

## THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON CALVIN: RESPONDING TO RECENT CALVIN INTERPRETATIONS

THOMAS L. WENGER\*

Within the last decade a noticeable shift has occurred in certain strains of Reformation scholarship that has challenged the traditional understanding of Calvin's theology in significant areas. One challenge that has recurred in several forms is the attempt to establish something of a realigning of Calvin's doctrines of justification and sanctification, asserting that the tradition has portrayed them too disparately. The alternative proposed by recent scholarship is the claim that rather than employing a distinct priority of justification to sanctification akin to that of the Reformed Scholastics, Calvin subsumed all his soteriology (and for some indeed his entire theology) under the rubric of union with Christ.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in the words of Richard Gaffin,

Calvin destroys Rome's charge [of antinomianism] by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without particular reference to justification, a concern for Godliness that is not to be understood only as a consequence of justification. Calvin proceeds as he does, and is free to do so, because for him the relative "ordo" or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically. Rather, what has controlling soteriological importance is the priority to both of (spiritual, "existential," faith-) to union with Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In calling this recent brand of Calvin interpretation the "New Perspective on Calvin" (hereafter NPC), I do not intend to infer illegitimate relations with NT studies, nor even with Mannermaa and the new Finnish school of Luther

\* Thomas Wenger resides at 625 Lion's Gate Lane, Odenton, MD 21113.

<sup>1</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards," *WTJ* 65 (2003) 165–79; Craig B. Carpenter, "A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification," *WTJ* 64 (2002) 363–86; Tim J. R. Trumper, "Covenant Theology and Constructive Calvinism," *WTJ* 64 (2002) 387–404; Jae Sung Kim, "*Unio cum Christo*: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998); Ronald N. Gleason, "The Centrality of the *Unio Mystica* in the Theology of Herman Bavinck" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001); David B. Garner, "Adoption in Christ" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002); Kevin Woongsan Kang, "Justified by Faith in Christ: Jonathan Edwards's Doctrine of Justification in Light of Union with Christ" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003); William Borden Evans, "Imputation and Impartation: The Problem of Union with Christ in Nineteenth Century American Reformed Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Gaffin, "Biblical Theology" 176–77.

interpretation.<sup>3</sup> While parallels may exist, there is no agenda here of establishing guilt by association.<sup>4</sup> In addition, I do not suggest even for a moment that there is a conscious mentality among the scholars here mentioned to establish a “new school” of Calvin interpretation, or that they are in concert with one another on all the issues involved. My grouping of them stems from their academic association with one another, their reliance on each other’s scholarship, and through their similar arguments in favor of a reinterpretation of Calvin’s notion of the relationship of justification and sanctification.<sup>5</sup>

While these scholars highlight aspects of Calvin’s thought that have perhaps not received proper attention at times, their reading of Calvin is, at the end of the day, an unfair one. The picture they paint is composed with questionable historiography and somewhat erratic collations of Calvin’s own words so that resultant work is not a faithful rendering of the subject himself, but something more resembling a self-portrait.

#### I. CALVIN AND UNION WITH CHRIST

The *Unio Mystica* has attracted more and more discussion across many theological strata, so it should come as no surprise that scholars have noted the important role that it plays in Calvin’s thought. What is of particular interest here, however, is the way in which the NPC has sought to establish this as Calvin’s central dogma, or architectonic principle and the consequential redefinition of the relationship of justification and sanctification referenced above.<sup>6</sup> Craig Carpenter, for instance, in his article “A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification” suggests that a proper understanding of Calvin’s notion of the *Unio Mystica* would invite consonant Catholic and Protestant dialogue on soteriology. He contends that “Calvin’s view of justification depends on his understanding of what he labels variously union with Christ, participation with Christ, engrafting into Christ, and communion with Christ . . . to a much greater degree than is commonly recognized.” He then argues, “Calvin differs from Rome on justification not

<sup>3</sup> See Carl E. Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Unio With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), especially Tuomo Mannermaa, “Why is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Interpretation” 1–20; see also Carl Trueman’s excellent review, “Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle,” *WTJ* 65 (2003) 231–44.

<sup>4</sup> Carpenter, however, actually invites comparison and suggests similarity with both the New Perspective on Paul and with Mannermaa (“Union with Christ” 364–66, 385).

<sup>5</sup> Gaffin cites Carpenter’s article as “a recent treatment on union with Christ and justification in Calvin, reaching similar conclusions” (Gaffin, “Biblical Theology” 177 n. 26); Carpenter thanks Gaffin and Trumper for insights on his article (Carpenter, “Union with Christ” 386 n. 61); similarly the four dissertations referenced above all interact to some degree with Gaffin and Trumper.

<sup>6</sup> The scholars referenced above have produced both articles and dissertations on this matter. In view of space and availability of the materials, I will interact primarily with the articles, and only occasionally with the doctoral dissertations. Of special importance though is Kim’s “*Unio cum Christo*” as it is relied upon by other NPC scholars and spends more time than the others establishing union as Calvin’s central dogma (see esp. pp. 114–55).

primarily in terms of the relative sequential occurrence of legal and subjective soteriological aspects, but rather in terms of the manner by which a sinner is united to Christ. If this can be established," he contends, "it suggests that Calvin's response to ECT and 'The Gift of Salvation' in particular and to Roman Catholicism in general might not be the same as that historically prosecuted by some of those who claim him as spiritual father."<sup>7</sup>

It appears that the NPC believes that one must either choose between union with Christ as Calvin's organizing principle or some other doctrine (they seem to imply that forensic justification is the likely option for their opponents). Carpenter, for example, explains, "As important as justification by imputed righteousness is for him, it is not justification by faith but union with Christ that is the controlling principle of the Reformer's doctrine of applied soteriology."<sup>8</sup>

