

# THEOLOGIA SYSTEMATICA

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## Reformer – Since When?

### An Attempt to Reassess the Young Calvin's Theological Attitude towards the Mediaeval Church

It is commonly accepted to mark Calvin's crucial debut in Christian theology with the issuing of the 1536 version of his *Institutes*. Although this is true as a matter concerning the date of publication, yet historically it is not at all insignificant, that the primary concern of the young Reformer was, perhaps curiously, the fate of the human soul after death. Modern scholarship is just beginning to give his pre-1536 theological thought a more detailed attention.<sup>1</sup>

In earliest cultures one may find ideas concerning the nature and existence of the soul as well as attempts to formulate answers to them. In this sense even the Greek philosophy had a long tradition to look back onto, well before historical times and recorded human memory. According to Calvin,

Plato, in some passages, talks nobly of the faculties of the soul; and Aristotle, in discoursing of it, has surpassed all in acuteness. But what the soul is, and whence it is, it is vain to ask at them, or indeed at the whole body of Sages, though they certainly thought more purely and wisely on the subject than some amongst ourselves, who boast that they are the disciples of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The title *Psychopannychia* used since 1545 is problematic in itself, since based on this expression the work was quite often, erroneously, labelled as the tract dealing with “the sleeping” of the souls. The Greek *παννυχίζω*, however, does not mean “sleeping”, but rather “being awake”, keeping vigil through the night. Ancient authors had been using it also in connection with religious feasts; therefore the expression could refer to overnight celebrations as well. Thus the term *παννυχικός* could denote also a *night-reveller*, albeit it would be a bit odd to label Calvin's first theological work as the “overnight partying” of the souls. The noun means both for Herodotus and Euripides especially a night spent awake in the sense of the Latin *vigilia*.

The central message of Calvin's work is focused upon the refutation and denial of two relatively common views:

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<sup>1</sup> Jung-Uck Hwang, *Der junge Calvin und seine Psychopannychia* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1991). Cf. George H. Tavard, *The starting point of Calvin's theology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> De animae facultatibus praeclare aliquot locis Plato: argutissime autem omnium Aristoteles disseruit. Verum quid sit anima, et unde sit, frustra ab iis et universa omnino sapientium natione quaeras, quanquam multo certe et prudentius et sincerius senserunt, quam isti nostri, qui se Christi discipulos esse gloriantur. See Baum – Cunitz – Reuss, eds., *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1866), V, 178. In the following we shall quote Calvin's works (*Calvini Opera*) according to their edition in *Corpus Reformatorum*. E.g. CO 5 = *Calvini Opera* vol. 5.

1. Souls do not “sleep”: after the person’s death the soul does not “expect” the last judgment in some sort of unconscious state, but within communion with God;
2. Souls do not become inexistent: in the moment of physical death the soul does not die in order to be resurrected again together with the body for the last judgment.

As one who is familiar with Platonic dialogues, our author begins his work with the definition of the theme and clarification of the terms:

Our controversy, then, relapses to the human soul. Some, while admitting it to have a real existence, imagine that it sleeps in a state of insensibility from death to the day of judgment, when it will awake from its sleep; while others will sooner admit anything than its real existence, maintaining that it is merely a vital power which is derived from arterial spirit on the action of the lungs, and being unable to exist without a body, perishes along with the body, and vanishes away and becomes evanescent till the period when the whole human being shall be raised again. We, on the other hand, maintain both that it is a substance, and after the death of the body truly lives, being endued both with sense and understanding. Both these points we undertake to prove by clear passages of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

Calvin therefore considers the soul to be substance, in opposition with all such concepts that would grant her merely a mostly material character deriving from the body’s vital functions. If the soul is substance indeed, then it can be clearly distinguished from the body, since the latter has a different – in Calvin’s view: mortal – substance. The soul, therefore, as a substance (*substantia*) does not cease to exist together with the expiration of the body ordered under her. Behind the expressions “a vital power which is derived from arterial spirit on the action of the lungs” Hans Scholl thinks we should look for the upper blood circle discovered or at least hinted at by Servetus, as well as the Aristotelian doctrine concerning the soul.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in the above quoted text we have already a masked critique against Michael Servetus.

