si rationem nostram volumus ad Dei Legem exigere, quae perfectae est iustitiae exemplar, comperiemus quam multis partibus caecutiatur. Certe quae in prima tabula praecipua sunt, minime assequitur: qualia sunt, de fiducia in Deum, de virtutis et iustitiae laude illi tribuenda, de nominis eius invocatione, de vero sabbathismo. Quae unquam anima, naturali sensu freta, subodorata est in his et similibus positum esse legitimum Dei cultum? Nam quum volunt profani homines Deum colere, etiam si centies revocentur ab inanibus sui nugis, semper tamen illuc relabantur" (*Opera Selecta*, ed., P. Barth, W. Niesel [Munich, 1926-62] 3.266.17-26 [hereafter *OS*]). See also *Institutes*, 1.3.3; 1.4.1. Contrary to Cochrane, Calvin was not denying the identity of the *prima tabula* with natural law but saying that humans naturally pervert what the *Lex praescribit* (*OS* idem. 266.29). See Cochrane, "Natural Law in Calvin" 199-200 and R.C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Philadelphia, 1993) 115.

²⁶*ST*, 1a2ae 100.4.

²⁷"Truth, Natural Law, and Ethical Theory" in *Natural Law Theory* (Oxford, 1992) 72.

is that the latter defined natural law primarily in terms of the Decalogue and Thomas did not.

V. CALVIN

In contrast to Thomas for whom Aristotle was *the* philosopher, Calvin said about the philosophers generally,

... they saw things in such a way that their seeing did not direct them to the truth, much less enable them to attain it! They are like a traveller passing through a field at night who in a momentary lightning flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of night before he can take even a step — let alone be directed on his way by its help.²⁸

²⁸“sed ita viderunt quae videbant, ut tali intuitu minime ad veritatem dirigerentur, nedum pertingerunt; qualiter nocturni fulgetri coruscationem, qui in medio agro est viator, longe lateque ad momentum videt: sed adeo evanido aspectu, ut ante noctis caligine resorbeatur, quam pedem movere queat: tantum abest ut in viam tali subsidio deducatur” (*Institutes*, 2.2.18; *OS* 3.261.2-8). See also Partee *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* 13. Given that Calvin’s first published work was a commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia*, we might expect to find considerable Stoic influence on Calvin. Did Calvin adopt the Stoic doctrine of natural law uncritically or did he plunder the Stoics to advance his own conception of natural law? The latter option was probably the case. Breen and Battles both observed that there was in the 15th-and 16th-centuries a “renaissance of Stoicism” in reaction to the immorality of the Italian renaissance and that Calvin was taking up an old thread with roots in Tertullian and Augustine (Breen, *John Calvin* 67-74; F.L. Battles, *Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia* [Leiden, 1969] 50-62; idem, “The Sources of Calvin’s Seneca Commentary” in *Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology 1: John Calvin* [Abingdon, 1966]). P.J. Leithart shows that Calvin made a sophisticated use of stoic terminology. See his three part essay in two volumes of the *Westminster Theological Journal* (idem, “Stoic Elements in Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 [1993] 31-54, 191-208; 56 [1994] 59-85. See also idem, “That Eminent Pagan: Calvin’s Use of Cicero in *Institutes* 1.1-5,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 [1990]:1-12); E. Grisilis, “Seneca and Cicero as Possible Sources of John Calvin’s View of Double Predestination: An Enquiry in the History of Ideas” in *In Honor of John Calvin 1509-64* (ed. E.J. Furcha; Toronto, 1986) 52; H.A. Oberman, *Initia Calvini: The Matrix of Calvin’s Reformation* (Oxford, 1991) 7-9 n.3, 35-41.

Here is an example of *ratio* as “natural gift” (*naturale donum*) which “... could not be completely wiped out; but was partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that its misshapen ruins appear”.²⁹ The true insights of the philosophers prove that the faculty of moral perception is diminished but not extinguished. Though what the unregenerate sees may be true, as a result he “neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes straight aim at, this truth: to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be toward us.”³⁰ Calvin’s pessimism about man’s unaided ability to perceive the truth or know God controlled his use of natural law.

