

“SO MANY COAXING NUDGES”: RHETORICAL PERSUASION AND THE LAW’S THIRD USE IN CALVIN’S DECALOGUE SERMONS

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AMONG CALVIN’S CRITICS, a common objection still persists to the effect that the reformer was a heavy-handed and unrelenting taskmaster, consumed by a self-determined duty to impel personal angst and impose harsh moral discipline in the city of Geneva. Advocates of this portrait, such as Susan Karant-Nunn, believe it likely that Calvin’s penchant for persuading the impenitent of their guilt and unworthiness accounts for his fabled moniker, “the accusative case.”¹ Moreover, Calvin’s legal training, with its emphasis on classical rhetorical models and persuasive oratory, has been blamed for Calvin’s “legalist” and “severe” pulpit invocations.²

In recent years, however, Reformation scholars have attempted to acquire a more accurate impression of how Calvin’s humanistic training and explicit rhetorical emphases had a positive, even invigorating and pastorally encouraging, influence on his pulpit

1. Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131. Karant-Nunn does not provide strong evidence to confirm that Calvin actually received this nickname, but in footnote 181 (p. 299) she provides a line from Theodore Beza’s Calvin biography, in which he indicates that a youthful Calvin was quick to point out his companions’ lapses in virtue. Karant-Nunn’s fascinating book is mostly critical of Calvin’s pulpit rhetoric, drawing unfavorable conclusions about the supposed emotional consequences of his preaching. From her narrowed examination of Calvin’s Passion sermons, the author finds him “dour” and most “disciplinary,” a man determined to convince his listeners of “their utter worthlessness.” In her view, Calvin is “vindictive,” even hypocritical, “sometimes forgetting even rhetorically to include himself within the ranks of the wretched” (p. 128). In short, Karant-Nunn feels that Calvin’s sermonic language “is immoderate and often violent. Any who were sensitive and listened carefully could have come away from sermon after sermon with a diminished sense of their adequacy in dealing with the world,” rather than a consoling knowledge of God’s paternal goodness and love (p. 129). A subsidiary purpose of this essay is to evaluate whether Karant-Nunn’s negative estimation of Calvin prevails after assessing the mood and content of Calvin’s Decalogue sermons.

2. William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 54. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 104, believes that Calvin’s “natural affinity” was not to console or encourage his listeners from the pulpit. Rather, because his pulpit exhortation followed the “Mannerist” style, it exhibited “the qualitative intersection between his severe pulpit oratory and the discipline meted out weekly by the Genevan Consistory....”

ministry in Geneva. In general, these studies treat the rhetorical process as a complex of social, cultural, and theological factors. One approach that has garnered significant scholarly interest examines how Calvin applied classical and Renaissance rhetorical methods to his scriptural exposition in order to build upon his theological “commonplaces,” that is, Calvin’s disputative analysis of fundamental points of doctrine located in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.³ Other scholars have focused attention upon the reformer’s historical milieu by examining how Calvin’s sermonic style and intentions are illumined by his unique pastoral skills, personal characteristics, and the socio-historical situation of the Genevan church.⁴ Still others have considered the art of clerical persuasion during the Reformation, assessing ways in which Calvin and his contemporaries artfully employed certain rhetorical methods to move human emotions and “alter religious experience.”⁵ These related projects demonstrate Calvin’s pastoral use of rhetorical methods to edify and

3. See, for example, Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21-38, 79-98, 107-11, 140-58; Raymond A. Blacketer, *The School of God: Pedagogy and Rhetoric in Calvin’s Interpretation of Deuteronomy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin’s Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 79-149; Thomas J. Davis, “Preaching and Presence: Constructing Calvin’s Homiletical Legacy,” in *The Legacy of John Calvin*, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2000), 84-106; and Olivier Millet, “Calvin’s Self-Awareness as Author,” trans. Susanna Gebhardt, in *Calvin & His Influence, 1509-2009*, ed. Irena Backus and Philip Benedict (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84-101. Also see Don Compier, “The Independent Pupil: Calvin’s Transformation of Erasmus’ Theological Hermeneutics,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1991): 217-233; Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 178-181; and Richard Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism – A Review and Definition,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 45-64, essays resisting recent interpretations that absolutize Calvin’s attacks on some forms of humanism [e.g. Richard Gamble, “*Brevitas et Facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin’s Hermeneutic,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 1-17.], while demonstrating both continuities and discontinuities between Calvin’s methodology and the writings of pagan antiquity and Renaissance humanism. For a related study of Calvin’s humanistic emphases in the *Institutes*, see Compier, *John Calvin’s Rhetorical Doctrine of Sin* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 13-42.

4. Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 145-181; William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 144-166; Jeannine E. Olson, “Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 153-172; and Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim’s Life*, trans. Albert Gootjes (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 110-144.

5. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 3. Also see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, “Postscript on the Religious Emotions in the Late-and Post-Reformation Era: Path Dependence and Innovation,” in *Calvin and Luther: The Continuing Relationship*, ed. R. Ward Holder (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 91-104; and Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

persuade his congregation to accept sound biblical teaching. Such studies also protest the notion that Calvin employed his humanistic training to rule Geneva as an iron-fisted despot.⁶

While many studies have treated Calvin's rhetoric, his oratory, and his application of Scripture, few have asked how these factors relate to Calvin's view of the law, especially its "third" or primary use as a guide for Christian gratitude and as the "rule of just and pious living."⁷ In addition, studies treating Calvin's concept of the law, including its characteristic third use, have tended to ignore Calvin's humanistic training and his rhetorical techniques to teach, admonish, and move his listeners to respond to God's law. Moreover, studies of Calvin's third use of the law have often neglected his *Sermons on the Ten Commandments* as a source, even though Calvin's admonitory or persuasive use of rhetoric features prominently in this series of exhortations as a means to teach the law's third use.⁸ In this particular set of sixteen sermons, which Calvin preached from June 7, 1555 to July 19 of the same year, the Genevan reformer offers a pastoral treatment of the Decalogue, building on themes treated earlier in his more systematic *Institutes*.⁹

6. Karant-Nunn's book, *The Reformation of Feeling*, is somewhat of an exception to this point, as I have already noted.

7. Calvin, *Serm. Harm. Deut. 29:29*, 411 (1). Calvin defines the third use of the law most succinctly in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.12, as the law's "principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, [which] finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns." In accord with this definition, Calvin's sermons on the Decalogue reiterate that even regenerate Christians, while they are free from the law with regard to its abolished ceremonies, still need order and guidance for their lives. Therefore, with respect to its substance and doctrine, the law "always has virtue; it never decays" (Calvin, *Serm. Deut. 4:44-5:3*, 48).