According to Calvin, the soul exists in the fullest possible way after death, meaning that she is self-aware and conscious. The awareness or sense (*sensus*) as well as the intellectual capacity (*intelligentia*) presuppose a partaking within life itself. It remains, however, an open question concerning what kind of life this actually is, within which the human soul, in possession of her self-awareness and intellectual capacities, actually participates? In fact, already at this point we are confronted with the problem of time vis-à-vis the existence beyond the body, yet our author does not deal with this question at all. We shall return to it towards the end of this presentation.

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<sup>3</sup> De hominis ergo anima nobis certamen est, quam alii fatentur quidem esse aliquid: sed a morte, ad iudicii usque diem, quo e somno suo expergefiet, sine memoria, sine intelligentia, sine sensu dormire putant. Alii nihil minus quam substantiam esse concedunt: sed vim duntaxat vitae esse aiunt, quae ex spiritu arteriae, aut pulmonum agitatione ducitur: et quia sine corpore subiecto subsistere nequit, ideo una cum corpore interit et evanescit, donec totus homo suscitetur. Nos vero et substantiam esse ipsam contendimus, et vere post corporis interitum vivere, sensu videlicet et intelligentia praeditam: ac utrumque evidentibus scripturae testimoniis nos probaturos recipimus. *CO* 5, 177–178.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Scholl, “Karl Barth as Interpreter of Calvin’s *Psychopannychia*”, in *Calvinus sincerioris religionis vindex. Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion*, ed. by Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian K. Armstrong (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997) 291–308 (p. 299).

Also as part of the introductory remarks Calvin clarifies that his arguments will be derived exclusively from Scripture, therefore he shall receive neither the philosophers, nor various other human rationales to guide his pen, even though he himself has admitted that concerning the faculties of the soul both Plato and Aristotle “talked nobly” and “in acuteness”. It is remarkable that at the very outset Calvin endeavours to clarify the notions concerning the body as well as to prevent all misunderstandings:

But before proceeding farther, we must cut off all handle for logomachy, which might be furnished by our giving the name of “spirit” (*spiritus*) and “soul” (*anima*) indiscriminately to that which is the subject of controversy, and yet sometimes speaking of the two as different. By Scripture usage different meanings are given to these terms; and most people, without attending to this difference, take up the first meaning which occurs to them, keep fast hold of it, and maintain it pertinaciously. Others, having seen “soul” sometimes used for “life”, hold this to be invariably the case, and will not allow themselves to be convinced of the contrary.<sup>5</sup>

Calvin also deals with the relationship between soul and life, the will and desires. In this sense, whenever used in connection with each other, the term *anima* means “will”, whilst *spiritus* means “desire”. Following the exposition of the biblical teaching concerning the soul, the story of man’s creation has prominence: the likeness of the human being to God (i.e. being his image) is interpreted by our author exclusively as pertaining to the soul, thus refusing all sorts of anthropomorphism, i.e. any ideas which would confer human attributes to God.<sup>6</sup> The very notion of our being made onto God’s image is inextricably yet inseparably connected to the soul breathed into us by our Creator. This soul, i.e. this image of God in fact distinguishes us from the souls of animals, which received their origin from the earth. As Calvin argues,

For whence do the souls of other animals arise? God says, “Let the earth bring forth the living soul” etc. Let that which has sprung of earth be resolved into earth. But the soul of man is not of the earth. It was made by the mouth of the Lord, i.e., by his secret power. [...] Whatever philosophers or these dreamers may pretend, we hold that nothing can bear the image of God but spirit, since God is a Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The difference between soul and body as well as the pre-eminence of the former over the latter is supported by Calvin – beside biblical quotations – with references to Polycarp, Melito of Sardis and Tertullian. The difference between soul and body is not merely due to the former’s capacity to think, acknowledge and feel, but also of her immortality:

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<sup>5</sup> Prius tamen quam longius progrediamur, ansa logomachiae praecidenda: quam arripere ex eo possent, quod nunc spiritum et animam promiscue vocabimus id de quo nunc nobis controversia est: interdum, ut diversa, distincte enunciabimus, Nam hic est usus scripturae, dare his verbis varias acceptiones: quarum plerique dum nullam habent rationem, ut quaeque prima sibi occurrit, eam mordicus tenent et pervicaciter defendunt. Aliquoties legerunt animam pro vita: id perpetuum putant et acerbe confirmant. CO 5, 178.