VI. WORD AND SPIRIT IN CALVIN’S EPISTEMOLOGY

Calvin’s redefinition of natural law was due partly to the Reformation’s reinvigoration of the doctrine *Sola Scriptura*. He taught that Scripture is essential and unique in its role in the saving knowledge of God. Because of their sinful perversity, human beings distort the divinely given knowledge of God. Therefore, they need the spectacles of Scripture and Spirit to correct their perception.³¹

It therefore remains for us to understand that the way to the Kingdom of God is open only to him whose mind has been made new by the illumination of the Holy Spirit Whom does he (Paul, I Corinthians 2:14) call ‘natural’? The man who depends upon the light of nature. He I say, comprehends nothing of God’s spiritual mysteries. Why is this? Is it because he neglects them out of laziness? No, even though he try, he can do nothing, ‘for they are spiritually discerned.’ What does this mean?

²⁹“non potuit in toto deleri: sed partim debilitata, partim vitiata fuit, ut deformes ruinae appareant” (*Institutes*, 2.2.12. OS 3.255.13-14).

³⁰Ibid. “Ad hanc ergo veritatem nec appropinquat, nec contendit, nec collimat humana ratio, ut intelligat quis sit verus Deus, qualisve erga nos esse velit” (OS 3.261.13-15).

³¹*Institutes*, 1.6.1. See also B.B. Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God” in *Calvin and Calvinism* (Oxford, 1931) 29-130; R.C. Gamble, “Calvin’s Theological Method: Word and Spirit, A Case Study” in *Calviniana. Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* (ed. R.V. Schnucker; Kirksville, MO, 1988) 63-75.

Because these mysteries are deeply hidden from human insight, they are disclosed solely by the revelation of the Spirit.³²

Calvin went on to say that where the Spirit does not cast light, all is darkness. Even the apostles, who were the best taught men, needed the Holy Spirit to illumine their understanding. Fallen humans are unable to know the truth *savingly*, apart from scriptural revelation and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. One must bear in mind always Calvin's rigorous application of his doctrine of the fall when assessing his definition of natural law.³³

VII. CALVIN'S DEFINITION AND USE OF NATURAL LAW

Calvin's prominent use of *lex naturalis* has led some to conclude that there is more continuity between Calvin and Thomas on natural law tradition than actually exists.³⁴ Some scholars seem to assume that Calvin means by *lex naturalis* the same thing as Thomas. At first glance such confusion is understandable. He did use natural law in traditional ways, e.g., to determine the justice of a given law. The nations he said, possess the *libertas* to frame laws as they wish. The primary test of the "laws of the nations" (*leges gentium*) is whether it is "according to that perpetual rule of charity" (*ad perpetuam illam charitatis regulam*). Those laws which permit honor to thieves or promiscuous sex are not just and are therefore abhorrent and not properly to be considered laws.³⁵ The question is which natural law?

VIII. LUTHER'S DEFINITION OF NATURAL LAW

³²*Institutes* 2.2.20. *OS* 3.263.7-21.

³³See D.J. Hoitenga Jr., *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology* (New York, 1991) 143-174.

³⁴McNeill said that Calvin thought of the Decalogue as the "authoritative witness to natural law," and ". . . Calvin has adopted the natural law tradition with modifications that do not denature it" (*idem*, "Reformers," 182).

³⁵*Institutes* 4.20.15; *OS* 5.487.27-35.

Two pieces of circumstantial evidence give us valuable clues to Calvin's definition of natural law. The first is Martin Luther's definition, the influence of which upon Calvin was considerable.³⁶ W.D.J. Cargill Thompson said that Luther's view of natural law marked a shift away from Thomas and the traditional medieval view. Luther places "rather more emphasis on the extent to which man's understanding of natural law was darkened by the fall" and he "tends in particular to emphasise the identity between natural law and the decalogue or the two commandments of Christ."³⁷ Commenting on Romans 2:12 (*sine Lege peribunt*) Luther said that natural law

... is impressed upon all people, Jews and Gentiles, and to this law, all people are bound. Therefore the Lord says in Matt. 7:12 "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets." You see, the whole transmitted law is nothing but the natural

³⁶"De Luthero . . . eum nos habere pro insigni Christi apostolo, cuius maxime opera et ministerio restituta hoc tempore fuerit evangelii puritas" (*Defensio de Servitute et Liberatione Humani Arbitrii Adversus Alberti Pighii Campensis* in *Corpus Reformatorum* (ed. W. Baum *et al.*; Berlin and Leipzig, 1834-1941] 34.250). Calvin was not just being polite. I. John Hesselink argues for substantial identity between Luther and Calvin on the law-gospel question (idem, "Law and Gospel or Gospel and Law? Calvin's Understanding of the Relationship" in *Calviniana. Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* [ed. R.V. Schnucker; Kirksville, 1988] 13-32; See also idem, "Luther and Calvin in Law and Gospel in Their Galatians Commentaries," *Reformed Review* 37 (1984).