8. Studies neglecting the context of Calvin's rhetorical method and his sermons on the Decalogue as a source for examining the law's third use include: I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 217-276; idem, "Christ, the Law, and the Christian: An Unexplored Aspect of the Third Use of the Law in Calvin's Theology," in *Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in Honor of Ford Lewis Battles*, ed. B.A. Gerrish and Robert Benedetto (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1981), 11-26; Merwyn S. Johnson, "Calvin's Ethical Legacy," in *The Legacy of John Calvin*, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2000), 63-83; and idem, "Calvin's Handling of the Third Use of the Law and Its Problems," in *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin*, ed. Robert V. Schnucker (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1988), 33-50. Johnson's two essays allude to the importance of consulting Calvin's sermons on the Ten Commandments, but he does not undertake that project himself. An exception to these gaps in Calvin scholarship is Raymond Blacketer's excellent monograph, *The School of God*. Blacketer provides the most recent and thorough accounting of how Calvin used pedagogical motifs and rhetorical methods in his exposition of the law. My essay is indebted to Blacketer's helpful conclusions regarding Calvin's humanistic training, his identification of Calvin's patristic and Renaissance sources, and his manner of applying rhetorical and pedagogical themes in his sermons.

9. Benjamin W. Farley, Introduction to *John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 24. For this essay I am mostly dependent upon Benjamin Farley's English translation of Calvin's Sermons on the Ten

These sermons, Benjamin Farley notes, are empowered by Calvin's conception of the law's third and normative use, and reveal how Calvin employed pedagogical themes and rhetorical methods to meet his admonitory and persuasive ends.¹⁰

This essay seeks to identify concrete ways in which Calvin, as an expositor of Scripture, used prominent rhetorical motifs and persuasive strategies to communicate the law's perpetual guidance for the Christian life. It builds on the growing scholarly interest in Calvin's employment of humanist rhetorical tools and classical oratory to show how he instructed his congregation in right living, exposed their frailty and inattention to God's commands, and persuaded them to submit willingly to the fruitful guidance of the divine law.¹¹ If we can better understand Calvin's emotive tone and persuasive appeal as he applied the law to his congregation, we will also gain a better sense of how Calvin regarded the purpose of the law's third use, and what he believed was an appropriate method and mode for its pulpit proclamation.

I have chosen in this essay to limit my attention to an inductive reading of Calvin's sermons on the Ten Commandments for several reasons. First, Calvin desired that readers of his extempore sermons should distinguish the quality of their rhetorical eloquence from that of his biblical commentaries and the *Institutes*.¹² As printed

Commandments. When page numbers are cited, these correspond with Farley's 1980 edition of Calvin's sixteen sermons on the Decalogue. Any additional citations of the *Calvini Opera* (CO) indicate that I have read the original French to demonstrate an especially important facet of that text. In addition, I am aware that the numbering of these sermons in Farley's volume does not correspond with the numbering indicated by their original titles in the *Calvini Opera*, as Farley also makes clear in his translation. In most cases, I will avoid confusion by simply referring to the specific text of a sermon or by identifying the commandment it treats, rather than indicating its numerical placement in Farley's translation.

10. Farley, Introduction, 26.

11. As I have already noted, an ample amount of previous research has examined the development of Calvin's rhetorical skills in connection with his broader historical, theological, and exegetical context. These studies have already set the groundwork for understanding Calvin as a humanist rhetor, whose self-awareness of his own rhetorical techniques developed in relation to the methods embedded within the Christian tradition. Blacketer's monograph, *The School of God*, parallels my essay as it examines Calvin's pedagogy and rhetoric and their impact upon Calvin's exegesis in Deuteronomy. The author, however, makes no concerted attempt to isolate Calvin's sixteen sermons on the Ten Commandments as a unique example of how Calvin's rhetorical skills affected his impact from the pulpit in Geneva. My essay proceeds with an objective that is certainly related, but not identical, to that of Blacketer's work. I aim to show how Calvin implements similar rhetorical techniques, but within a unique body of literature (transcribed sermons), and with an eye to its particular socio-historical backdrop.

12. Between 1549 and 1560, a skilled stenographer, Denis Raguenier, began to take down Calvin's sermons in shorthand and, with the help of associates, transcribed these notes into full textual versions of Calvin's sermons. Calvin was never thrilled with this process of recording his extempore sermons. "In his own mind there was a clear distinction between the scholarly lectures, which he willingly edited for

transcriptions of Calvin's public exhortations, these sermons exhibit a distinct rhetorical character and purpose that their readers should acknowledge.¹³ Secondly, the social and historical milieu of these sermons offers a fascinating glimpse of the motivation for and implementation of Calvin's persuasive rhetoric in the service of preaching the law's third use. It is valuable to note that Calvin's sermons on the Decalogue were delivered in the midst of a particularly stormy time in Geneva's political and ecclesiastical life. "Libertine" opposition to reform was at its height, and questions of Consistorial authority and political-theological unrest troubled the community. Calvin's sermons occasionally allude to these events, drawing vivid lessons from concrete everyday life.

In sum, this essay will attempt to show that in his sermonic exposition of the Ten Commandments, Calvin applies pedagogical themes and rhetorical methods specifically to *instruct* believers about the law's perpetual guidance, *admonish* them concerning its threats and promises, *persuade* them to experience displeasure with their shortcomings in order to promote greater attention to God's law, and *edify* them concerning God's gracious assistance through the Holy Spirit for progress in Christian holiness. Moreover, unlike Karant-Nunn's "accusatory" Calvin, whose pulpit oratory ultimately emphasized human corruption and promoted self-recrimination and feelings of worthlessness, offering little promise of internal peace or intimate fellowship with God, this essay will try to demonstrate that while Calvin's exhortations were certainly charged with the force and conviction of Scripture, he nevertheless infused his sermons on the Decalogue with pastoral insight, grace, and sensitivity "to accommodate his words to the immediate needs of his Genevan flock" ¹⁴

publication, and sermons preached for a particular local audience" (Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 23). Calvin had serious reservations about the mass dispersal of his sermons, "for their canonization implied a rhetorical and literary quality that these works, directly transcribed from oral teaching done without oratorical pretension, lacked in his eyes" (Millet, "Calvin's Self-Awareness," 92). Nevertheless, Calvin never retracted these printed transcriptions, and we can be confident that they accurately represent Calvin's expository intentions. Devoid of oratorical pretensions, these sermons are perhaps supremely capable of showing us how Calvin employed rhetorical tools in a restrained manner to teach the plain meaning of Scripture persuasively.

13. Of course, it is not the case that no rhetorical affinity exists between these distinct publications. Calvin's sermons reveal his masterful oratorical control and an artful use of rhetoric, despite the extemporaneity of his delivery. Therefore, this essay will at points show important connections between Calvin's Decalogue sermons and his other exegetical and systematic works, which is the most responsible way to understand and assess the reformer's theological thought.

14. Millet, "Calvin's Self-Awareness," 93.

Edification and Persuasion in the “School of God”

Preaching was the “centerpiece” of Calvin’s second ministry in Geneva, and it is well documented that the reformer discharged his pastoral duties with the utmost care. Calvin, along with his Reformed associates, believed that personal, congregational, and societal reform would result from the faithful exposition of God’s Word, through the mouths of ordained pastors, with the powerful attendance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Faithful expository preaching, as the fruit of responsible biblical exegesis, is the Spirit’s primary means for creating and confirming faith in the elect and for prompting concomitant good works. Congregational edification from the simple and plain meaning of Scripture rather than rhetorical pomp or wordiness was the aim of Calvin’s pulpit oratory.¹⁶ Consequently, when Calvin’s sermons evince the rhetorical method of amplification (*amplificatio*) or abundance (*copia*), which is the sermonic development of historical, poetic, philosophical, or biblical motifs, the reformer’s objective is always to provide theological instruction and pastoral edification, rather than to impress his audience with his rhetorical eloquence.¹⁷

15. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors*, 146-152; Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 144-45; and Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 103ff.

16. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 143. Muller remarks that Calvin was opposed to the more ostentatious and profane forms of humanist rhetoric. “And as for secular rhetoric, Calvin was convinced that the words of Scripture were ‘immeasurably superior’ to greatest classical oratory, inasmuch as they evidence no ‘affected language’ or ‘extravagant speculations’ and partake of no “frivolous rhetoric’ but speak to us in ‘pure simplicity.’”

17. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 143. Muller adds that “just as [Calvin’s] sermons follow more an ‘oratorical’ than a ‘scholastic’ style, so also do they move toward a copious, amplificatory model of exposition rather than follow the commentary model of *brevitas* and *facilitas*” (p. 144). He also shows that the edificatory *intentio* of Calvin’s rhetorical style reflects the oratorical models of Rudolf Agricola and Philip Melancthon, who identified “the ‘copious’ and ‘varied’ treatment of *loci* as the central task of Christian teaching” and associated “*amplificatio* or *copia* less with ornamentation than with edification” (p. 143). Calvin himself demonstrates a mastery of this rhetorical device (*amplification* – *auxesis*) as early as 1532 in his *Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia*. The index of Calvin’s rhetorical terms, found in *Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), Intro. 79-80; bk: 1, 56, 58, 114, 210, and 318, reveals this fact. Furthermore, Christopher Ocker, *Biblical Poetics Before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 187-88, helpfully demonstrates that “through Agricola’s influence, scholars became increasingly interested in the analysis of specific forms of argument known from Cicero as ‘topics.’ It was here that the distinction between ordinary speech and the formal language of dialectic mattered most, for rather than isolate the disciplines of logic and rhetoric, it seemed to sharpen the complementarity of rhetoric and dialectic, as one can readily see in the adaptation and popularization of Agricola’s method by Philip Melancthon.” For more on Agricola’s dialectical attempt to complement rhetoric and theology (by building on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, elaborated by Cicero, Quintillian, and Valla), as well as

Nonetheless, it would be faulty to conclude that Calvin's sermons represent a bumbling and inanimate style of oratory. Precisely because his sermons were the result of diligent study and scriptural meditation, Calvin's preaching was enlivened with a zeal for instructing and admonishing his congregation.¹⁸ As Richard Muller observes, "Calvin stressed the liveliness and, indeed, the *persuasive character* of his oratory, assuming that his extemporaneous delivery was buttressed both by a mastery of the tools of rhetoric, particularly by techniques of topical amplification, and by an immersion in the text of the sermon as well as in the text of Scripture as a whole, the grounds or *fontes* of his amplificatory practice."¹⁹

Raymond Blacketer, in *The School of God*, demonstrates that the intention to *teach* and *persuade* were "the two main ingredients of Calvin's preaching."²⁰ His twofold goal as an expository preacher was to exhort his congregation with regard to the content of the Christian faith and persuade them to commit themselves to the profitable guidance of God's law. Calvin undertook this task with the conviction and fervor of a divinely ordained prophet, believing he was charged with the duty to faithfully unfold the Scripture in a way that did justice to the power of its content and the supreme eloquence of its prose.²¹ Rhetoric did not serve itself, but was a means to faithfully exposit the natural sense of Scripture in a way that could move the congregation to respond in faith and obedience to God's desires. "In the pulpit, then, Calvin takes on the role of both pedagogue and pleader, endeavoring to teach and persuade, at the same time claiming that any result would be due not to his erudition or eloquence, but to the power of the divine Doctor and Orator."²² By

Melanchthon's popularization of this method in his rhetorical theory, see Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 184-213.

18. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 144.

19. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 145; emphasis added.

20. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 23.

21. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 104. With respect to Calvin's Passion sermons, Karant-Nunn remarks that Calvin instructed his congregation "with passionate conviction—his words are filled with his own feeling—the correctness of his beliefs. He saw himself as a prophet . . . Others needed desperately to adopt his perspective, he thought, and in the role of teacher-persuader he sought to move them" (p. 104).

22. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 23. Blacketer draws this understanding of the twofold objective of Calvin's pulpit rhetoric [to "teach" and "move"] from Olivier Millet's groundbreaking work, *Calvin et la dynamique de la parole. Etude de rhétorique réformée* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1992). Millet's article, "Docere/Movere: Les catégories rhétoriques et leurs sources humanistes dans la doctrine calvinienne de la foi," in *Calvinus sincerioris religionis vindex*, 35-51, also informs Blacketer's knowledge of Calvin's use of pedagogy and persuasion in his sermons. Charles P. Arand, "Melanchthon's Rhetorical Argument for *Sola Fide* in the Apology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 286, has also noted the influence of Melanchthon's *Elementorum rhetorices* upon Calvin, wherein Melanchthon distinguishes between the functions of dialectics and rhetoric: "The distinction, to put it perhaps more properly,

way of example, one can look to Calvin's sermon on Deuteronomy 4:44 – 5:3, in which he explicitly implores his congregation to remember God's gracious covenant arrangement, and respond to his paternal guidance with humility and gratitude, rather than arrogant dismissal. "*I beg of you,*" says Calvin, "should we not be more than ingrates if we did not humble ourselves before him and abstain from all pride and arrogance?"²³

Calvin believed that his exposition of the law served a distinctly pedagogical function for training Christians in "the school of God," which is a rhetorical metaphor that comes to expression in many of his writings and which he borrowed from "the patristic and medieval Christian literary tradition."²⁴ Calvin exhorts his congregants to all alike regard God "as our [school] master," in whose academy they are enrolled for lifelong training.²⁵ He appeals to the goodness of God's character and law as a method for prompting Christian attentiveness. Since God has shown us the proper path of Christian obedience and happiness in his law, we should never question the excellence or intention of it, says Calvin. "Let us be content with what God has shown. For he will always be a good [school] master to us, provided we do not become bad pupils on him."²⁶

To further emphasize the objective of our enrollment in God's school, that is, to develop a mature knowledge and implementation of God's law, Calvin indicates that God must humble us and make us submissive or "docile" in order to benefit from his school. Indeed, as Blacketer notes, "A prerequisite for profiting in the school of God, and one of Calvin's most frequent rhetorical commonplaces, is the cultivation of a teachable (*docile*) disposition."²⁷ Calvin says in his sermon on Deuteronomy 5:22, since "we do not possess the dexterity to benefit in his school unless he makes it possible," we must submit to the Master and become teachable.²⁸ Because of God's faithful guidance and powerful assistance, Calvin insists that pupils also have the corresponding duty to accept the law's authoritative guidance and "make ourselves docile to its contents" [*nous rendans*

is that the end or purpose of dialectic is *to teach*, but the function of rhetoric is *to move* and to stimulate minds and thus to affect a person" (CR 13:420).

23. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 46; emphasis added. Calvin's oratorical pleading is evident throughout this sermon.

24. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 37. See Blacketer, *The School of God*, 37-52 and Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 25-32, for further exposure to Calvin's use of academic motifs from medieval scholasticism. Blacketer (37-39) shows that Calvin was not innovating when he employed a variety of rhetorical images or metaphors in his sermons. He relied on illustrative images present early in the Latin Christian tradition, particularly in Augustine's writings. For a related comparison of Calvin's preaching and medieval scholastic methods, see Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism," 50-53.

25. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:22, 240.

26. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 6:1-4, 291.

27. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 46.

28. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:22, 239.

dociles].²⁹ We are reminded of Calvin's own "sudden conversion," by which God made him "teachable" (*docilitatem; docilité*), and prepared him to be a capable exegete and teacher of the Scriptures.³⁰

Calvin's argument appeals to the *fitness* of believers' submission to God. Is it not utterly fitting or appropriate, considering God's compassion and covenant fidelity, to develop a teachable spirit within us and willingly "take the trouble to yield ourselves to our God and totally be subject [*subiets*] to him?"³¹ "Let us be warned," Calvin says, "that we shall have profited poorly in God's school if we only keep our hands from doing evil while our hearts are unreformed."³²

Nevertheless, Calvin also instructs his congregation regarding the appropriate fruits of submission in the believer's life. Christian adherence to God's commands involves much more than cognitive assent. God, the divine schoolmaster, gives his law to us "that we might be reformed and that God may approve of the subjection [*subiection*] which we render him."³³ Even when the law uncovers believers' personal shortcomings, which make them deeply indebted to God, this too has a positive effect—"that we might be that much more motivated to serve him."³⁴ Christians' need for constant exhortation from God's law grounds Calvin's use of persuasive rhetoric in his Decalogue sermons. He "stresses that pedagogy, or in rhetorical terms, *docere*, is not enough; Christians require continual exhortation, corresponding to oratorical *persuasion (movere)*."³⁵ Christian pupils in God's school need to be shown that the instruction of God's Word should "result in practice" and that "it is incumbent on us to demonstrate in reality that we have not been taught it without avail."³⁶ Believers necessarily show by their lives that their training in godliness has profited them:

Thus when we want to know if we have gained anything from God's law, we must always test and sound whether we entertain the desire and zeal for God to be honored and glorified by us. For if we do possess such a fear in our heart, *the results will be seen* in [the works of] our hands and feet,

29. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:11, 95-96 (CO 26:282).

30. In a rare autobiographical moment, Calvin speaks about his mind being "subdued" and brought to "a teachable frame" in the preface to his *Commentarii In Librum Psalmorum* (1557), in vol. 31 of *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, col. 21-22, ed. Baum, Cunitz, and Reuss (Brunsvigae: C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1887).

31. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 42 (CO 26:239).

32. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:17, 166.

33. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 43 (CO 26:240).

34. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 42.

35. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 48.

36. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 43.

that is in all our members, as God also decreed this rule when he proclaimed his law.³⁷

Consequently let us learn to manifest, in word and in deed [*par effect, et par experience*], that we fear God by submitting our life to his will.³⁸

In this respect there is line of continuity between Calvin's expositional *intentio* and the character of the law's third use. Just as Calvin employs the rhetorical concept of the "school" to teach and persuade his audience to remain consciously submissive to God's instruction, so it is also Calvin's primary intention to show how God's will for daily Christian life is not only revealed in the Ten Commandments, but that it also serves to "exhort and strengthen man's witness and confirm his life in obedience to God."³⁹

It is also important to observe that when Calvin urges his congregation to develop a teachable and submissive disposition respecting the law, he appeals to their emotion or sense of devotion by calling them to obey out of a *genuine affection* for God. The scope of this essay is insufficient to fully engage a growing number of studies that investigate the subject of emotion and emotionality as a socio-historical inquiry.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this field of research deserves some attention here, no matter how brief.

With respect to the emotional dimensions of the sixteenth-century Reformations, recent works by Karant-Nunn and Andrew Pettegree are most helpful at demonstrating how various ecclesiastical leaders used a vocabulary of feeling to persuade congregants and invoke certain religious sentiments.⁴¹ Several scholars have also shed light on Calvin's particular understanding of the nature and function of human emotions, including the typical ways Calvin names interior human affections. Muller notes that Calvin seems to regard proper human emotion as something associated with the nature of faith in its relation to the faculties of the soul. Against certain scholastics, which identified faith with mere assent (*assensum*) stemming from intellectual knowledge (*notitia*), Calvin insists that the faith-producing illumination of the Spirit

37. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 6:1-4, 293. Calvin makes this same point in his *Commentaries. Calvin Tract Society.* 46 vols. Reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), *Harm. Deut.* 4:1, 344 (1); *Harm. Deut.* 10:16, 358 (1).

38. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 6:1-4, 293.

39. Farley, Introduction to *John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, 26. In this way, says Farley, "the third use of the law constitutes the critical foundation for all sixteen sermons" on the Ten Commandments.

40. In the Introduction to her book, *The Reformation of Feeling* (pp. 3-13), Karant-Nunn offers a helpful summary of some prominent works that treat various conceptions and expressions of emotion from the early medieval period to early modernity.

41. In particular, see Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, and Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*.

affects both the mind and the will, which are the two faculties of the soul (*anima*) and the seat of the feelings and affections. Calvin often uses the affective terms “heart” and “soul” interchangeably, but “particularly when juxtaposed with ‘mind’ (*mens*), the term also refers to ‘the seat of the emotions’ or ‘the whole range of human affections,’ or, indeed, the faculty that reaches out toward known objects, which is to say, the will.”⁴² Thus, Calvin normally connects emotion with volition or the will, under the guidance of knowledge or understanding.

Accordingly, Kyle Fedler argues that Calvin holds a view similar to the Stoics’, in that he does not regard emotions as “simply nonrational forces that ‘overcome’ us, but are integrally related to what we believe and value.”⁴³ Unlike the Stoics, Calvin argues for the goodness of human emotions on account of the original goodness of creation, thus grounding his thought soteriologically, christologically, and theologically. Fedler shows that whereas “the Stoics called for an elimination of the emotions, Calvin calls for their purification or ‘sanctification.’ To this end Calvin argues that believers can and should train their emotions by means of meditation upon the cross of Christ, meditation upon the future life and the spiritual discipline of prayer.”⁴⁴ In short, Calvin’s expository preaching urges a holistic response to the instruction of God’s Word, so that the emotions, and not just human cognitive faculties, are subjected to God’s will. This, at least in part, is why Calvin’s preaching of the law consciously calls for an emotional response to the instruction of God’s Word on the part of his hearers. He wants his congregants’ meditation on the law to *move their hearts* toward a more teachable state. Calvin is concerned that the believer’s emotional state resulting in external obedience is nothing short of “true affection” (*uraye affection*):⁴⁵

And furthermore we are also admonished to come to God with a pure and sincere affection. For it is not enough to restrain our feet and our eyes from doing evil, rather *the heart must lead the way and God be worshipped by us in true affection*. And that affection must not be constrained, but *it must proceed from a true love of God*.⁴⁶

Willing submission [*services volontaires*] or “free affection” resulting from a “true love of God” is the only acceptable disposition for students in God’s school.⁴⁷ At various places in his Decalogue

42. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 168.

43. Kyle Fedler, “Calvin’s Burning Heart: Calvin and the Stoics on the Emotions,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 22 (2002): 133.