<sup>6</sup> CO 5, 180–181.

<sup>7</sup> Unde enim habent ortum aliorum animalium animae? Producat (inquit Deus) terra animam viventem, et caetera. Ita in terram resolvantur, quae de terra emerunt. Anima vero hominis non de terra est, sed ex ore Domini: hoc est ex virtute secreta. [...] Quidquid nugentur vel philosophi, vel isti somniores, habemus nihil esse quod imaginem Dei ferat, nisi spiritum, ut Deus spiritus est. CO 5, 181.

For I come to my second proposition, i.e. that the soul, after the death of the body, still survives, endued with sense and intellect. And it is a mistake to suppose that I am here affirming anything else than the immortality of the soul. For those who admit that the soul lives, and yet deprive it of all sense, feign a soul which has none of the properties of soul, or dis sever the soul from itself, seeing that its nature, without which it cannot possibly exist, is to move, to feel, to be vigorous, to understand. As Tertullian says, “The soul of the soul is perception.” (Lib. de Carne Christi). Let us now learn this immortality from Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

During the strictly biblical argumentation it becomes clear that in Calvin’s view the soul is immortal not in its classical philosophical sense – i.e. according to its very nature, character, or simply “by itself” (cf. *sui generis*) – but rather, especially based on Mt 10, 28 and Lk 12, 5 she lives exclusively by God’s grace:

For when we say that the spirit of man is immortal, we do not affirm that it can stand against the hand of God, or subsist without his agency. Far from us be such blasphemy! But we do say that it is sustained by his hand and blessing.<sup>9</sup>

The young Calvin’s concept concerning the creation of man deserves special attention, since, according to him, Adam was created immortal, i.e. “inexterminable”:

Therefore, as death reigned on entering by Adam, so now life reigns by Jesus Christ. And we know that “Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more: death shall no longer have dominion over him: For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he lives, he lives unto God.” (Romans 6:9–10) Here we may see how they themselves give their heresy its deathblow! When they say that “death is the punishment of sin”, they at the same time imply that man, if he had not fallen, would have been immortal. What he began to be, he once was not; and what he is by punishment, he is not by nature. Then the Apostle exclaims that sin is absorbed by grace, so that it can no longer have any power over the elect of God; and hence we conclude that the elect now are such as Adam was before his sin; and as he was created inexterminable, so now have those become who have been renewed by Christ to a better nature. There is nothing at variance with this in the Apostle’s declaration, (1Corinthians 15:54) “The word shall be accomplished (fiet), death has been swallowed up in victory”, since nobody can deny that the term *shall be done* (fiet) is synonymous with *shall be fulfilled* (implebitur).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Venio enim ad id, quod secundo loco a me propositum erat: Eam ipsam animam ab interitu corporis superstitem manere, sensu ac intelligentia praeditam. Fallitur autem qui existimat me hic aliud quidpiam affirmare, quam animae immortalitatem. Si quidem qui animam vivere fatentur, illamque simul omni sensu spoliant, prorsus animam fingunt, quae nihil animae habeat: aut animam ipsam a se ipsa avellunt: quum eius natura, sine qua consistere ullo modo nequit, sit moveri, sentire, vigere, intelligere: atque (ut ait Tertullianus) animae anima, sensus sit. Istam ergo immortalitatem ex scriptura discamus. CO 5, 184.

<sup>9</sup> Nam quum dicimus spiritum hominis esse immortalem, non affirmamus contra manum Dei stare posse, aut sine eius virtute subsistere. Absint a nobis hae blasphemiae. Sed dicimus, eius manu ac benedictione sustineri. CO 5, 222.

<sup>10</sup> Ergo, quemadmodum mors per Adam ingressa regnavit, ita nunc per Iesum Christum regnat vita. Scimus autem quod Christus excitatus a mortuis iam non moritur: mors illi ultra non dominabitur. Quod enim mortuus fuit peccato, mortuus fuit semel: quod autem vivit, vivit Deo. Atque hic videre est, ut suum errorem suo ipsi gladio confodiant. Dum enim poenam peccati mortem esse dicunt, simul profitentur hominem, si lapsus non esset, futurum fuisse immortalem. Nam et quod coepit, aliquando non fuit: et quos poe-

According to the above – based on the typology of the first and second Adam – those saved in Christ enter the same state in which mankind had been before the fall. At this point we may sense perhaps the influence of Augustine’s concept concerning the four statuses of man. The situation of man in paradise would be of interest for modern theological discussion also: did God create man initially to be immortal, or man had some sort of mortal condition, which still differed from our present mortal state in the sense that *that* mortal condition would not have resulted in a substantial change within our relationship with God?