³⁷*The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Sussex, 1984), 86-87. See also McNeill, "Natural Law in Luther's Thought," *Church History* 10 (1941) 221 [hereafter "Luther"] and "Reformers" 169. Both McNeill and Cargill Thompson, argued for continuity between Luther and the medieval view on the basis of statements by Gratian identifying natural law with portions of Scripture (McNeill, "Reformers" 170; idem, "Luther" 214; Cargill Thompson, 87). The reformation emphases on natural human inability and identity of natural law with the biblical moral law seem to be more than simply following "standard medieval practice."

law, which cannot be unknown to anyone and on account of which no one can be excused.³⁸

He made the same argument in his 1519 commentary on Galatians. The *lex naturae*, the *lex scripta* and the *lex evangelica* are one because they all have the same "end" (*finis*) which is "love" (*charitas*).³⁹

These features of Luther's view remained consistent throughout his life: natural law is "known by all men, written in every heart" (*omnibus nota hominibus, scripta in omnium cordibus*) which "the Spirit might write in the hearts of all without interruption" (*spiritus dictat in cordibus omnium sine intermissione*);⁴⁰ inborn, summarized by the "law of love" (*lex charitatis*), identical to the "ten precepts" (*decem praecepta*) and designed to leave us "inexcusable" before God.⁴¹ These were the threads which Calvin took up in his exposition of natural law, not those of the *Stoa* or Thomas.

IX. CALVIN AND THE *VIA MODERNA*

³⁸Luther's *Works*, American Edition, vol.25, *Lectures on Romans* [ed., J. Pelikan et al.; St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1958-86] 180 (hereafter *LW*); *Luthers Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 56 (Weimar, 1883ff.) 197 (hereafter *WA*).

³⁹*WA* 2.580. P. Althaus and F.E. Cranz note this essential continuity in Luther's identification of natural law (Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* [trans. Robert C. Schultz; Philadelphia, 1966] 90-92; Cranz, "An Essay on the Development of Luther's Thought on Justice, Law and Society" in *Justice and Law 1518 and Later* [Cambridge, Mass, 1959] 105-111). R.H. Fischer and B.A. Gerrish describe Luther's use of reason (Fischer, "A Reasonable Luther" in *Reformation Studies. Essays Honoring Roland H. Bainton* [ed. F.H. Littell; Richmond, 1962] 30-45; Gerrish, *Grace and Reason. A Study in the Theology of Luther* [Oxford, 1962]. A.E. McGrath says, contra Karl Barth, that Luther's location of *Anknüpfungspunkt* in the innate knowledge of God is "in no way inconsistent with his *theologia crucis*" (McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* [Oxford, 1985] 163). Cf. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith* 24-28.

⁴⁰*WA* 2.580.

⁴¹*WA* 56.199 Luther said natural law "est nata et concreata, non data, inventa, not tradita, viva, non scripta" (*WA* 50.312-337; *LW* 47.90). See also B. Lohse *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Edinburgh, 1986) 157.

Calvin's relationship to the *via moderna* is the second gauge of his definition of natural law. It is most likely that while in Paris, Calvin read and was influenced by John Major's Scotist commentary on Lombard's *Sententiae*.⁴² Calvin's voluntarism is evident in his answer to the question whether God acts "... according to established laws or does he establish laws by his acts?"⁴³ According to David Steinmetz, Calvin was deeply concerned that "God's power should be considered in the context of God's Word, what God can do in the framework of his declared will."⁴⁴ Calvin refused to separate the *potentia Dei* from the *voluntas Dei*. Calvin said,