How is it that they establish union with Christ as the lens through which Calvin's *ordo salutis* must be viewed? Each in their own fashion, these scholars attempt to discern an *ordo salutis* in Calvin that is inferred rather than exegeted from his writings, because they each proceed on the principle of assuming an *ordo salutis* based on Calvin's *ordo docendi* (order of teaching). Gaffin's argument is representative of the rest when he states:

First, the basic flow of Book 3 is instructive. Chapter 1, as already noted, introduces union with Christ by Spirit-created faith; chapter 2 further treats faith (its "definition" and "properties"); chapters 3–10 take up "regeneration by faith" and the Christian life ("regeneration" used here in a broader sense, equivalent to sanctification in subsequent theology); chapters 11–18 then focus on justification by faith (followed by chapters on Christian freedom, prayer, election, and the final resurrection). What is remarkable here is the "ordo"! Calvin discusses the change that takes place within the sinner, our ongoing inner renewal and personal transformation, *before* the definitive change effected in the sinner's legal status, our forensic standing *coram Deo*. He addresses the removal of the corrupting slavery of sin before considering the abolition of the guilt it incurs. All told, he treats sanctification, at length, before justification. Such an approach contrasts conspicuously with subsequent Reformed and Lutheran theology, where justification always (without exception?) precedes sanctification.<sup>9</sup>

Carpenter makes similar claims, saying, "It appears that Calvin's *ordo salutis* does not require the logical or temporal priority of a forensic act to a renovative act." Then, as Gaffin does, Carpenter moves to separate Calvin from later Calvinism: "Calvin may have been reluctant to join either side in subsequent Reformed debates about the priority of one aspect to the other, since the gift and exercise of faith that legally justifies us itself entails a moral change of disposition, viz., the will to believe the truth."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Carpenter, "Union with Christ" 365–66; see also Trumper, "Covenant Theology" 389. Trumper makes similar claims in his comparing Calvin with John Murray.

<sup>8</sup> Carpenter, "Union with Christ" 380.

<sup>9</sup> Gaffin, "Biblical Theology" 176 (emphasis original).

<sup>10</sup> Carpenter, "Union with Christ" 381.

Based upon this notion that Calvin subsumed his entire soteriology under union with Christ, as well as the assumption that the *ordo docendi* in the *Institutes* is Calvin's *ordo salutis*, they proceed then to argue their case for less distinction between his doctrines of justification and sanctification than has been traditionally permitted. Part of the evidence presented for this case is their claim that Calvin, unlike those to follow him in the Reformed tradition, functioned more as a biblical theologian than as a systematician. Though they make no outright claims that he was not a systematic theologian, there is nonetheless an attempt to pit his methods over against what is presumably the Protestant scholastic era. Gaffin argues that "[i]n an especially instructive and edifying way, unparalleled in the Reformed tradition as far as I have seen, [Calvin] shows the absolute necessity of *ordo salutis* concerns and at the same time has led the way in pointing to an *ordo salutis* faithful to the *historia salutis*, to an appropriation of salvation that honors the redemptive-historical structure and substance of Scripture."<sup>11</sup> And as already seen above, Gaffin claims that "[s]uch an approach contrasts conspicuously with subsequent Reformed and Lutheran theology, where justification always (without exception?) precedes sanctification."<sup>12</sup> Carpenter adds that such methodology "also intimates that Calvin, by his insistence on union with the exalted Christ as the means by which sinners benefit from God's salvation activity in Christ, may be more faithful to Paul's redemptive historical orientation than some critics admit his influence on reformed Protestantism to have been."<sup>13</sup> Describing what he sees as "the developmental disjunction between Calvin and his Reformed heirs," Carpenter concludes that "it is not clear that Calvin's view is entirely in line with that brand of protestant soteriology whose characteristic mark, A. A. Hodge notes, 'is the principle that the change of relation to the law signaled by the term justification . . . necessarily precedes and renders possible the real moral change of character signaled by the terms regeneration and sanctification.'<sup>14</sup> On a similar note William Evans contends, "Here the fundamental incompatibility of Calvin's view of union with Christ with the later *ordo salutis* should be noted. On Calvin's view, salvation is an organic unity communicated *in toto* through spiritual union with Christ. On the *ordo salutis* model, however, salvation is bestowed through a series of successive and discrete acts."<sup>15</sup> Trumper, perhaps the most explicit in this claim, establishes two kinds of Calvinists: orthodox and constructive. Describing (and endorsing) the latter, he says, "constructive Calvinists are usually the product of later Calvinism [post-Vos] and in sympathy with it, yet wish to see the moderate scholastic form of Westminster Calvinism recast in the biblical-theological approach to the theology of Scripture and, in the Reformed tradition, of Calvin most notably."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Gaffin, "Biblical Theology" 169–70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

<sup>13</sup> Carpenter, "Union with Christ" 366.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 385–86.

<sup>15</sup> Evans, "Imputation and Impartation," quoted in Carpenter, "Union with Christ" 383, n. 53.

<sup>16</sup> Trumper, "Covenant Theology" 403.

Thus, the picture of Calvin that emerges sets him against the Reformed theologians who succeeded him both in theological method and content. Calvin, they claim, is more sensitive to the redemptive historical themes of Paul, and less concerned with systematic formulae; thus establishing priority between the justifying and sanctifying actions of God is not something that concerned him. They claim that because union with Christ is his organizing principle, Calvin can speak of things like saving faith without reference to justification, and only in light of sanctification, without fear of theological incongruity.