Whilst analysing this question in a wider perspective the first emerging problem is whether we regard Adam and Eve as being historical persons, or – based on the meaning of the Hebrew *adam* – we merely regard him/them as “man”, i.e. *Man*, a common representative of us all. In the latter case we would experience “his” fall as our own. This question, of course, has a much wider literature which makes it impossible to be dealt with even superficially within this presentation. At this point we merely acknowledge that for Calvin the typology of Adam–Christ is an almost insurmountable prerequisite for man’s salvation by God.

The question arises: who might have taught the doctrine concerning the “sleeping” or “dying” of the souls in the sixteenth century against whom the young Calvin was justified to write his treatise? The author himself attributes all these teachings to the so-called “Anabaptists” or “Catabaptists”, although apart from the concealed critique of Michael Servetus we may find a few other clues.

The refusal of the mediaeval doctrine concerning purgatory, prayers for the dead as well as the intercession or mediation of the dead saints on behalf of the living believers was one of the common points of the Reformers’ teaching. Although both in Luther’s 95 theses<sup>11</sup> and Zwingli’s 67 theses<sup>12</sup> the prayers for the dead are more or less tolerated, the intercession of the saints and the purgatory, however, are flatly refused by Zwingli’s 19., 20., and 57. thesis.<sup>13</sup> From within this refusal – with Roman Catholic logic – one could have presumed that the Reformers implicitly deny the continuous existence of the soul after death, i.e. they either profess the “sleeping” of the souls or their final resurrection at the last judgment. Thus, in the first half of the sixteenth century the Reformers had to distance themselves not only from the Roman custom of praying for the dead and asking for the mediation of the saints, but also from such teachers who proclaimed the sleeping of the souls or their death and resurrection together with the body. These latter, presumably contemporary opponents are called by Calvin as “Anabaptists” and “Catabaptists”. His unnamed opponents are quite harshly criticised even in this relatively “tamed” version of the text, which leads us to believe that the author intends to avoid at all costs any charge of being a representative or champion of the radical trend of the Reformation, i.e. an “Anabaptist”. It is also important to note that even if there

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nae est, non est naturae. Contra apostolus, peccatum absorberi a gratia clamat, ut adversus electos Dei agere amplius non possit. Obtinemus igitur, electos Dei tales nunc esse, qualis fuerit ante peccatum Adam. Et ut ille creatus est inexterminalis, ita et nunc eos esse, qui per Christum in meliorem naturam recreati sunt. Neque obstat illud apostoli: Tunc fiet verbum: absorpta est mors in victoria. Quando Fieri pro Impleri dictum, nemo infitari potest. CO 5, 206.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. thesis no. 26: Optime facit papa, quod non potestate clavis (quam nullam habet) sed per modum suffragii dat animabus remissionem.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Zwingli’s thesis no. 60 in Huldrych Zwingli, *67 thése*, ed. Dániel Keresztes and Ede Hamarkay (Erdőkertes: Exodus, 2006), 53. The Swiss German, German and Latin versions are *ibid.* pp. 40, 65 and 88.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 49 and 52.

were such Anabaptists, who around 1534 (the time of the *Psychopannychia*'s first composition) taught the "sleeping" of the souls, the concept itself was not by a long chalk an Anabaptist invention or peculiarity.<sup>14</sup> Calvin published later, in 1544 a tract in French against the Anabaptists, within which he printed excerpts from the *Psychopannychia* also.<sup>15</sup>

Since apart from the ancient Arabs, Pope John XXII and the Anabaptists no other opponents are mentioned, without a careful reading of the text one indeed cannot detect any trace which would indicate a separation from any doctrine of the mediaeval Roman church. Calvin was so successful in his harsh refusal of the contemporary opponents (labelled, as it were, as a crowd rather than concrete individuals), that even some modern analysts did not realise the concealed reformatory character of the *Psychopannychia* – including Alister E. McGrath, George H. Tavard and Sándor Gánóczy. Each of them claims that Calvin's *Psychopannychia* is entirely free from any anti-Roman polemic or even of its slightest signs; therefore it cannot be considered a reforming document. Alister E. McGrath writes:

Nevertheless, the evidence does not point to any fundamental break at this point with what Calvin would later refer to as "superstitions of the papacy". He was reform-minded at this juncture, sharing an outlook already associated with many within the French church; there is, however, no hint of a break with that church. [...] Furthermore, the *Psychopannychia* contains no anti-catholic polemic. It is difficult to find even a hint that the work was written by a young man recently persuaded of the errors of his former catholic ways.<sup>16</sup>

Further, according to George H. Tavard,

*Psychopannychia* was not a reforming document. The position it defended was identical with catholic teaching, and it did not contain one word that was critical of the medieval Church or of the papacy.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the assessment of Sándor Gánóczy:

Upon reading this little book, one is astonished that it does not contain any anti-Roman excursus or even allusions of this genre.<sup>18</sup>

The above assessments – either accepted as traditional judgments or original findings – derive from a superficial knowledge of the *Psychopannychia*. McGrath's statement is correct inasmuch as the work is indeed free from any open, derogatory-type assaults upon mediaeval Catholicism. If expressions like "papist idolatry", "Roman heresy" or "pontifical and monastic immorality" and their like are considered as being necessary elements of Reformation literature, then the *Psychopannychia* is indeed not a reforming tract. Yet if without these exaggerations some concealed critique is directed implicitly against

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Scholl, "Barth as Interpreter of Calvin's *Psychopannychia*", 300.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Calvin, *Briève instruction pour armer tous bons fideles contre les erreurs de la secte commune des Anabaptistes* (Genève: 1544); cf. CO 7, 45–142. The excerpts pasted from *Psychopannychia* into this work are in CO 7, 114–139.

<sup>16</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 73.

<sup>17</sup> George H. Tavard, *The starting point of Calvin's theology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 149.

<sup>18</sup> "En lisant ce petit livre, on est frappé de ce qu'il ne contient aucun excursus antiromain, et même pas d'allusion de ce genre." See Alexandre Gánóczy, *Le jeune Calvin: genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice* (Mainz: F. Steiner, 1966), 77.

the Roman church within a given work, then the analyst should not pass them by. In order to save time we shall quote only two examples.

The first passage is connected to Sirach 17, 26–27: “the confession, as nothing, is taken away from the dead: confess while you are still alive”.<sup>19</sup> According to Calvin:

The object of Sirach is not to show that the souls of the dead perish, but while he exhorts us early, and as we have opportunity, to confess God, he at the same time teaches that there is no time of confessing after death; that is, that there is then no time for repentance. If any of them still asks, What is to become of the sons of perdition? – that is no matter of ours. I answer for believers: “They shall not die, but live, and show forth the works of the Lord.” (Ps 118,17)<sup>20</sup>

The above text hardly needs any explanation: if after death there is no possibility to confess or to repent, then there is no point in praying for the dead, in interceding for their sake, thus there is no point of having a purgatory either, since purgatory was “created” by earlier theologians exactly for the purpose of providing a possibility of repentance and penitence after death. Here we need to correct Hans Scholl’s assessment as well, who argues that at first sight the *Psychopannychia* does not discuss any major theme of the Reformation. According to him,

Had it been argued in a Reformed mode, a negative mention of the teaching regarding purgatory would have been inevitable.<sup>21</sup>

If purgatory, as an expression, is indeed absent from the text, Calvin’s above explanation of Sirach 17: 26–27 excludes any other interpretation. The work is “non-reforming” according to its style and formulation, but not according to its message. The refusal to deal with “the sons of perdition” also mirrors this Reformed standpoint.