⁴²See A.E. McGrath, "John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 77 (1986) 77; idem, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford, 1990) 40-47. A. Ganoczy bitterly rejects this argument on "historical" grounds but admits that Calvin had read Major by 1540 (idem, *The Young Calvin* [Edinburgh, 1977] 174-178). W.J. Bouwsma sees evidence of "nominalist" convictions in Calvin's 1537 catechism (idem, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* [Oxford, 1988] 107). T.F. Torrance describes Calvin as Major's "pupil" (*The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* [Edinburgh, 1988] 38, 49). D. Steinmetz adequately demonstrates Calvin's Scotism (idem, "Calvin and the Absolute Power of God," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 18 [1988] 65-79). R. A. Muller relates Calvin's voluntarism to his faculty psychology (idem, "*Fides and Cognitio*"). Oberman acknowledges Calvin's Scotism and offers a supplement to Bouwsma's use of "labyrinth" as a hermeneutical device by using a study of "abyss" in *Psychopannychia* (1534) as a lens into Calvin's soul (idem, *Initia Calvini* 13-35). See also idem, "*Europa Afflicta: The Reformation of the Refugees*," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 83 (1992) 91-111.

⁴³For a more Thomist reading of Calvin see P. Helm, "Calvin and Natural Law," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984) 7. Helm argues that when Calvin says "Necque tamen commentum ingerimus absolutae potentiae: quod sicuti profanum est, ita merito detestabile nobis esse debet. Non fingimus Deum ex legem, qui sibi ipsi lex est" (*Institutes*, 3. 23.2. OS 4.396.16-18) he was saying that, for Calvin, there is a standard against which God's acts can be judged. Steinmetz however, explains that in this passage Calvin was actually rejecting the Franciscan "*commentum*" (fiction) *de potentia Dei absoluta*, i.e., God the Son might have become incarnate as a donkey. See Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Absolute Power of God" 73.

⁴⁴Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Absolute Power of God" 73. "Nam Christus nonnisi ex Dei beneplacito quicquam mereri potuit" (*Institutes*, 2.17.1 OS 3.509.25-26).

For his will is, and rightly ought to be, the cause of all things that are. For if it has any cause, something must precede it, to which it is as it were, bound; this is unlawful to imagine. For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it.⁴⁵

This was voluntarism. For Calvin, God does as he wills. If humans interpret God to be arbitrary, that demonstrates human blindness not God's injustice. The ultimate measure of God's righteousness is his own *beneplacitum*.⁴⁶ Calvin could not imagine that God's will might be unjust.⁴⁷

More to the point, it will not do to identify Calvin's view of natural law with the existing tradition because such identification fails to account for Calvin's own explicit definition of natural law. Two significant comments come in the midst of his interpretation of Romans 2:14.

There is no nation so opposed to everything that is human that it does not keep within the confines of some laws. Since, therefore, all nations are so disposed to make laws for themselves of their own accord, and without being instructed to do so, it is beyond all doubt that they have certain ideas of justice and rectitude, which the Greeks refer to as *προληψεις* and which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men. Therefore they have a law without the law, for although they do not have the written law of Moses, they are by no means completely lacking in the knowledge of right and justice.⁴⁸

⁴⁵*Institutes*, 3.23.2; *OS* 4.395.34-396.5.

⁴⁶*Institutes*, 3.23.4; *OS* 4.398.20-24.

⁴⁷"Dico cum Augustino, esse a Domino creatos, quos in exitum ituros sine dubitatione, praesciebat; idque ita factum qui sic voluit" (*Institutes*, 3.23.5; *OS* 4.398.30-33). It is no restriction on the *potentia Dei absoluta* to say that by nature, God is incapable of being unjust. The Nominalist conception of God's freedom held that God is able to do whatever is not contradictory of himself.

⁴⁸*Commentary on Romans* (trans. R. McKenzie, ed., D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance; Grand Rapids, 1961) 48; *CR*: 77.37-38. The Canons of Dort taught the same thing: "Residium quidem est post lapsum in homine lumen aliquod naturae" (*Canons of*

Calvin was probably referring to the Stoics in this passage.⁴⁹ He said that (1) the fact that nations make laws is evidence of some common implanted sense of justice; (2) *naturaliter* means that it is part of the nature of man as creature to have in his conscience a law which is substantially identical to the Law given at Sinai. Commenting on the same passage in the *Institutio* he said that there is a very specific *finis*, (purpose) for the law “written on hearts” (*scriptum in cordibus*). Carefully noting the context of Paul’s words, Calvin defines *lex naturalis* by its purpose.