44. Fedler, “Calvin’s Burning Heart,” 133.

45. Fedler, “Calvin’s Burning Heart,” 135.

46. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:8-10, 77-78; emphasis added.

47. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:8-10, 76.

Sermons and in the *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, Calvin reiterates the importance of “free affection” as the beginning and foundation of the believer’s fitting obedience to God’s law. He maintains that any compliance to God’s law that “is drawn forth by constraint, or servile fear, cannot please God.” God desires voluntary submission to his law by those who are “attracted by its sweetness, and willingly endured it”.⁴⁸

He does not solely want us to worship him out of servile fear [*crainte servile*]. Rather he wants us to come to him with a *sincere and cheerful heart*, so much so that we *take pleasure* in honoring him. And that cannot be done unless we love him. Thus let us note that the beginning of obedience, as well as its source, foundation, and root, is this love of God; that we would not attempt to come to him unless we found in him our *deepest pleasure* [*plaisir singulier*]. Furthermore let us recognize that that is our *true blessedness*, and that we cannot ask for more than it be governed according to his will, and to be in conformity with it.⁴⁹

Sincere compliance with God’s commands, along with its concomitant fruit within the Christian life, offers believers assurance that they are truly profiting from God’s school. This results in further motivation to observe God’s righteous statutes in a zealous and grateful manner.

In contrast to the pure and sincere affection that results in submissive conformity to God’s will, Calvin identifies the dire outcome awaiting those who refuse to benefit from God’s school. Calvin often reiterates that when pupils are unwilling to be subject to God and his ordained authorities, they have in effect made “war” with God, a “detestable” thing.⁵⁰ By attempting to subvert the good and proper order that God intends, we demonstrate that “we are worse [off] than wild beasts in the heart of the forest. Thus all who rebel against legitimate authority are both God and nature’s enemies, as well as the enemies of the whole human race; they are monsters whom we ought to detest.”⁵¹ On June 3, 1555, only a few weeks before Calvin preached these sermons, Ami Perrin and four other leaders of the Libertine party were sentenced to be beheaded for their part in an insurrection earlier that year. Opposed to Calvin’s reforms and resentful of the Consistory’s authority, these men embodied the unruly pupils who vainly attempt to justify their own rebellion

48. Calvin, *Harm. Exod.* 20:1; 339 (1); *Lev.* 19:36, 343 (1); *Deut.* 11:1, 381 (1); *Exod.* 23:22, 404 (1).

49. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:8-10, 76 (CO 26:266); emphasis added.

50. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:8-10, 77.

51. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:16, 148. Cf. *Serm., Deut.* 5:23-27, 263.

against God and refuse “to subject themselves to him and his Word.”⁵² There is little doubt that this controversy influenced Calvin’s sermons on the Decalogue. At the very least, these unsettling events were on his mind and in the thoughts of all his parishioners, serving as a vivid illustration of the monstrosity of making war against God and his instruction.

“Touched to the Quick”: Calvin’s Rhetorical Metaphors

We have already observed Calvin’s commitment to crafting edifying and persuasive sermons that would teach (*docere*) and move (*movere*) his congregation. He believed that faithful expository preaching animated by the Holy Spirit was the divinely ordained vehicle for convicting Christians of God’s truth and persuading them to observe his commands in daily life. One aspect of Calvin’s oratorical *amplificatio* was his utilization of memorable sayings and illustrative concepts to motivate his pupils for diligent study in the school of God. We find a few of these vivid images in Calvin’s sermons on the Ten Commandments, which not only serve a practical purpose to amplify Calvin’s rhetoric, but also convict and move Calvin’s congregation with respect to the law.⁵³

52. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:4-7, 55. Farley (55, n17) suggests that Calvin “may well have had the Perrinists and his Bernese opponents in mind” when he gave this sermon. In addition to the Perrinist controversy of 1555, Calvin also had to contend with certain Bernese pastors who viciously and unfairly attacked his doctrine of providence and predestination, which only prompted greater ecclesiastical and political antagonism between Geneva and Bern. Hostilities continued up to and throughout the time Calvin preached his sermons on the Ten Commandments. These events were deeply troubling to Calvin, and several of his sermons, including this particular one, indicate his displeasure over his opponents’ refusal to be subject (docile) to the Word of God. For a more detailed account of these and related events of 1555, see Farley, Introduction, 14-23; Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 167-207; Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 186ff.; Keith Randell, *John Calvin and the Later Reformation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 25-29; and T.H.L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 154-157.

53. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 72, properly notes, “As with all of Calvin’s illustrative motifs, he borrowed these images from other writers; they are common in the literary tradition of both eastern and western Christendom, and they are well established in the theological literature of the Christian church.” Calvin’s use of rhetoric for the practical purpose of dressing up or amplifying his teaching reflects the influence of Philip Melancthon. In book one of his popular textbook, *Erotemata Dialectices* (1547), in vol. 13 of *Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider (Halis Saxonum: C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1846), col. 514-15, Melancthon distinguishes between rhetoric and dialectic, stating that “rhetoric adds adornment in these matters [the art of right teaching; *ars recte docendi*], which is able to be illuminated with an abundance and brilliance of speech and diversely embellished.” *Rhetorica addit ornatum in his materiis, quae orationis copia et splendore illustrari et varie pingi possunt.*

A basic concern prompting Calvin's use of these terms was the prevalent inattention to the law on the part of God's people.⁵⁴ He comments in his sermon on Deuteronomy 4:44-5:3 that although hearing God's law even once should be sufficient to conform us to the "yoke" or perpetual claim of the law, "we do not believe as promptly [*promptement*] as we ought, for no sooner than we begin we regress and ultimately forget what we have learned."⁵⁵ Calvin regarded the Genevan populace as "a precise spiritual reincarnation of the 'stiff-necked, intractable Hebrews' of the Old Testament," and thus he employed his oratorical gifts and rhetorical vigor to shake his congregants out of their spiritual stupor.⁵⁶ From Israel's stubborn pride, which motivated their senseless resistance to God's Word, Calvin draws an immediate lesson for his congregation with respect to their own intractability. In his sermon on Deuteronomy 5:22, Calvin shows the people that, like Israel, their occasional preoccupation with worldly desires and possessions leaves them "bewildered and dazed," "boorish and earthly"⁵⁷ Consequently, they require a guide for obtaining spiritual wisdom. "We are in great need," says Calvin, "for our Lord to *touch us to the quick* that we might reflect a proper reverence for his Word"⁵⁸

Calvin repeatedly shows the people that God's desire for prompt and sincere obedience means that the divine law remains a necessary tool for the Christian life. Therefore, in his sermons on the Ten Commandments, he illustrates several enduring purposes of the law for correcting Christian sluggishness by using the images of the bridle and the goad or spur, as well as the common rhetorical techniques of working from the lesser to the greater and juxtaposing seemingly contrary ideas, in order to convict, admonish, and reassure.⁵⁹

54. It is striking that throughout his sermons on the Decalogue, Calvin rarely if ever rebukes believers for their failure to accept the gospel or maintain the *sola gratia* and *sola fide* of justification. His concern, rather, is their inattention to the principles of the law. Lack of zeal for the law evokes his sermonic admonitions. Calvin believes that such negligence is inconsistent with the gospel, since the gracious and progressive renewal of the Christian's life, which includes a love for God and his law, is the indispensable fruit of justification.