The second quotation, coming from the very end of the tract, shows even more clearly that Calvin did not take up his pen only to refute the doctrines of some unknown Arabs, the already condemned Pope John XXII and the similarly nameless “Anabaptists”:

They brandish some other darts, but they are pointless. They give no stroke, and they do not even cause much fear. For they quote some passages which, besides being irrelevant, are taken from books of doubtful authority, as the 4<sup>th</sup> Book of Ezra, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of the Maccabees. To these, the answer we gave in discoursing of the Resurrection is sufficient. In one thing their procedure is shameless, and is seen by all to be so, namely, in claiming Ezra, though he is wholly on our side. And they are not ashamed to bring forward the books of the Maccabees, where a dead Jeremiah prays to the Lord on behalf of his warring people; and where prayers are made for the dead, that they may be delivered from their sins! Possibly they have other arguments, but they are unknown to me, as it has not been my lot to see all their fictions. I have not intentionally omitted anything which might mislead, or make any impression on the simple. I again desire all my

<sup>19</sup> A mortuo, quasi nihil, perit confessio: confiteberis vivens. CO 5, 223.

<sup>20</sup> Ecclesiasticus non hoc agit, ut ostendat mortuorum animas perire: sed dum hortatur, ut mature et per occasionem Deo confiteamur, simul docet, non esse confitendi tempus post mortem: hoc est, non esse locum poenitentiae. Quod si quis ipsorum adhuc obstrepit: quid perditionis filiis futurum sit, nihil ad nos. Ego pro fidelibus respondeo: non morientur, sed vivent, ac narrabunt opera Domini. CO 5, 227–228.

<sup>21</sup> Scholl, “Barth as Interpreter of Calvin’s *Psychopannychia*”, 295.

readers, if I shall have any, to remember that the Catabaptists (whom, as embodying all kinds of abominations, it is sufficient to have named) are the authors of this famous dogma. Well may we suspect anything that proceeds from such a forge — a forge which has already fabricated, and is daily fabricating, so many monsters.<sup>22</sup>

The quoted passage is the closing part of the *Psychopannychia*. The critique is sharply directed against the “Catabaptists”. And still: the use of the so-called deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament, including references to it, is not some “Catabaptist” peculiarity, since those books are contained both by the *Septuagint* and the *Vulgate*. Calvin himself refers to such Old Testament deuterocanonical writings – amongst them the Book of Wisdom, Sirach and Baruch, although he mentions that he considers these to be of somewhat lower rank than the canonical ones. The heirs of the “Catabaptists” – if they are today’s Baptists – also reject these books, like other churches of the Reformation. Calvin’s critique, therefore, at this point is *prima facie* directed against the “Catabaptists”, yet in fact it targets the Roman practice.

The strongest anti-Roman critique, however, can be observed at the point where Calvin – almost forgetting about himself – goes on to accuse the “Catabaptists” with something they could not have done exactly because of the previous charges brought against them. The opponents – according to Calvin – “are not ashamed to bring forward the books of the Maccabees, where a dead Jeremiah prays to the Lord on behalf of his warring people; and where prayers are made for the dead, that they may be delivered from their sins”. The solution is rather simple: if the Catabaptists – as Calvin claims – say that the soul after death is “sleeping” or even dies and resurrects together with the body at the last judgment, then they themselves cannot refer at the same time to the second book of the Maccabees in order to justify the prayers for the dead. If the soul is dead or asleep, there is no point in praying for her. Here one must apply the Aristotelian scientific postulate concerning the avoidance of mutually exclusive statements. The doctrine concerning “soul-sleep” or “the soul’s death” and the teaching about the necessity of praying for the dead are mutually exclusive. Consequently, nobody can be accused with upholding both teachings at the same time.

In my opinion, Calvin, the lawyer, at this point “overdefended” his case and contradicted himself. We could almost say that at the end of the work he involuntarily betrayed himself, since he tried to accuse the Catabaptists with something that was befitting the Roman church only. Thus, we need to modify McGrath’s and the others’ assessment: the *Psychopannychia* indeed contains anti-catholic polemic, with the flaw that within Calvin’s work (who lived at the time under Catholic rule and perhaps was keen to