The purpose of natural law is to render men inexcusable. This would not be a bad definition: natural law is that apprehension of the conscience which distinguishes between just and unjust, and which deprives men of the excuse of ignorance, while it proves them guilty by their own testimony.⁵⁰

When he spoke of the apprehension by *conscientia* of that which “distinguishes between the just and the unjust” (*inter iustum et iniustum*) he was speaking of that which leaves humans inexcusable: the implanted law of God in the human heart and mind, not an independent standard of right and

Dort [1619] 3/4.4 in *The Creeds of the Christendom* (ed. P. Schaff; Grand Rapids, 1983) 3.565 [hereafter *Schaff*]. Herman Bavinck said, “Reason and judgement and will however corrupt, yet, in so far as they belong to man’s nature, have not been wholly lost Consequently it is contrary to Scripture as well as to experience to attribute to man such a perpetual blindness as would render him unable to form any true conception” (idem, “Calvin and Common Grace” in *Calvin and the Reformation* (trans. G. Vos; London, 1909) 118-119). Breen took Calvin’s doctrine of natural law as evidence he held the “essentials of the idea of common grace” (*John Calvin*, 162). Likewise C. Partee notes that in *Institutes* 2.2.13 (*OS* 3.256.23-31) Calvin distinguished between *res terrenas* and *res caelestes*. To the former belong *politia*, *oeconomia*, *artes omnes mechanicae*, *disciplinaeque liberales* (“Calvin and Experience,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 [1973] 177).

⁴⁹Leithart, “Stoic Elements,” I,41 n.43.

⁵⁰“Finis ergo legis naturalis est, ut reddatur homo inexcusabilis. Nec male hoc modo definiatur, Quod sit conscientiae agnitio, inter iustum et iniustum sufficienter discernentis: ad tollendum omnibus ignorantiae praetextum, dum suo ipsorum testimonio redarguantur” (*Institutes*, 2.2.22; *OS* 3.265.6-11).

wrong.⁵¹ By *conscientia* he meant, “. . . a sense of divine judgement, as a witness joined to them, which does not allow them to hide their sins from being accused before the Judge’s tribunal”⁵² Calvin distinguished *conscientia* from *simplex notitia* which might “so to speak, reside closed up in man” (*in homine residere posset veluti inclusa*). The conscience is a “guardian” or inquisitor, “spy[ing] out” secrets of the heart.⁵³ For Calvin, the implanted knowledge of God’s law not only leaves us inexcusable before the Divine *iustitia* but also convicts us experientially before the final judgement.⁵⁴

It was not mere serendipity that Calvin often discussed natural law in his exposition of the Decalogue. In his sermon on Deuteronomy 5:22 he said that the man who will “rule his life in complete perfection” should “live in justice and equity” with his neighbor which means observing “the equity of nature.” He equated observing natural law with “not doing anything to anyone unless we would want them to do the same to us.”⁵⁵ The *lex charitatis* is the “natural

⁵¹*Institutes* 1.3.1-3. See Dowey, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* 61-64, 245-246.

⁵²“ita quum sensum habent divini iudicii, quasi sibi adiunctum testem, qui sua peccata eos occultare non sinit quin ad iudicis tribunal rei pertrahantur . . .” (*Institutes*, 3.19.15; *OS* 4.295.12-14).

⁵³*Institutes*, 3.19.15; *OS* 4.295.20-21. The moral law as the basis of man’s inexcusability was a reformed commonplace beginning with Melancthon. See the *Confessio Belgica* (1561) Art. 2., *Schaff* 384; J.E. Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch Theology, 1575-1650* (Leiden, 1982) 10-33, 180-201.

⁵⁴Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith* 98-102.

⁵⁵*John Calvin’s Sermons on the Ten Commandments* (trans. and ed. B.W. Farley; Grand Rapids, 1980) 247. “L’homme veut-il bien reigler sa vie en toute perfection? En premier lieu il faut qu’il s’adonne au service de Dieu, qu’il sache que c’est que Dieu demande, et approuve: et puis que nous vivions en telle droiture et equité avec nos prochains, que nous monstrions par cela que nous sommes vrais enfans de Dieu. Le premier donc est, que nous cognoissions comme Dieu veut estre honoré de nous: le second, que nous rendions à nos prochains ce qui leur appartient, et gardions ceste equité de nature, de ne rien faire à autrui, sinon ce que nous voudrions qu’on nous face” (*CR* 54.392).

equity" (*aequitas naturalis*) of the law.⁵⁶ Natural law was promulgated by God at creation and implanted in the human consciousness. We only know God because he has revealed himself, but he has revealed himself to us from the very beginning. Thus to say that a law is natural is to say that it is revealed in and constitutional to creation.⁵⁷

In the *Institutes*, he equated explicitly natural law to the Decalogue. At the beginning of his exposition he said "that interior law" (*lex illa interior*) "which we have described as written, even engraved upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the Two Tables."⁵⁸ In book four, discussing civil polity, Calvin made the same point.