## II. HISTORIOGRAPHIC CRITICISM

Historiographically, these formulations are problematic on several fronts. First, it is difficult to believe that this late in the game there are still Calvin vs. the Calvinists assertions being made, especially from these scholars. Over the last three decades Richard Muller has significantly reshaped the contours of the discussion of Reformed scholasticism, culling massive amounts of original sources to prove that the previously accepted view of the Scholastics is in stark contrast to the evidence. For years the reigning paradigm claimed that Reformed or Protestant scholasticism was essentially a rationalistic movement that established its theology on reason, Aristotelian principles, and the central dogma of the divine decree rather than on an exegetically based, Christocentric, biblical theology like that of Calvin. According to Muller, Alister McGrath's own description of Reformed Scholasticism provides "a nearly perfect summary of all that is wrong about the older scholarship."<sup>17</sup> McGrath argues that the Reformed scholastics departed from Calvin in establishing a theology that was "philosophical rather than biblical":

The Starting point of theology thus came to be general principles, not a specific historic event. The contrast with Calvin will be clear . . . Calvin focused on the specific historical phenomenon of Jesus Christ and moved out to explore its implications . . . By contrast, Beza began from general principles and proceeded to deduce their consequences for Christian theology.<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to this, Muller has provided indisputable evidence that the Reformed scholastics founded their theology on careful, meticulous exegesis, "produced biblical commentaries, critical texts, translations, hermeneutical studies" and "pioneered the use of Judaica in the study of Scripture."<sup>19</sup> Their use of reason and scholastic categories was simply their means of explaining and organizing their exegetically founded theology; for the Protestant scholastics reason was ministerial, not magisterial. Thus, there is no

<sup>17</sup> Richard Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism: A Review and a Definition," in Willem J. Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 47.

<sup>18</sup> Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 129–30, quoted in Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism" 46.

<sup>19</sup> Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism" 47.

“contrast” between their theology and Calvin’s in either method or content. There is a great deal more involved in this debate, and since there has been such a vast amount of work done in this area, surveying it here is unnecessary.<sup>20</sup>

What is perplexing about the NPC is that they are not ignorant of the Muller thesis; Carpenter actually avows fidelity to it, and Gaffin has even criticized others for not recognizing it.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that all of them pit Calvin against the later Reformed tradition, especially in the areas of biblical vs. systematic theology, is rather surprising.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, their reasons differ from those of McGrath, the Torrances, Rolston, Armstrong, Kendall and Hall, etc., but the same historiographic criticism applies.<sup>23</sup>

Second, the NPC, like Charles Partee, Otto Gründler, Robert Doyle, and Brian Armstrong specifically, but like many others generally, has not been able to resist the siren song of divining central dogmas in Calvin’s thought.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Van Asselt and Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism*; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); “Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy,” parts 1 and 2 in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 63–102; “Scholasticism in Calvin: A Question of Relation and Disjunction,” in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* (ed. William H. Neuser and Brian Armstrong; Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997) 247–66; *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); “The Myth of ‘Decretal Theology,’” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30/1 (1995) 159–67; “Found (No Thanks to Theodore Beza): One ‘Decretal’ Theology,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, 32/1 (1997) 145–51; Carl Trueman and Scott Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999); Jill Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza: Development of the Reformed Doctrine* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1972); Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Gaffin, “A New Paradigm in Theology?” *WTJ* 56 (1994) 386.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Kang, “Justified by Faith in Christ.” Throughout his dissertation he continually cites Muller approvingly but nevertheless pits Calvin against the later Reformed tradition with equal frequency.

<sup>23</sup> Muller and others have shown that the older scholarship operated within significantly Barthian categories and projected those into Calvin’s work, and this criticism does not apply to the NPC.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Partee, “Calvin’s Central Dogma Again,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18/2 (1987) 191–99; Otto Gründler, “John Calvin: Engrafting in Christ,” in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom* (ed. E. Rozanne Elder; Cistercian Studies Series 30; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976) 169–87; Brian Armstrong, “*Duplex Cognition Dei?* Or The Problem and Relation of Structure, Form and Purpose in Calvin’s Theology,” in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey* (ed. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian Armstrong; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989) 136–53; Robert C. Doyle, “The Preaching of Repentance in John Calvin: Repentance and Union with Christ,” in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays presented to David Broughton Knox* (Homebush West: Lancer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 287–321; see also D. Willis-Watkins, “The Unio Mystica and the Assurance of Faith According to John Calvin,” in *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag* (ed. Willem van’t Spijker; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991) 77–84; John D. Nichols, “‘Union with Christ’: John Calvin on the Lord’s Supper,” in *Union and Communion: 1529–1579* (Westminster Conference, 1979) 35–54; I. Howard Marshall, “Sanctification in the Teaching of John Wesley and John Calvin,” *EQ* 34 (1962) 75–82. Marshall says similar things of Calvin, though selecting sanctification rather than union as the “center of gravity of his theology” (p. 77).

The whole notion of “central dogmas” or “architectonic principles” stems from 19th-century historiographic method and characterizes Enlightenment theological construction, but cannot apply to Calvin and the mid-sixteenth century. Indeed, before the early 19th century, the entire notion of explaining theology through the use of central dogmas did not exist, thus any attempt to conjure up such a methodology in Calvin is quite anachronistic.<sup>25</sup> Again, the definitive scholarship of Richard Muller and T. H. L. Parker in this area should have precluded such quixotic missions, but nevertheless, the attempts still persist. As Muller has warned, however,

[T]he studies that examine a particular doctrine or complex of doctrines as Calvin’s central motif are invariably organized and argued in ways that do not reflect either the patterns of organization found in Calvin’s own text or statements that Calvin makes himself concerning the argumentation of his work. Here in particular doctrinal statements made in the *Institutes* tend to be harmonized with the statements made in the commentaries, sermons, and treatises with the explicit intention of uncovering theological structures not revealed by Calvin to his readers.<sup>26</sup>

This is a fair description of the NPC’s suggestions that union with Christ is Calvin’s interpretive paradigm; their attempt to justify this “controlling principle” results in “uncovering” an *ordo salutis* in Calvin that is foreign to his thought altogether and is thus imposed on his work rather than naturally arising from Calvin’s own words or explanations of intent. This is not to downplay the importance of Calvin’s doctrine of union with Christ; it is clearly a crucial component of his system. Nevertheless, it does not function as the governing paradigm that they claim. But neither does forensic justification, or any other doctrine. The point is not to argue the centrality of justification over that of union with Christ; rather, the point is that Calvin did not organize or establish his theology on *any one* principle but instead organized it, in the *Institutes*, according to the *ordo docendi* of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.<sup>27</sup>

Third, the NPC thesis stands or falls on whether or not Calvin’s *ordo docendi* functions as his *ordo salutis*. The NPC is left to rely on Calvin’s order of teaching and to proceed by mere assertion that it functions as his *ordo salutis* because Calvin clearly never set out to establish a formal taxonomy of the logical or temporal order of salvation. Several problems ensue from this. First, the whole notion of describing “Calvin’s *ordo salutis*” and in so doing comparing it with those of later generations is again anachronistic.