55. Calvin, *Serm. Deut. 4:44-5:3*, 37 (CO 26:235).

56. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 1.

57. Calvin, *Serm. Deut. 5:22*, 245.

58. Calvin, *Serm. Deut. 5:22*, 245; emphasis added.

59. As we noted earlier, Calvin's sermons on the Ten Commandments are replete with applications from the law that correspond most closely to its third and principal use. Calvin intends for these various rhetorical turns of phrases to prompt a renewed appreciation for and attention to the law among God's people. Thus, Calvin's use of rhetorical language and imagery, whether gentle or impassioned, whether seasoned with promises or weighted with obligations, is used to address a congregation of (presumably) justified believers. Calvin's reprimands and warnings, as well as his consolations and encouragements, reveal something of how Calvin thought the third use of the law should be preached, and how the law should be applied.

The Bridle and the Path

In his sermon on the First Commandment, Calvin prompts his congregation to observe the value of the law, which serves as a gracious guide and “effective bridle” to steer them away from the sinful errors of superstitious idolatry.⁶⁰ This image indicates the variety of ways in which the law gives prudent direction to the Christian life. Unbelievers, conversely, are those who “behave like runaway horses,” because “they have no bridle” to lead them.⁶¹ Relatedly, Calvin employs the figure of a road or path upon which we should travel in order to explain the law’s benefit. By the governance of his law, God “shows us the road in order that we might not be errant pilgrims who ramble about from pillar to post, led by our appetites, but that we might be led as if by his hand.”⁶² Calvin uses the road or path as a favored rhetorical image to shock his audience with a life-altering dilemma: either follow the right path set by God in his law, which leads to blessedness, or plunge down the antithetical cliff of error and destruction.⁶³ Calvin also uses this imagery to emphasize that walking according to God’s law, as down a set path, directs us to “our highest good.”⁶⁴ We need to learn to joyfully accept the “right track [*bon train*],”⁶⁵ and not allow ourselves to deviate from it, for “God wants us to do what he commands in order that it might go well with us.”⁶⁶ Thus, God’s good and reliable instruction, as a “bridle” or “road,” profits believers in several ways by encouraging the mortification of the flesh and our willing subjection to God, and by distinguishing “the right path” that leads to a reformed life.⁶⁷

60. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 41. Blacketer, *The School of God*, 75-77 also notes the wider presence of this rhetorical figure in some of Calvin’s Old and New Testament sermons.

61. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:4-7, 63.

62. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 49.

63. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, notes that Calvin uses similar rhetorical techniques and images, including the “way,” the “labyrinth,” and the “abyss,” to generate a sense of urgency in choosing between truth and falsehood. “Indeed,” Muller writes, “what better way to press on a reader the necessity of choosing between two *viae*, the one disastrous, the other salvific, than to draw on the image of a labyrinth or maze, which traditionally take the form of a *bivium* or division of the ways, one leading to entrapment, the other to the light?” (93).

64. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:28-33, 275.

65. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:28-33, 280.

66. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:28-33, 276. Using similar language in his Deut. 5:22 sermon, Calvin urges his congregation to submit to God [*ranger-soumettre*] and accept the “boundaries” and “limits” set by his law. “For there is nothing but ruin when we fail to take the *path* that God has accordingly provided and *mapped out* [*compassé-mesuré*]” (Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:22, 244; emphasis added).

67. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 44-45; c.f. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:12-14, 107.

The Goad and the Spur

Calvin also uses the image of a goad or spur to illustrate how God's law serves as a constraint upon the remnants of our sinful passions. Since we are often disposed towards worldly pleasures and enslavements, we need God's law to restrain or "goad" us and pull us back from the destructive path, while also spurring us on to follow the course God has ordained for us. For Calvin, it is on account of our remaining ungodly affections and pride that we have need of God's law to rein us in, giving us "so many coaxing nudges [*coupe d'esperon*], as to stubborn horses."⁶⁸ In order for our pride to be humbled and our wayward tendencies overruled, "God has provided us a nudge [*un coup d'esperon*] with his spurs saying, *Your God commands you to do it.*"⁶⁹ Seeing that God remedies our stubbornness in this manner, Calvin concludes, "let us be displeased with all our affections and learn to become enslaved by nothing which might impede our following the course which God commands us."⁷⁰

In sum, the figures of the bridle, goad, and spur illustrate how the law's perpetual importance for the Christian life serves to convict sinful negligence respecting the law, offer an admonishing spark to fan the flame of desire for God's instruction in the believer's heart, and hold out the gracious and consoling blessings that result from heeding God's commands.⁷¹

68. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:13-15, 120.

69. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:16, 146.

70. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:13-15, 121.

71. Calvin's description of the law as a "spur" or "whip to the flesh" (see *Institutes* 2.7.12) seems cruel when read against the landscape of modern sentiments concerning child abuse—especially since Calvin juxtaposes this language with God's paternal goodness and fatherly guidance. Barbara Pitkin's essay, "The Heritage of the Lord": Children in the Theology of John Calvin," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 160-93, shows that adults during the Reformation were in fact very affectionate toward children, and placed a high value on their physical and spiritual welfare. Protestant preachers and teachers made children aware of their obligations before God and neighbor, and stressed the fitting consequences for disobedience, but few of them used "the doctrine of original sin to underscore the sinful character of children or legitimate harsh treatment of them. No less disappointed than later generations in the failings of the young, especially adolescents, sixteenth-century writers did not generally condone physical abuse and violence as means of correction and discipline." Furthermore, Pitkin shows that, although Calvin had a realistic view of human sin and inability, his convictions regarding human depravity did not lead him to promote or justify child abuse (pp. 163-64). Calvin's seemingly harsh language should be understood with respect to his rhetorical context, in which these terms served an edificatory function for prompting willing submission to God's commands as part of a rightly ordered life.

Enthymeme and Paradoxical Pairings

Calvin employed several other rhetorical techniques to cultivate deep feelings of regret for one's shortcomings, a sense of awe from God's warnings and reprimands, and, juxtaposed with this, a knowledge of the paternal constancy and goodness of God toward his frail children. First, by using a method like that of Chrysostom, Calvin argues from the lesser to the greater (*enthymeme*; ἐνθύμημα) in order to impress upon his hearers how appropriate their covenant obedience and fidelity to the law truly is.⁷² If God revealed his paternal goodness to Israel by establishing the covenant of grace "in the time of the law," Calvin argues, then "today there is an even better reason" to prostrate our hearts and submit willingly to God. By sending his special Son as the substance and fulfillment of God's covenant promises, God "revealed himself as our father and savior *more amply than he had ever done* and in an unsurpassably gentle and conciliatory manner, as if he had divulged his most *intimate* feelings." Calvin appeals directly to his listener's emotional sense of duty, urging them to respond with greater faith and devotion, seeing that "God has *given us his heart* in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ who so *intimately* communicates with us that he no longer calls us his servants but his friends."⁷³ This very pastoral description of God's affectionate regard for his children hardly coincides with Karant-Nunns' incredulous suggestion that Calvin was incapable of being "ravished in love" with God, and whose style of preaching depicted an emotionally unstable and antiquated Deity that rarely caused his congregation to come away with a sense of God's paternal kindness and love.⁷⁴

72. Peter Moore, "Plain Talk with a Gilt Edge: An Exploration of the Relation Between "Plain" Biblical Exposition and Persuasion in Chrysostom and Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011): 169.

73. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 46 (CO 26:242). Notice Calvin's repetition of "intimate" [*entrailles*] to encourage a proper response of gratitude for God's paternal kindness revealed through the covenant and the law's guidance. Similarly, in his sermon on Deut. 5:4-7, Calvin works from the lesser to the greater to demonstrate how the benefits of redemption in Christ entail fitting obligations for the believer: "But for our part, when God reclaims us for himself, are we not *all the more* strictly obligated fully to unite ourselves with him, to hold ourselves under the obedience of the doctrine which is proclaimed to us in his name?" (Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:4-7, 64; emphasis added).

74. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 130-31. Karant-Nunn believes it likely that the emotional outcome of Calvin's preaching upon his congregation represents a "shift backward in time to the judgmental Deity of the period prior to the twelfth century." Reformed preachers, she concludes, did not emphasize the internal peace that comes from willing submission to God. The vindictive Deity in Calvin's sermons "does not bend down his ear to his beloved children; this God requires uprightness, is ever alert to its lack, and demands recompense for every transgression." The reader can judge whether this largely dour portrayal of Calvin's sermonic mood is entirely accurate, especially compared to the content and tone of his Decalogue sermons under examination in this essay. One would think that Calvin's supposed legalism and his

In his Deuteronomy 5:12-14 sermon, which treats the Fourth Commandment and Sabbath observance, Calvin also employs the rhetorical method of moving from the lesser to the greater to impress upon his congregation the importance of spiritual rest in Christ and sincere dedication to God. Seeing that God has rescued us from the “servile subjection of the law” and its ceremonial strictures, and has “granted us more privilege than he granted the fathers of old,” the result is that “we ought to be inflamed *that much more* to keep spiritually this rest of the Lord.”⁷⁵ God’s amicability and paternal kindness in Christ obliges us “*that much more [cela nous oblige tant plus]*” to consider the spiritual principle embedded in this commandment, “to the end that we might observe it correctly.”⁷⁶ Even when the law humbles us by revealing our failure to observe the requirements of this spiritual rest, we are consequently “*that much more* moved and excited to take advantage” of God’s spiritual provision.⁷⁷ The conviction of God’s law makes our endeavor to obey it even more imperative, seeing that God has granted the grace to be willing to serve him. Calvin summarizes, “Thus in detesting the evil which is in us, let us be *so much more* inspired to profit continually in their rest, and to make progress in it, and for each of us daily to call ourself to account.”⁷⁸

Calvin’s rhetorical method not only impresses upon his listeners a sense of obligation to respond obediently to God’s kindness, he also works from the lesser to the greater to warn his congregation about the fearful consequences that result from their inattention to God’s wise instruction. Calvin warns his congregation about the “fickle” and “diabolical” curiosity that often plagues their minds when they covet something other than the perfect law of God to guide them. They “wriggle,” like rowdy schoolchildren, after something more than what God has divulged in his Word. “Therefore,” Calvin cautions, “whenever such a vice is detected among us, *so much more [d’autant plus]* is it imperative that we remember the warning which is contained here: for it informs us that if we wish to allow God to be our master, then we shall discover in his school all perfect wisdom. For the law exists precisely to make us prudent.”⁷⁹ Moreover, Calvin often reminds his listeners that they are without excuse when they fail to profit from the Scriptures, since God in his Word condescends to our human frailty. We encounter him therein “like a wet nurse”

immoderate—even violent—invocations would feature most prominently in his sermons on the divine law, but our survey has so far demonstrated Calvin’s rather measured and consolatory use of pulpit rhetoric to teach, persuade, and edify his congregation regarding the path of true blessedness.

75. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:12-14, 102.

76. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:12-14, 102 (CO 26:287).

77. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:12-14, 107.

78. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:12-14, 108.

79. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 39 (CO 26:236); emphasis added.

that graciously accommodates a child's incapacity. "Therefore," Calvin warns, "insofar as God has made himself accessible to us, so *much more [tant plus]* will grievous condemnation rest on our heads if we do not take the effort to profit in this doctrine which has already been masticated for us, in a manner of speaking, so that the only thing that remains for us is to swallow and digest it."⁸⁰

Finally, in addition to the rhetorical methods and figures of speech used in his Decalogue sermons, Calvin also commonly juxtaposes seemingly contrary realities in order to generate the proper Christian emotions of sorrow for sin and desire for renewal. On the one hand, Calvin emphasizes the "fear" and "awe" that should affect the believer when he or she does not yield to the "threats" that are appended to the law.⁸¹ God will call his people to account if they "reject his yoke,"⁸² and he "censures" all who transgress his law.⁸³ Calvin goes so far as to appeal to the "feelings" of God to move his congregation. For example, regarding the Fifth Commandment he says that one's failure to submit to God's ordained authorities ("lieutenants") is the same as rejecting God's jurisdiction, "and as a result his justice is violated and he *feels insulted by you [et qu'il se sent outrage par vous]*."⁸⁴ On the one hand, then, when Calvin applies the law to his congregation he never hesitates to show how the Lord is "strictly opposed" to those who abuse his name and "reveals himself as a party adverse" to all who disregard his commands.⁸⁵

On the other hand, Calvin also insists that God wants his children to discern his "paternal goodness" in the law, as well as the gracious promises he annexes to Christian obedience. God always approaches his children as their "guide and savior." He desires to "govern" his "little family" through the Word as its "King," seeking the welfare and salvation of his children.⁸⁶ Therefore, we should accept his law "as friendly, in order that we might taste it and take pleasure in submitting ourselves to it and permit ourselves to be governed by it according to the doctrine which it contains."⁸⁷ Calvin does not consider hearty exhortations to obedience to be at odds with God's paternal love reflected in the law. Rather, he says in his *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, it is on account of God's kindness that we are adopted and "effectually stimulated" to respond in grateful obedience. Precisely because Christians are received into the family of God, they, therefore, "lay under an obligation to keep His statutes; as Paul more plainly teaches us that we are redeemed from all iniquity, that Christ

80. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:22, 242 (CO 26:387); emphasis added.

81. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:4-7, 60-61.

82. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:15, 147.

83. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:11, 91.

84. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:15, 147 (CO 26:319); emphasis added.

85. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:11, 91.

86. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 4:44-5:3, 45.

87. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:4-7, 60.

might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Tit. ii. 14).⁸⁸

Karant-Nunn struggles to grasp the compatibility of these juxtaposed themes in Calvin's preaching. While occasionally conceding that Calvin may have cared genuinely for the spiritual welfare of his Genevan flock, she is primarily skeptical that his stern warnings and reprimands served a truly edificatory purpose in keeping with the gospel. She maintains that the subject of human "unworthiness" and "dissoluteness" is the reformer's ultimate "preoccupation;" his "beating drum."⁸⁹

A more refined reading, however, indicates that Calvin did not consider the "threats" of the law to stand in contradiction to God's gratuitous kindness, though these are paradoxical. Calvin admits that when he talks about "threatenings" for the elect, this seems out of place, since God desires voluntary obedience. But he contends that such threats are useful to the children of God so that, even after their regeneration, "their corrupt affections may be daily subdued" through the Holy Spirit's power, and the path of true blessedness rightly followed. Truly, Calvin wants his listeners to feel convicted and moved by Scripture as he proclaims it. He refuses to withhold his amplified rhetoric in order to communicate that only those who have learned to despise their sin as "a lasting part of [their] duty," who sincerely desire to obey God's law, and whose fleshly corruptions God is daily removing, will manifest the qualities of a true member of Christ's body. His listeners should regularly feel "touched to the quick."⁹⁰

At the same time, Calvin rescues his congregation from final despair by showing that God's chastisements are never meant to condemn them. It is the ultimate salvation of the elect that God has in mind when he corrects his people.⁹¹ God executes his "gentle strokes"—his moderate corrections—which, in his paternal loving-kindness, are sufficient to draw us back.⁹² Thus, Calvin desperately wants to imbue his listeners with an acute sense of the law as a special privilege, a helpful nudge, and as a straightforward guide for believers who daily aspire to the personal and progressive renewal that harmonizes with the gospel promises.⁹³

88. Calvin, *Harm. Deut.* 27, 359.

89. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 114-15.

90. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:11, 91.

91. Calvin, *Harm. Deut.* 7:10, 226-32 (3).

92. Calvin, *Harm. Lev.* 26:18, 233 (3).

93. Throughout his Decalogue sermons, Calvin emphasizes that the law, to which believers are led by God's "mutual love," is a gracious provision in that it illumines the only path leading to true blessedness and lasting comfort (*Serm. Deut.* 5:8-10, 78). He teaches that the "love of God," rather than servile fear of punishment, "will direct us to serve him and to submit to his justice to the extent that we will see a conformity and harmony between the law of God and all our desires and affections" (*Serm. Deut.* 5:8-10, 77).

Unfortunately, by failing to account for Calvin's understanding of the law's conviction as a special privilege in this way, Karant-Nunn is left to regard Calvin as an immoderate and violent ecclesiastical leader who offers very little hope or consolation to his needy flock from the pulpit.

In truth, Calvin frequently comforts his congregation by showing how God deals with his children's frailty with "clemency" and paternal gratuity. When God enforces his law he does not press us "as much as he could." He does not overburden us with his laws as a malevolent dictator. Despite the law's rigor, Calvin says it is "not excessive."⁹⁴ In this way, God "upholds us and utilizes an infinitely paternal goodness [toward us]."⁹⁵ Moreover, out of his pure grace, God promises to reward his children if they walk according to his commandments. Although they are far from deserving, God in his "inestimable liberality" deals with his children "as if they did something to deserve it."⁹⁶ Thus, obedience has great profit for its doer, even though God owes the believer nothing. In his sermons on the Decalogue, then, Calvin effectively holds the threats and promises of the law together in a compelling way to move his congregation to feel sorrow for sin and the joy of consequent renewal. He ably shows, with vivid and convincing language, how the law reflects God's paternal care and protection, even as it sets forth fitting warnings and obligations for believers.

Summary and Concluding Principles

In the course of this essay we have shown how Calvin's exposition of the Decalogue exhibits his keen passion for applying God's law to the life of the believer. His sermons on the Ten Commandments especially emphasize the law's perpetual benefits for guiding Christian gratitude and obedience (a "third" use of the law). We also observed that Calvin, in order to preach the normative use of the divine law and encourage its desired effect upon his listeners, regularly utilized vivid descriptors and stirring rhetoric to reveal how the law exits to nudge Christians out of their spiritual lethargy. An ample number of studies cited in this essay show how these methods resulted from his earlier training in classical and Renaissance rhetoric, and how Calvin uses these techniques in a measured way to faithfully expound the law and meet his objective to edify and persuade (*docere et movere*).

Various principles may be drawn from Calvin's exposition of the Ten Commandments that provide helpful direction for properly applying the law with respect to its third and primary use. We

94. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:17, 163.

95. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:13-15, 118.

96. Calvin, *Harm. Deut.* 7:12, 227 (3).

conclude by identifying some of the characteristics Calvin himself ascribed to proper pedagogical instruction:

1. The law's exposition in the context of corporate worship should be amplified by the preacher's apparent zeal for instructing and prompting Christians with respect to God's commands. Expository preaching must *instruct or exhort* believers concerning the content of the Christian faith, and also *urge or persuade* them to commit themselves to profiting from the divine law as "pupils" in the "school of God."

2. Believers should be made aware of their duty or obligation to accept the authoritative guidance of the law for their lives, and taught to become willingly submissive or docile to its instruction, which exists to make them prudent.

3. Applying the law's third use means identifying the concomitant fruits of submission to God. Preachers should not limit their instruction about Christian obedience to simply urging cognitive assent, belief in the gospel, or mere abstention from evil, offering no directives for the actual accomplishment of what is good. Rather, since it is incumbent upon every believer to show by their lives that the law's instruction has benefited them, pulpit pedagogy should also serve that end.

4. In order for Christians to benefit from the law, it is necessary for them to think long and hard about their remaining vices and imperfections. They need to experience displeasure over their shortcomings as part of their daily duty in order to long for their removal. Thus, when applying the law to believers, pastors should encourage an appropriate introspection while also avoiding the error of legalism.

5. Preaching the law's primary use should demonstrate how the warnings and admonitions of the law serve a positive purpose for the overall salvation of the elect. The conviction of God's law makes our endeavor to obey it even more imperative, seeing that God has rescued us from sin's ultimate bondage through Christ and grants the grace to be willing to serve him. By learning to detest the evil that is in them, believers are inspired *that much more* to profit from the law's fruitful guidance, make progress in it, daily call themselves to account, and seek the grace of God, who does not leave them in despair, but helps them up just as quickly as the law exposes the remnants of their sin.⁹⁷

6. Thus, finally, pedagogical instruction should emphasize that it is God who grants believers the heart and ambition to observe the Law, and that it is by the force of the Spirit that Christians are enabled to put God's law into effect. Calvin would have believers instructed "to ask [God] for strength, for him to

97. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:21, 234.

help us through his Holy Spirit, and not simply for him to make up for our frailty, but for him to begin and perfect everything in us, for him to grant us both the will and the strength and even constancy, and then add the power to achieve what we long for.”⁹⁸ In sum, instruction from the law should make clear that the believer’s *will* to obey, *strength* to obey, and *consistency* in obedience are the result of God’s grace and the Holy Spirit’s attendance. Nevertheless, and equally important, this gracious assistance results in the actual transformation of the Christian’s disposition and desires. Pedagogical application should declare, as Calvin does, that the Holy Spirit does not merely “make up for” our frailty, but makes us strong. He does not leave us in a defeated state, but “perfects everything in us,” so that we willingly come to him “peaceably and permit ourselves to be governed by his Word and become submissive to it.”⁹⁹ Whereas in justification, believers receive a new status through faith, in sanctification they are confirmed in their persons to that new status in Christ. To that end, pedagogical training in the “school of God” with his law as the guide bears an abundant harvest.

98. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:28-33, 274.

99. Calvin, *Serm. Deut.* 5:28-33, 275.