It is a fact that the Law of God which we call the moral law is nothing less than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has inscribed upon the minds of men. Consequently, the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in it.⁵⁹

⁵⁶"Siquidem officiorum inter membra communicatio nihil gratuitum habere creditur, sed potius solutio esse eius quod naturae lege debitum negare prodigiosum esset" (*Institutes*, 4.20.16; OS 5.487.38-40, 488.3-8. *Institutes*, 3.7.7; OS 3.158.9-11). It is such language which undoubtedly comprises the background to *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) 19.4 "To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require." (*Schaff*, 3.641).

⁵⁷*Institutes*, 1.15.1; OS 3.174.3. This knowledge is in a sense, Christological, since the pre-incarnate Word is, after all, *naturae author*. Willis says "The two facets of our knowledge of God are not *creatoris* et *Christi* but *creatoris* et *redemptoris*, because for Calvin Christ is not only the redemptive Word of God, but also the creative Word of God . . ." (idem, *Catholic Christology* 121; see also 128-30).

⁵⁸"Porro haec ipsa quae ex duabus tabulis discenda sunt, quodammodo nobis dictat lex illa interior, quam omnium cordibus inscriptam et quasi impressam superius dictum est" (*Institutes*, 2.8.1; OS 3.344.11-14). See also OS 3.344.24-26 where the *lex scriptam* clarifies the more obscure *lex naturalis*.

⁵⁹*Institutes*, 4.20.16 OS 5.488.3-7. See also H. Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge, 1982) 179-184.

Far from being a conduit of the Classical or Thomistic view of the *lex naturalis* Calvin made a very sophisticated revision of the concept of natural law by removing it from the Stoic and Thomistic corpus of "self-evident" truths and identifying it with the content of the Law revealed in the Garden and at Sinai and in the Sermon on the Mount.

X. BARTH AND THE DISCONTINUITY ARGUMENT

In his own theology, Karl Barth rejected natural theology as an unbiblical and rationalistic attempt to find common ground between believer and unbeliever outside of Christ.⁶⁰ He admitted reluctantly that Calvin taught a theology of nature.⁶¹ Generally however, he attributed the rise of the Protestant natural theology to the Reformed scholastics.⁶² In *Church*

⁶⁰*The Epistle to the Romans* (6th ed., trans., E. C. Hoskyns; London, 1965) 42-70. Cf. K. Barth, *Der Romerbrief* (Munich, 1926) 18-45. Cf. G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London, 1956) 53-56. Barth attributed many, theological errors to the pernicious influence of natural theology. In his 1937-1938 Gifford Lectures he criticized traditional Lutheran and Calvinist views of election as bearing "traces of a natural theology" (idem, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation* [trans. J.L.M. Haire and I. Henderson; London, 1938] 78-79).

⁶¹In his 1934 pamphlet *Nein!* Barth said that natural knowledge of God is only a hypothetical possibility for Calvin (*Natural Theology* 100-109). He allowed to Calvin "guarded and conditional use of the possibility of Natural Theology . . ." (idem, *The Knowledge of God* 8). He also said however, that Calvin and Luther made an "unguarded and unconditional use" of natural theology in their teaching on the law. On the distinction between natural theology and theology of nature see C.E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (Edinburgh, 1995) 41.