<sup>25</sup> Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism” 49.

<sup>26</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 5; see also T. H. L. Parker, “The Approach to Calvin,” *EQ* 16 (1944) 165–72.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 118–30; “*Ordo Docendi*: Melancthon and the Organization of Calvin’s *Institutes*, 1536–1543,” in *Melancthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg* (ed. Karin Maag; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 123–40; “*Scimus Enim Quod Lex Spiritualis Est*: Melancthon and Calvin on the Interpretation of Romans 7:14–23,” in *Phillip Melancthon (1497–1560) and the Commentary*, ed. Timothy Wengert and Patrick Graham (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 216–37; Wilhelm Pauck, “Calvin’s *Institutes* of the Christian Religion,” *Church History* 15 (1946) 17–27.

His lack of explanation on the topic should not be read as being either for or against the possibility of such constructions; rather, it should be made clear that his concerns did not involve establishing an explicit position for debates in which he was not involved and which arose after his time. Thus his silence on the issue should demand the same from his interpreters. This is not to say, however, that Calvin did not believe in *any* logical, scriptural, or temporal order in the realm of soteriology but rather that the notion of attributing to him some kind of formal *ordo salutis* is an anachronistic endeavor.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the fact that the internal and contextual evidence does not show that Calvin intended to explicate an *ordo salutis* in Book 3, the historical context and external influences which led Calvin to establish the *ordo docendi* of the *Institutes* are nowhere referenced by any of these scholars. That they each fail to interact with Muller and others on this point is conspicuously negligent. Though Carpenter, at least, cites him at points, nevertheless the substantial work that Muller has done explaining the origin and purpose of Calvin's *ordo docendi* is completely ignored.<sup>29</sup>

What Muller has shown in numerous places is that Melanchthon affected a definitive impact on the Reformation as a whole in his insistence on the centrality of Romans as an interpretive grid for theology. From his earliest, *Theologia institutio in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (1519), to the *Loci communes theologici* (1521), the *Annationes in Epistolas Pauli ad Romanos* (1522), and finally his 1532 *Commentary on Romans*, Melanchthon exerted a wide-ranging influence on both the content and methodology of Reformation theology.<sup>30</sup> Calvin took from Melanchthon not only the belief that Romans supplied the key doctrinal content of Christianity, but also, in Muller's words, "Melanchthon's very specific sense of the topical arrangement of Romans as the ideal point of departure for theology."<sup>31</sup>

Crucial to the development of Calvin's *ordo docendi* is the disagreement that he had with Melanchthon over the art of commentary. From 1536 until the completion of his first commentary published in 1540, Calvin wrestled with how properly to construct biblical commentary as he worked through

<sup>28</sup> See Muller, *Christ and the Decree*. He notes Calvin's discussions of the importance of explaining causal order primarily on the topic of predestination in his comments on Ephesians 1 and on Rom 8:28 (vv. 24–25), yet he explains later that it is not until the early Reformed orthodoxy of the late 16th century that formal *ordo salutis* formulations actually begin to develop (pp. 73–75, 124–25, 175–82).

<sup>29</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* 118–30; "Ordo Docendi" 123–40; "Scimus Enim Quod Lex Spiritualis Est" 216–37.

<sup>30</sup> Muller, "Ordo Docendi" 136; *The Unaccommodated Calvin* 118–39; "Scimus Enim Quod Lex Spiritualis Est" 224–27; see also Robert Kolb, "Melanchthon's Influence on the Exegesis of his Students: The Case of Romans 9," in *Phillip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and the Commentary* 194–215; Wengert, "The Biblical Commentaries of Phillip Melanchthon," in *Phillip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and the Commentary* 106–48.

<sup>31</sup> Muller, "Ordo Docendi" 137; A characteristic account of the development of the *Institutes* without any reference to Luther's Melanchthon's influence can be seen in Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 77–102.

his exposition of Romans.<sup>32</sup> In Calvin's view the discussion of *loci* did not belong within the text of commentaries but rather in separate, specifically theological discussions (creeds, catechisms, *disputationes*, etc).<sup>33</sup> Including such elements within the commentary text itself violated, for Calvin, the crucial principle of "lucid brevity" (*brevitas et facilitas*): that of adhering to the exegesis of the scriptural text but doing so "expeditiously."<sup>34</sup>

In Calvin's wrestling with his Romans exposition, it seems that he did indeed encounter many topics that he desired to discuss. Thus his belief that such *loci* and *disputationes* which arise from exegesis should be included in works *other than* commentaries led Calvin to follow Melanchthon's pattern in the 1535 *Loci Communes* and to restructure the 1539 *Institutes* around the Pauline *ordo docendi* of Romans, while still retaining much of the original catechetical content from the 1536 edition.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the chapters that Calvin added to the 1539 edition are exactly the topics that Melanchthon listed as Paul's *Loci* in Romans, and they are placed in the identical *ordo docendi*.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, there is not the substantial shift that many claim exists between the ordering of the 1539 and 1559 versions of the *Institutes*. Though Calvin did indeed add somewhat of a creedal structure (and considerably more content) to the final edition, this was only a "relative" structure not to be taken too rigidly.<sup>37</sup> The Pauline *ordo docendi* is still the prominent organizing principle to the work, so that it is acceptable to talk of soteriological elements in Book 2, as well as Christological elements in Book 3

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947). See the dedicatory epistle to Simon Grynaeus, where Calvin takes issue with Melanchthon for not commenting enough on the text of Scripture in favor of expounding various loci, and with Bucer for a prolix style that is inaccessible to most readers; T. H. L. Parker, "Calvin the Biblical Expositor," in *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism: Calvin and Hermeneutics*, vol. 6 (ed. Richard C. Gamble; New York: Garland, 1992) 65–73.