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<sup>22</sup> Vibrant et alia quaedam, sed obtusa tela: quae nec feriunt, et terrent non multum. Citant enim nonnulla, minime ad rem facientia, eaque ex libris incertae fidei, quarto Esdrae et secundo Machabaeorum, quibus nihil aliud responsum volumus, quam quod prius disseruimus de resurrectione. Quanquam hic omnibus se produunt, quam sint perdita fronte, qui Esdras, quum totus noster sit, ad se trahere audent. Machabaeorum libros pro se proferre non verentur: ubi Ieremias mortuus Dominum precatur, pro belligerante populo; ubi instituuntur pro defunctis orationes, quibus a peccatis solvantur. Habent forte et alia: sed mihi incognita. Ut cui eorum commenta omnia videre non contigit. Nihil sane praeterii sciens, quod simpliciores vel de gradu deiicere, vel movere posset. Istud rursus lectores omnes (si qui tamen erunt) memoria tenere volo: Catabaptistas (quos, ad omne genus flagitiorum designandum, nominasse satis est) esse praeclari huius dogmatis auctores. Merito enim debet nobis esse suspectum, quidquid a tali officina proderit: quae tot portenta et fabricata est et quotidie fabricatur. *CO* 5, 231–232.

protect himself from any retribution) occasionally we should replace the “Catabaptists” with “papists”. NB: Calvin has already experienced the aftermath of Nicolas Cop’s academic opening speech! The fact that the above critique is indeed directed against Roman practice is clearly proven by the very sentence within which Calvin repeatedly reminds his readers, that the authors of this plainly famous dogma are the Catabaptists. In centrally governed, monarchic and highly controlled societies such practices are usually labelled as “beguiling” the censors. It appears, therefore, that the young French lawyer may have become a Reformer within himself well before the production of the *Institutes*, and it is this strengthening reformist conviction which surfaces between the lines of his first theological tract, almost betraying their author.

Finally let us move onto the question which is neither touched upon by the *Psychopannychia*, nor by its analysts – including Karl Barth. Although in his analysis there is a subtitle which alludes to time and eternity (*Zeit und Ewigkeit*),<sup>23</sup> he does deal with the question itself. I mean here the theme which could be represented as a fundamental difference between time and timeless eternity, as pointed out e.g. by Emil Brunner.<sup>24</sup> If we suppose that between the death of the person and the last judgment there is any time or interval, then – and only then – it is useful to wonder in what kind of state do the souls enter after death. We could almost say that if with his/her personal death the human being effectively “steps out” from the categories of immanent time and space known to us, then the *Psychopannychia*, as a work concerned to deal with this matter, becomes unnecessary. In order to see this, we must consider two factors:

1. eternity is not an endless continuation of time, but a reality or a condition beyond and above time;
2. every endeavour, which sets out to put eternity into human words, necessarily needs to use expressions limited by the categories of time and space. Therefore, this language will always be analogous and not direct.

In light of the above I apologise to the reader that – due to the limitation of our human mind as well as our “seeing in a mirror, dimly” (1Cor 13: 12) – I am compelled to speak about eternal things by using expressions which are bound to time and space.

Time – according to a widely accepted definition – is the measure of change, since all changes are measurable only in time. If we see the eternity not as a prolonged time, but a reality beyond it, then the human person who finished his/her life on earth does not go “somewhere”, does not participate at a “preliminary hearing” before God in order to spend the rest of the time (centuries, millennia?) somewhere, somehow until “the end of time”, but *immediately* – and I apologise again for using a time-bound expression – proceeds to the Last Judgment. This happens exactly because he/she “stepped out” of the bounds of time. Thus, there is no point in asking whether there are two judgments (one personal and one universal/final) or what the condition of the souls between death and judgment actually is. Consequently, there is no point in enquiring whether one could or should pray for them, or whether they could intercede for us.

Before casting this thought off as unbiblical or unacceptable for Christian theology, let us examine what is the product of the thought according to which the souls spend this “time” which “passes” between their death and the last judgment. First, we have to

<sup>23</sup> Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins 1922*, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe II: *Akademische Werke* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993), 203–207.

<sup>24</sup> Emil Brunner, *Das Ewige als Zukunft und Gegenwart* (München: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1965).

be clear that we have already projected our earthly time upon God's timeless world. Even admitting this, we must say that the souls cannot spend this postulated time in the presence of Christ, i.e. God, because He is beyond time and change. Since if together with Christ the souls of the dead are still living in time, it follows that even God himself must be subject to his own creature: time. This thought is worse than Arianism, since it postulates not only that the Son, but that the whole Trinity is subject to *chronos*, to time. It necessarily denies the teaching concerning God's immutability also.<sup>25</sup>

If, however, we can move beyond this human limit of time, and consider the past, the present and the future as being "simultaneous" within eternity, then neither the question of a first and second resurrection, nor of a first and second judgment present us with any problems. As Emil Brunner says,