⁶²4/1.369. He criticized Piscator's *Aphorismi Doctrinae Christianae* (1589) for "making Calvin say" that there is a "two fold knowledge of God" *naturales* and *acquisita*. He also objected to Bucanus' *Institutio Theologiae* (1609) 19.3 and he had similar objections to Polanus' *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (1609). According to J.B. Torrance, Barth regarded Calvin's failure to "interpret Christologically his views on the State and civil government" as a weakness which he tried to correct ("Interpreting the Word" 256). Torrance says Calvin "never explicitly employs the concept of natural law in his theology" (ibid. 256-257). In contrast, Brunner said "The *lex naturae* is identical in content with the *lex scripta*, though the *lex scripta* is

Dogmatics he described the orthodox-scholastic Protestant view of natural law as the law written on the heart, identical with the law which "Moses merely repeated expressly proclaiming and interpreting." Identifying the Decalogue with natural law, was by the early 17th century "the general custom in Protestantism."⁶³

Barth described correctly the view held by seventeenth century Reformed orthodoxy, but he misunderstood the relations between Calvin and his successors on natural law.⁶⁴ The "scholastic" view was really Calvin's. It was also the view of the confessional age theologians and it was grounded in their view of the covenant, which they learned, in substance, from Calvin.⁶⁵

For example, the one of the more significant Heidelberg Calvinists, Caspar Olevian (1536-87), in whom Barth said he could "hear the voice of Calvin again," said that God made a *naturale foedus seu obligatio* with humanity as

necessary to make again perfectly clear the writing of the *lex naturae* which has, as it were, faded" (*Natural Theology* 39). Cf. Barth's apparent approval of natural theology in *Theology and the Church* (London, 1962) 342, cited in T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Knowledge* (Edinburgh, 1985) 63, n.33. See also, Platt, *Reformed Thought* 104-118; Barr, *Natural Theology* 8-10, 103-111; R.A. Muller, s.v., "Orthodoxy, Reformed," *Encyclopedia*.

⁶³CD 4/1.369. Zwingli, Bullinger, Beza, Ursinus and Olevianus also held this view. Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity", 1.291-292; 1.345-351; 2.122-124, 138 n.51, 2.148-149, 2.273-174; H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (trans. G.T. Thomson; London, 1950) 291-300.

⁶⁴Barth said that the view which he attributes to 17th century Reformed scholastics began with Melanchthon (CD 4/1.58). Cf. Dowey, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* 65-71; McNeill, "Reformers" 173-175. Cf. D. Sinnema, "The Discipline of Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28.1 (1993) 10-44.

⁶⁵CD 4/1.58, 62-64. Barth incorrectly juxtaposed Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger and Olevian with Melanchthon, Ursinus and Cocceius believing that only the latter group taught a pre-lapsarian covenant of works and, in conjunction, a *lex naturae*. Cf. Muller, *Post-Reformation* 1.63-82; D.B. McWilliams, "The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991) 109-124.

the image of God for the purpose of "removing every excuse."⁶⁶ In turn, God ought to be honored and glorified. He explicitly equated the Decalogue with natural law.

God willed to exist a testimony of this natural obligation, partly in the natural law written on our minds, and partly in the law written on the two tables.⁶⁷

For Calvin and for his successors such as Olevian, Ursinus, Wollebius, and later Turretin and van Mastricht, it was a given that God had entered into a probationary, federal-covenantal relationship with Adam, and that the *lex moralis* which God instituted in this probationary arrangement with his impeccable, righteous and holy creatures is the same law which he codified at Sinai and which Calvin called the *lex naturalis*. It was part of the warp and woof of 16th and 17th century Reformed theology to think of these things synonymously as components of the creational order.⁶⁸

⁶⁶CD 4/1, 59.

⁶⁷"aliis autem, omnem excusationem adimat ostendendo quid fuerit naturale foedus, seu naturalis obligatio inter Deum, quatenus est creator et homines ad ipsius imaginem conditos: hoc nimirum, ut quemadmodum se Deus ipsis patefecerat partim interne in sua imagine, partim externe in speculo opiscii huius mundi, ita vicissim ab ipsis honoraretur et glorificaretur. Huius naturalis obligationis testimonium Deus extare voluit partim in lege naturae inscripta mentibus, partim in lege scripta in duabus tabulis (C. Olevian, *De Substantia foederis gratuiti inter Deum et electos* [Geneva, 1585] 2.5). See also L.D. Bierma, "Covenant or Covenants in the Theology of Olevianus?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987) 244.