<sup>33</sup> Muller, "Ordo Docendi" 136–37; see also Elsie Anne McKee, "Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition* 154–72.

<sup>34</sup> Muller, "Ordo Docendi" 126; see also Richard Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," *WTJ* 47 (1985) 1–17; "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is there Anything New?" in *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988) 178–94; "Exposition and Method in Calvin," *WTJ* 49 (1987) 153–65. Calvin described this principle in the dedicatory epistle addressed to Simon Grynaeus in his very first commentary in 1539, recalling that they both agreed that "the chief excellency of an expounder consists in lucid brevity. And, indeed, since it is almost his only work to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain, the degree in which he leads away his readers from it, in that degree he goes astray from his purpose, and . . . from his own boundaries." Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947) xxiii–xxiv.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 134–38; *The Unaccommodated Calvin* 28–29, 133–34; see also Wilhelm Pauck, "Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*" 19–21.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>37</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* 133–35; see also Jean-Daniel Benoit, "The History and Development of the *Institutio*: How Calvin Worked," in *John Calvin: A Collection of Essays* (ed. Gervase E. Duffield; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 109–10.

without an overzealous application of the I. *God*, II. *Christ*, III. *Spirit*, IV. *Church* structure prohibiting such flexibility. Thus Muller concludes that in the final 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, “the Pauline order remains determinative: the original order of sin, law, grace, Old and New Testaments, predestination has been interspersed with other topics but not altered.”<sup>38</sup>

Hence, if Calvin was following Melanchthon’s description of Paul’s organization of Romans, then it is improper to assume that his *ordo docendi* is tantamount to an *ordo salutis*, because his intent was not to describe such a thing at all. In addition, it is improper to begin in Book 3 and interpret it in isolation from the rest. The entire *Institutes* follows the Pauline order and thus must be interpreted in that light. So to claim, as the NPC does, that Calvin used union with Christ as his organizing soteriological principle based on their assumed *ordo salutis* beginning in Book 3 not only lacks internal evidence but is also completely out of accord with the historical context of the *Institutes*’ development.

One reason that the NPC has ignored these considerable influences from Melanchthon is because they frequently pit Lutherans and Calvin against one another on issues such as justification, thus precluding the possibility of Lutheran influence in many areas of Calvin’s doctrine and method. Characteristic of this attempt is David Garner’s claim that “Calvin and Luther shared much in common in the Protestant movement, but their respective hermeneutical and theological differences must not be discarded. To do so is to confuse Reformed theology and Lutheranism, and to read into Calvin a Lutheran concept of justification by faith. In truth, Luther and Calvin differed not only on the Lord’s Table, but also on the very heart of sola fide!”<sup>39</sup> So in addition to overlooking the previously referenced scholarship from Muller on these matters, they ignore critical contributions from Timothy Wengert, Alexandre Ganoczy, Francois Wendel, Wilhelm Neuser, Wilhelm Van’t Spijker, Jean-Daniel Benoit, and others which firmly establish the significant role that Luther and Melanchthon played in the formulation of Calvin’s thought, not only in the method but also in the content of his theology.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* 135.

<sup>39</sup> David Garner, “The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology: A Review,” *TrinJ* NS 23 (2002) 291–94.

<sup>40</sup> Wengert, “The Biblical Commentaries of Phillip Melanchthon,” in *Phillip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and the Commentary* 106–48; “We Will Feast Together in Heaven Forever: The Epistolary Friendship of John Calvin and Phillip Melanchthon,” in *Melanchthon in Europe* 19–44; “Philip Melanchthon’s 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism,” in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of his Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Richard A. Muller and John Thompson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 118–40; Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (trans. Philip Mairet; London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., 1974). See esp. 122–23, 131–35, 142 where Wendel spends a considerable amount of time proving the Lutheran influence on the theology of Calvin; W. H. Neuser, “The Development of the *Institutes* 1536–1559,” in *John Calvin’s Institutes: His Opus Magnum* (ed. B. Van der Walt Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1986) 33–54; Wilhelm Van’t Spijker, “The Influence of Luther on Calvin According to the *Institutes*,” in *John Calvin’s Institutes: His Opus Magnum* 83–105;

Consequently, they also ignore Calvin's own words of admiration for Luther and Melancthon and the agreement he saw between them theologically, despite the differences they had. In fact, not only did Calvin sign the Augsburg Confession, but he acknowledged as late as 1557 that "in regard to the Confession of Augsburg my answer is, that it does not contain a word contrary to our doctrine."<sup>41</sup> To clarify just how faithfully he intended to interpret the words of the Confession, he said, "As to their meaning . . . to whom can I better appeal than to the author himself? If he declares that I deviate in the smallest from his idea, I will immediately submit."<sup>42</sup>

To exegete Calvin properly, then, one must take these issues into account in order present a fair reading that gives proper weight to his historical context. Thus attempts to establish "Calvin's *ordo salutis*" ought to be abandoned in favor of researching the writings where he specifically *intends* to discuss logical, scriptural, or temporal order in soteriology. Likewise, the "union" thesis must be discarded, because it paints a false and anachronistic portrait of Calvin.

### III. EXEGETICAL CRITICISM

I said earlier that in addition to problematic historiography, the NPC utilizes erratic readings of Calvin to establish its case. As all too frequently happens in debates of this sort, each side can seemingly "out-proof-text" the other, often leading to futile stalemates. So my goal is not merely to provide contrary quotations, but rather to show that the way in which the NPC selects its evidence from Calvin is just as flawed as its historiography and that it proceeds to a large degree from it.