The date of death is different for everyone, because the day of death belongs to this world. The date of our resurrection, however, is the same for everyone, and is not separated by any period of centuries, because this interval of time exists only here, in this world, and not there, in the presence of God, where "a thousand years are like one day".<sup>26</sup>

It is partly understandable why certain theologians or believers still cling to these "heavenly time-intervals". Since Christianity is not the religion of a small group, people who have difficulties understanding timeless existence, need this postulated, parallel heavenly time. See e.g. Revelation's teaching about the first and second death and resurrection. To this, in the freedom given to us by Christ we may simply say: let it be according to your faith. This neither causes division within us, nor does it rank one's faith above or under the other's.

With the spreading of time-travel films, however, more and more people are able to think beyond time and to contemplate simultaneously different events separated by time. Perhaps Brunner's ideas would be much more widely received today than they have been in 1953. Scripture leads the way for us in this matter also, since it furnishes examples where not only space, but also time is stretched: multiple timepieces end events are synchronised without anyone being surprised. For example, at a certain point during the Transfiguration (Mt. 17,3) "Moses and Elijah" appear and speak to Jesus. NB: here we read about the meeting of three and not merely two time-fragments or pieces, since Moses and Elijah are neither contemporaries of Jesus, nor of each other. Scripture, therefore "organises" this time-travel in its most natural way – then why would it be so difficult to think beyond time on a biblical basis? By which we could again follow the footsteps of our Reformers, since according to their expectations, we try to teach something better from Scripture to the Lord's people.

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<sup>25</sup> See e.g. the famous statement of Arius concerning the Son as the first and most perfect creature of the Father – a statement condemned by the anathema following the Nicene Creed: "there was when the Son was not [ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ Υἱός]". See Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica* I, 5. Cf. with Arius' letter to Bishop Alexander: "[the Son] was not before he was begotten [οὐκ ἦν πρὸ τοῦ γεννηθῆναι]". See Athanasius, *De synodis* 16 (TLG: *De synodis Arimini in Italia et Seleucia in Isauria* 16, 1, 1 – 16, 5, 6). The Nicene anathema expressly condemned all such statements. See Heinrich Denzinger – Adolf Schönmetzer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 33<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), \*126.

<sup>26</sup> Das Todesdatum ist für jeden ein verschiedenes; denn der Todestag gehört zu dieser Welt. Unser Auferstehungstag ist für alle derselbe und ist doch vom Todestag durch kein Intervall von Jahrhunderten getrennt – denn es gibt diese Zeitintervalle nur hier, nicht aber dort, in der Gegenwart Gottes, „wo tausend Jahre sind wie ein Tag“. See Brunner, *Das Ewige als Zukunft und Gegenwart*, 167.

At this point one may realise that dogmatics is not primarily a prescriptive, but a descriptive discipline: based on God's Word, asking for his Spirit's guidance one may try to *describe* that God saves the world (perhaps a bit also how he saves it). Nevertheless, one may never venture to *prescribe* for God how he should save this world.

## Reformátor – mióta?

### *A fiatal Kálvin teológiai viszonyulása a középkori egyházhoz: Újraértékelési kísérlet*

Kálvint a szakirodalom Nicolas Cop tanévnyitó beszéde epizódjának kivételével elvileg 1536-tól, az *Institutio* megjelenésétől tekinti reformátornak. Ebben az értelemben a korábbi megnyilatkozásait – jelesen a lelkek virrasztásáról szóló *Psychopamychiát* – kezdeti próbálkozásként tartják számon, és még a legismertebb elemzők is úgy vélik, hogy ebben a munkában még közvetett módon sem fogalmaz meg olyan kritikát, amely a római egyház valamelyik tanítását vagy gyakorlatát bírálná. Annak ellenére, hogy nyílt támadásról valóban nem beszélhetünk, a mű soraiban fellelhetők olyan elemek, amelyek mintegy előre jelzik a szerző későbbi nyílt küldetésvállalását. Kálvin a világ számára 1536-ban, önmaga előtt azonban már jóval korábban – feltehetőleg már a lelkek virrasztásával foglalkozó munka megírása idején – reformátorrá vált. Az általa érintett kérdések nem időszerűtlenek, noha ma már másként tevődnek fel.