⁶⁸E.g., See C. Olevian, Caspar Olevian, *In epistolam ad Romanos notae* (Geneva, 1579) 148, 195-196; idem, *De substantia* 1.1.7-9, 1.2.1; 1.5.31; 2.5, 8; 2.27, 2.41; idem, *In epistolam D. Pauli apostoli ad Galatas notae* (Geneva, 1578) 57. Z. Ursinus, *Summa*, Q. 10; *Opera theologica* (3 vol., ed. Q. Reuter; Heidelberg, 1612) 1.10; idem, *Summa* Q.30, *Opera*, 1.11; J. Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae Christianae* (Basel, 1626) 1.8; F. Turretini, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* 8.3 in *Opera* (Edinburgh, 1847) 1.517-521; P. van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia* (Utrecht, 1699) 1.3.12. On Ursinus see R. S. Clark and J.R. Beeke, "Ursinus, Oxford and the Westminster Divines," *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Publication of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (ed. J. L. Duncan and D. Rankin [forthcoming]).

Calvin did not identify natural law, like Thomas, with *ratio* and he did not think of natural law the way that Grotius and the Enlightenment philosophers later did. Natural law was not proof of man's rationality, but the ground of God's prosecution of human depravity. Thus, the wedge which has been driven between Calvin and the Reformed scholastics, on the assumption that talk of natural law is evidence of rationalism, must be discarded. The view which Barth attributed solely to the allegedly rationalist scholastics was Luther's, Calvin's and that of late 16th century Reformed orthodoxy.⁶⁹ Of course the problem is not really what Luther, Calvin, or the Reformed scholastics taught about natural law, but rather that neo-orthodox historiographers have abused the orthodox tradition looking for support for their views.⁷⁰ In truth the traditional view of the natural law taught by Calvin and the Reformed tradition after him was not rationalistic.⁷¹ Calvin's twin

⁶⁹Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Orthodoxy* 1:167-193.

⁷⁰For example Hendrikus Berkhof said, "For Calvin the world is a self-testimony of God, for Barth it is not" (idem, *Karl Barths Lichtelehre* (Zurich, 1978) cited in Barr, *Natural Theology* 189). Barr accuses Barth of making Calvin into a Barthian. This is certainly true of some of his followers. For example, W. Niesel claimed that, for Calvin, "God himself is not to be encountered in the world of nature and history. He exists above the order of nature and is thus not immanent within it" (*The Theology of Calvin* 59). A.C. Cochrane said, "according to Calvin there is no natural knowledge of God for the Church and no natural knowledge of His will through a natural law implanted in all men from creation" ("Natural Law in Calvin" 180). T.H.L. Parker is more moderate (idem, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* 7, 8, 48-50). George W. Stroup is a sophisticated attempt to make Calvin the "pre-critical" (i.e., pre-Enlightenment) Bible reader useful to post-critical narrative theology (idem, "Narrative in Calvin's Hermeneutic," *John Calvin and the Church. A Prism of Reform* [Louisville, 1990] 158-171). On Calvin's doctrine of Scripture see Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God"; 48-70; R.S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh, 1953); B.A. Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and the Reformation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 10.4 (1957) 337-351; J. Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Grand Rapids, 1960); F.L. Battles, "God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Interpretation* 31 (1977) 19-38. Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco, 1979); cf. D. K. McKim, s.v., "Scripture," *Encyclopedia*; represent the revisionist interpretation of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture and its relationship to Reformed Scholasticism.

⁷¹By *rationalism* I mean a system of thought in which human reason is supreme, the fulcrum by which all other authority is levered. Beza, Ursinus, Olevianus (to use

emphases, which the Reformed scholastics inherited from him, on the divine will and our natural inability, were incompatible with rationalism.⁷²

XI. CONCLUSION

Calvin did not follow Thomas' doctrine of natural law, though he did make significant use of natural law. Both schools of thought which developed following the Barth-Brunner debate failed to account for 1) Calvin's pessimistic epistemology; 2) Calvin's high view of divine revelation (*scripta* and *inscripta*); 3) Luther's influence on Calvin; 4) Calvin's Scottist emphasis on the primacy and adequacy of God's will as a moral standard. These factors allowed him to identify natural law with God's probationary self-revelation *in paradiso* and with the Decalogue delivered at Sinai.

three examples) can only be called "rationalist" if by that we mean anyone who used Aristotelian language or a syllogism. In which case, Calvin must be considered a "rationalist." See Bierma, *The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevian* 229-238; L.C. Boughton "Supralapsarianism and the Role of Metaphysics in Sixteenth Century Reformed Theology" *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986) 63-96.

⁷²See Muller, "Duplex Cognitio"