Rather than a proper exegesis of Calvin, the NPC frequently culls quotations from various and sundry locations in his work and then arranges them without proper concern for their original proximity. In addition, its proponents often give less than objective interpretations to his words which do not do justice to his actual position. To a degree this occurs, it seems, because of the artificial interpretive grid these scholars have brought to the text, which has not arisen out of an impartial comparison of elements within Calvin's broader corpus.

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"The Influence of Bucer on Calvin as Becomes Evident from the *Institutes*," 106–32; Jean-Daniel Benoit, "The History and Development of the *Institutio*: How Calvin Worked" 102–17; I. John Hesselink, "The Development and Purpose of Calvin's 'Institutes,'" *Reformed Theological Review* 24 (1965) 65–72; James T. Hickman, "The Friendship of Melancthon and Calvin," *WTJ* 38 (1976) 152–65; Brian Gerrish, "John Calvin on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 67–96; David Willis, "The Social Context of the 1536 Edition of Calvin's *Institutes*," in *In Honor of John Calvin, 1509–1564: Papers from the 1986 International Calvin Symposium McGill University* (ed. E.J. Furcha; Montreal: Faculty of Religious Studies McGill University, 1987) 133–43; August Lang, "The Sources of Calvin's *Institutes* of 1536," *EQ* 8 (1936) 130–41.

<sup>41</sup> Calvin, "Last Admonition of John Calvin to Joachim Westphal," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 2 (ed. Henry Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 355.

<sup>42</sup> Calvin, "Second Defence of the Pious and Orthodox Faith Concerning the Sacraments, in Answer to the Calumnies of Joachim Westphal," in *Selected Works of John Calvin*, 2.277.

The NPC exhibits a prime example of this in the fact that its adherents treat Calvin's discussion of soteriology as if it begins in Book 3 seemingly without recognizing that it follows on the heels of Book 2. Thus they make their claims that in Calvin's *ordo salutis* sanctification precedes justification. However, according to the Romans *ordo docendi*, a major discussion of justification is in fact found in *Inst.* 2.16–17. To be sure, those who favor other imposed interpretive grids may find it improper to categorize *loci* in Book 2 as referring to anything but Christology, but again, such a grid is foreign to Calvin. As Muller says, “[I]nasmuch as the *soteriological* discussion of *Institutes*, Book II continues to follow the Pauline *ordo* added by Calvin to the 1539 edition . . . the creedal model fully accounts for the order and arrangement of the 1559 edition.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore there are significant aspects of redemption and the application of redemption that *precede* Book 3 and must be accounted for in order to interpret Calvin's soteriology properly.

Important to note here is the main theme that Calvin discerned in the Epistle to the Romans; for it was not union with Christ, but rather justification by faith that he thought was the primary purpose of Paul's letter. As he says in his summary of the argument, “[W]hen any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture. The whole Epistle is so methodical, that even its very beginning is framed according to the rules of art . . . [A]nd thus he enters on the main subject of the whole Epistle—justification by faith.”<sup>44</sup>

Thus, Gaffin contends that “Calvin proceeds as he does, and is free to do so, because for him the relative ‘ordo’ or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically,” not because Calvin actually argued such things, but only because of the illegitimately inferred *ordo salutis*.<sup>45</sup> When one looks for Calvin's actual arguments on the matter, he is quite explicit that when explaining these doctrines, one ought *never* to establish sanctification before justification, but rather that the former is always to be founded upon the latter.

Simply consulting Calvin's account of why he explained things in the order that he did in the *Institutes* clarifies whether or not he thought beginning with justification or sanctification was “indifferent theologically.” In the *Institutes* 3.11.1 the *locus* devoted to justification by faith, Calvin explained his rationale:

I believe I have already explained above, with sufficient care, how for men cursed under the law there remains, in faith, one sole means of recovering salvation. I believe I have also explained what faith itself is, and those benefits of God which it confers upon man, and the fruits it brings forth in him. Let us sum these up. Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and *secondly*, that

<sup>43</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* 134 (emphasis added).

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on Romans: The Argument* xxix.

<sup>45</sup> Gaffin, “Biblical Theology” 177.

sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life. Of regeneration [sanctification], indeed, the *second* of these gifts, I have said what seemed sufficient.<sup>46</sup>

So far Calvin explained that he had actually already touched on justification and that it is the primary of the "double graces," describing sanctification twice as "secondary." But then he proceeded to explain his purpose more fully:

The theme of justification was therefore more lightly touched upon because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned. Therefore we must now discuss these matters thoroughly. And we must so discuss them as to bear in mind that *this is the main hinge on which religion turns*, so that we devote the *greater* attention and care to it. For unless you *first* of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a *foundation* on which to establish your salvation *nor one on which to build piety* toward God.<sup>47</sup>

Thus there is no need to attempt to deduce Calvin's reasons for the order of his explanation and thus no legitimacy in inferring theological indifference toward beginning with justification or sanctification. He clearly places justification in a primary position theologically, and even explains his rationale: that sanctification is impossible if not founded on justification.

A multitude of other references could be given where Calvin argued a similar case, and in each case his expressed purpose is to clarify the relationship of justification and sanctification. His refutation of Osiander is pertinent in this discussion for several reasons. Though Osiander's definition of union with Christ is most certainly different from the scholars mentioned here, nevertheless, a commingling of justification and sanctification resulted. Calvin noted the fact that even though Scripture often joins notions of justification and sanctification, it "*still lists them separately* in order that God's manifold grace may better appear to us." He then added, "For Paul's statement is not redundant: that Christ was given to us for our righteousness and sanctification. And whenever he reasons—*from* the salvation purchased for us, *from* God's fatherly love, and *from* Christ's grace—that we are called to holiness and cleanness, he clearly indicates that to be justified means something different from being made new creatures."<sup>48</sup> It is clear that in Calvin's mind, Paul reasons *from* the fact that we are justified *to* the consequent work of sanctification.

<sup>46</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, vols. XX–XXI (ed. J. T. McNeill; trans. F. L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 3.11.1. Unless otherwise noted, all references to the *Institutes* are from this edition. Second references (hereafter referred to as *CO*) are all from Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia* (ed. Wilhelm Baum, Edward Zcunitz, Edward Reutz; 59 vols.; *Corpus Reformatorum*, vols. 29–98; Brunswick: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863–1900) *CO* 2, col. 533.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 3.11.1; *CO* 2, col. 533.

<sup>48</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.6; *CO* 2, col. 537 (emphasis added).

Calvin made this point even clearer when he expressed his concern for the practical outworking of Osiander's accusation that justification *sola fide* necessarily led to antinomianism. Though the NPC, as we have seen, claims that Calvin refuted this charge "by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without particular reference to justification,"<sup>49</sup> his words here prove otherwise:

Osiander objects that it would be insulting to God and contrary to his nature that he should justify those who actually remain wicked. Yet we must bear in mind what I have already said, that the grace of justification is not separated from regeneration, although they are things distinct. But because it is very well known by experience that the traces of sin always remain in the righteous, their justification must be very different from reformation into newness of life. For God so begins this *second* point in his elect, and progresses in it gradually, and sometimes slowly, throughout life, that they are always liable to the judgment of death before his tribunal. But he does not justify in part but liberally, so that they may appear in heaven as if endowed with the purity of Christ. No portion of righteousness sets our consciences at peace until it has been determined that we are pleasing to God, because we are entirely righteous before him. From this it follows that the doctrine of justification is perverted and utterly overthrown when doubt is thrust into men's minds, when the assurance of salvation is shaken and the free and fearless calling upon God suffers hindrance—nay, when peace and tranquility with spiritual joy are not established. Thence Paul argues from contraries that the inheritance does not come from the law, for in this way "faith would be nullified." For faith totters if it pays attention to works, since no one, even of the most holy, will find there anything on which to rely.<sup>50</sup>

In a similar vein, when seeking to help the Christian understand the relationship of justification to sanctification for their assurance, Calvin argued, "Paul consistently denies that peace or quiet joy are retained in consciences unless we are convinced that we are 'justified by faith.'" What then is the source of the Christian's assurance? It occurs "when 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.' It is as if he had said that our souls cannot be quieted unless we are surely persuaded that we are pleasing to God. . . . Therefore, those who prate that we are justified by faith because, being reborn, we are righteous by living spiritually have never tasted the sweetness of grace, so as to consider that God will be favorable to them."<sup>51</sup> Calvin is careful to remind his readers that "[t]his surely does not take place through the gift of regeneration [sanctification], which, as it is always imperfect in this flesh, so contains in itself manifold grounds for doubt." Rather, "[W]e must come to this remedy: that believers should be convinced that their only ground of hope for the inheritance of a Heavenly Kingdom lies in the fact that, being engrafted in the body of Christ, they are freely accounted righteous. For, as regards justification, faith is something

<sup>49</sup> Gaffin, "Biblical Theology" 176.

<sup>50</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.11; *CO* 2, col. 542.

<sup>51</sup> *Inst.* 3.13.5; *CO* 2, col. 563.

merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but receiving from Christ that which we lack."<sup>52</sup> This explanation is especially informative because Calvin utilized the language of union (engrafting) with Christ, but only as a means of further describing the proper distinction between justification and sanctification, rather than a blurring of categories or of their order.

Thus, in Calvin's formulation, for sanctification to proceed, it must be grounded in justification and theologically cannot happen in another order. Nowhere is he more adamant in this regard than in his *Antidote to Trent*, where he boldly declares, "In short, I affirm, that not by our own merit but by faith alone, are both our persons and works justified; and that the justification of works depends on the justification of the person, as the effect on the cause. Therefore, it is necessary that the righteousness of faith alone so precede in order, and be so pre-eminent in degree, that nothing can go before it or obscure it."<sup>53</sup> Clearly Calvin is far from "indifferent" on this issue.

Perhaps the more blatantly revisionist claims occur in Carpenter's suggestions that due to the alleged common ground that both Calvin and Trent shared on the issue of union with Christ, Calvin's response "to Roman Catholicism in general might not be the same as that historically prosecuted by some of those who claim him as spiritual father."<sup>54</sup> Oddly enough, Carpenter marshals quotations from Calvin's *Reply to Sadoletto* and his *Antidote to Trent* to justify this assertion—two of the places where Calvin is most vehement in his condemnation of Rome. Again, as Muller described above, this method of interpretation is "invariably organized and argued in ways that do not reflect either the patterns of organization found in Calvin's own text or statements that Calvin makes himself concerning the argumentation of his work," and are construed "with the explicit intention of uncovering theological structures not revealed by Calvin to his readers."<sup>55</sup> So while Carpenter's claim is that the priority that both Trent and Calvin gave to union with Christ should establish more positively affable relations than later Reformed generations have extended toward Rome, Calvin's actual words to Sadoletto point to anything but fraternal potential:

You, in the first place, touch upon justification by faith, the first and keenest subject of controversy between us. Is this a knotty and useless question? Wherever the knowledge of it is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion abolished, the Church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown. That doctrine, then, though of the highest moment, we maintain that you have nefariously effaced from the memory of men. Our books are filled with convincing proofs of this fact, and the gross ignorance of this doctrine, which even still continues in all your churches, declares that our complaint is

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, "Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote," *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 3 (ed. Henry Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 128 (emphasis added).

<sup>54</sup> Carpenter, "Union with Christ" 366.

<sup>55</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* 5.

by no means ill founded. But you very maliciously stir up prejudice against us, alleging that, by attributing every thing to faith, we leave no room for works.<sup>56</sup>

Apparently ignoring the combative tenor of this passage, Carpenter then skips the bulk of Calvin's refutation of Sadoletto's charge, and only quotes the portion that touches on union with Christ.<sup>57</sup> This manner of selectivity then permits him to say that Calvin essentially argued that "[t]he sinner's faith-embrace of Christ is the moment when he comes into communion with Christ and therefore receives saving righteousness." He notes that "this is fully gratuitous . . . and Calvin affirms that righteousness is imputed. But his dominant point is that 'God hath reconciled us to himself in Jesus Christ. The mode is afterwards subjoined—by not imputing sin.'"<sup>58</sup> Soon after this Carpenter states, "Trent, as we have seen, agrees that 'he who has obtained justification possesses Christ' the first premise in Calvin's argument."<sup>59</sup>

However, the portion that Carpenter chose to omit from Calvin's response to Sadoletto's allegation concerning "justification by faith, *the first and keenest subject of controversy between us*" actually shows that union with Christ is not his "dominant point," nor anywhere near his "first premise." In fact, Calvin plainly established his first and following premises:

First, we bid a man begin by examining himself, and this not in a superficial and perfunctory manner, but to sist his conscience before the tribunal of God, and when sufficiently convinced of his iniquity, to reflect on the strictness of the sentence pronounced upon all sinners. Thus confounded and amazed at his misery, he is prostrated and humbled before God; and, casting away all self-confidence, groans as if given up to final perdition. Then we show that the only haven of safety is in the mercy of God, as manifested in Christ, in whom every part of our salvation is complete. As all mankind are, in the sight of God, lost sinners, we hold that Christ is their only righteousness, since, by his obedience, he has wiped off our transgressions; by his sacrifice, appeased the divine anger; by his blood, washed away our stains; by his cross, borne our curse; and by his death, made satisfaction for us.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly Calvin's first premise is actually the guilt of humanity as it is exposed by the law of God. Once this is established the next premise of his argument is the proclamation of the Gospel, which in this instance, he centers on notions of acquittal, justification, and imputed righteousness. Only after this discussion does he mention union with Christ, hence showing it to be an *aspect* of his argument, but hardly his "first premise" or his "dominant point."

<sup>56</sup> Calvin, "Reply to Cardinal Sadoletto," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 1 (ed. Henry Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 41.

<sup>57</sup> The portion he quotes is as follows: "We maintain that in this way man is reconciled in Christ to God the Father, by no merit of his own, by no value of works, but by gratuitous mercy. When we embrace Christ by faith, and come, as it were, into communion with him, this we term, after the manner of Scripture, the righteousness of faith." Carpenter, "Union with Christ" 372.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 372–73.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 372.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, "Reply to Sadoletto" 41–42 (emphasis added).

Fairness to Calvin demands that we take him at his word; that here he is primarily concerned with correcting the Roman doctrine of justification, and to set the record straight he sought to clarify several issues. If the harmony between Calvin and Rome actually existed on the issue of union with Christ, why did Calvin not see this as an issue on which to capitalize strategically? Suggesting such harmony ignores two things. The first is the fact that Calvin's prominent descriptions of Romanists are significantly more pejorative than what one typically sees today among Calvinists. His frequent use of terms such as "antichrist," "Satanic," and especially "devilish" to denote all things popish certainly reveals the lack of common ground that Calvin saw between himself and Rome. The second and more important issue, however, is that none of his *disputationes* deal primarily with union with Christ, nor is there a single chapter devoted to it in the entire *Institutes*.<sup>61</sup> While Calvin wove this concept throughout many of his works and pondered it at times with pointed significance, all that this can prove is that he viewed it as important.<sup>62</sup> One cannot, based on this evidence, move beyond it to establish union with Christ as Calvin's controlling idea. Thus any attempt to make it an architectonic principle for him must employ what Muller described as the "uncovering" method. For the sake of brevity I must conclude here, but a good deal more could be said.<sup>63</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Summarily, the NPC is not wrong to point out the importance that union with Christ plays in Calvin's thought. It is obviously significant and any attempt to downplay it will to that degree interpret Calvin improperly. However, the 19th-century historiographic method of divining central dogmas in eras when no such preoccupation drove theological construction must be avoided by anyone who desires to paint a fair portrait of Calvin. Therefore not only is the notion that union with Christ is Calvin's architectonic principle inaccurate, but so also the consequent attempts to redefine the relationship of justification and sanctification in his thought. Hence, it seems as though theological presuppositions have driven this interpretation of Calvin more than fair and accurate exegesis of his own words.

Thus, the lines connecting the New Perspective on Calvin emerge. These scholars, in pointing to important aspects of Calvin's theology, nevertheless do damage to his actual formulations by realigning his doctrines of justification

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, there is not a single *locus* devoted to union with Christ in the *Institutes*. The closest one finds are in Calvin's refutations of Osiander, and these clearly serve polemical rather than foundational purposes.

<sup>62</sup> See Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994). He includes in a helpful appendix a detailed list of references to union with Christ throughout many of Calvin's works.

<sup>63</sup> See particularly Calvin's harsh words condemning what he saw as an improper construing of justification and sanctification in, "Antidote to Trent," in *Tracts and Treatises*, vol. 3, esp. 110–20.

and sanctification in a manner that blurs the precise distinctions that Calvin made quite clear. Hence, they negate the careful ordering of Calvin's theology by illegitimately equating his *ordo docendi* with an *ordo salutis*. In this, they have not only failed to acknowledge definitive contributions of many scholars but most notably the work Richard Muller has done to explain both the proper method of reading Calvin in his context, and the major role that both Luther and Melancthon played in influencing the content and organization of Calvin's *Institutes*. One would hope that the groundbreaking accomplishments of Oberman, Steinmetz, and Muller would preclude such methods and point interpreters of history in the direction of fairer exegesis of texts, and more thorough investigation of historical context.