

CALVIN'S TREATMENT OF THE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL AND DIVINE GRACE

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AN INTERESTING ASPECT of Calvin's theology, which has intermittently drawn the attention of Calvin scholars, is the Reformer's treatment of the nature and scope of divine grace toward the non-elect. This question, sometimes referred to as the issue of "common grace," grows in stature in view of Calvin's unashamedly robust doctrine of predestination. It elicits however the query whether God, in sending the overtures of the gospel to sinners, to the elect and non-elect alike, in any sense acts favorably or graciously toward the reprobate. It should be noted that the subject of common grace in Calvin's thought has generated a number of divergent interpretations among scholars. The critical question in both older and more recent scholarship has been whether it is proper to ascribe to Calvin a doctrine of common grace and thus by implication whether God is in any way favorable or loving toward those he has predestinated to perdition. If one were to attempt to summarize the results of this research in schematic form, one might say that the various interpretations exhibit three trajectories. First, there are interpreters who argue that Calvin's theology elicits a fairly detailed doctrine of common grace, with some writers linking this doctrine to Calvin's treatment of the gospel-offer question;¹ second, there are those who argue that Calvin's thought only sets forth this doctrine in an embryonic form, being left undeveloped, informal, and/or on the periphery of his theology.² Finally, a few writers maintain that

1. For example: Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," *Presbyterian Theological Review* 7 (July 1909): 437-465; printed in *Calvin and the Reformation*, edited by William Park Armstrong (New York, Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1909; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 99-130, 225; Abraham Kuiper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Hóveker & Wormser, 1902-1904), I, 5-7; Quirinus Breen, "Calvin and Common Grace," in *Religion and Culture* 5 (1923-24): 119-120; 131; 151-152; 171-172; *Religion and Culture* 6 (1924-25): 3; idem, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism*, 2nd edition (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), 165ff.; V. Hepp, *Het Misverstand in Zake de Leer der Algemeene Genade* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1923), 14-17; Fred Bronkema, "The Doctrine of Common Grace in Reformed Theology or New Calvinism and the Doctrine of Common Grace" (Th.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1928); Herman Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace" (Th.D. dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam, Goes, the Netherlands: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre; Grand Rapids: Smitter Book Co., 1928); Eugène Choisy, "Calvin's Conception of Grace," in *The Doctrine of Grace*, edited W. T. Withley (New York: MacMillan, 1932), 228-234; Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 95f.; Herman Kuiper, in particular, links the idea of common grace with the "free offer" of the gospel in Calvin's theology.

2. James William Anderson, "The Grace of God and the Non-elect in Calvin's Commentaries and Sermons" (Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976); Richard Arden Couch, "An Evaluation and Reformulation of the Doctrine of Common Grace in the Reformed Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1959); J. Douma, *Algemeene Genade: uiteenzetting, vergelijking, en beoordeling van de opvattingen van A. Kuiper, K. Schilder en Joh. Calvijn over 'algemeene genade.'* (Goes, The Netherlands: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1981); Charles B. Partee, "Calvin on Universal and Particular Providence," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, edited by Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 69-88; Walter Campbell Campbell-Jack, "Grace without Christ? The Doctrine of Common Grace in Dutch-American Neo-Calvinism" (Ph.D.

any notion of common grace that might seem to be present in Calvin's thought constitutes a gross inconsistency in the Reformer's thinking, and perhaps even reveals that Calvin was given at times to flagrant contradictions.³

It is the purpose of this study to provide an analysis of Calvin's deliverances on the idea of the offer of the gospel to all people and to discover how Calvin may have linked his discussion of the offer to the notion of a universal divine benevolence toward all sinners. I think such a link can be demonstrated to exist in Calvin's thought. In fact, it is my contention that Calvin's treatment of the gospel-offer illustrates this connection. Consequently, insofar as Calvin's theology evidences some conception of a general grace or favor of God toward all sinners, the offer of the gospel is a constituent of that conception.

This essay will consist of the following: first, a brief survey of the literature on the issue of Calvin and common grace, noting the divergence of opinion pertaining to it; second, an analysis and exposition of Calvin's treatment of the offer of the gospel; and last, a summary of conclusions to be drawn from this analysis, with a cautious judgment, based upon the primary sources, as to the validity of maintaining that Calvin associated the idea of the gospel-offer to some notion of common grace.⁴

I. Survey of Scholarship

Among the writers who form a consensus in detecting a doctrine of common grace in Calvin's theology, there still exists a variety of interpretations regarding what his doctrine entails and what implications it has within the whole of his thought. In Herman Bavinck's analysis of Calvin's understanding of common grace, the focus is upon the interplay and union between a salvific grace that brings forth the salvation of human beings and a common grace that entails the preservation of the world. This preserving work includes safeguarding remnants of humanity's original and natural gifts from God. In enabling human life to proceed and develop, God thus manifests a certain favor upon all people, for all human achievement must be considered gifts of the Holy Spirit. God bestows such gifts not only to meet human need and satisfy human necessity, but also to bring forth enjoyment and pleasure to human life as evidence of his fatherly kindness for the elect and non-elect

dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1992), see Chapter 7, "John Calvin: Common Grace in Embryo," pp. 196-235.

3. See, for example, Herman Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/11-13 (March 1, 1961; March 15, 1961; April 1, 1961): 244-245; 268-269; 292-293, 297; idem, *Calvin, Berkhof and H. Kuiper: A Comparison* (Grand Rapids: no publisher, n.d.); Herman Hanko, "The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (2): the Reformers," in *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 16 (April 1983): 3-17; David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), pp. 83-89. Also see William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967 [c. 1862]), 395-402.

4. For clarity in the ensuing discussion, it should be noted that the use of the language of "common grace" is not a formal category that belongs to Calvin's theology as such. In the subsequent history of Reformed churches, the words "common grace" came to be used by synergistic or Arminian theologians to refer to a particular species of prevenient grace. In this conception sinners could either effectively resist or effectively cooperate with that grace. The idea of common grace as discussed here has no synergistic elements.

alike.⁵ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sanctification and of life, working in believers and in unbelievers.⁶ In fact, for Calvin, “reprobation does not mean the withholding of all grace.”⁷ Although the blindness of human depravity necessitates God’s redemptive initiative and provision, including the gift of special revelation and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit for redemption, God also works in and upon all humans through a “*generalis gratia*.”⁸ This “grace” has at least a fourfold effect, namely (1) the restraint of sin; (2) the retention of certain “natural gifts”—bringing forth positive benefits both morally, socially, and epistemically; (3) the use of earthly possessions as divine gifts for human enjoyment; and (4) the preservation of the created order itself, which means therefore that human vocation, which is rooted in creation, cannot be divorced from divine redemption and faithful service to God.⁹

Interestingly, Bavinck does not anywhere directly link the idea of common grace in Calvin with the question of the offer of the gospel. The closest he comes to making that connection is found in his analysis of Calvin’s concept of the “seed of religion.” In summarizing Calvin’s thought Bavinck writes, “In every man there is still a seed of religion, a consciousness of God, wholly ineradicable, convincing all of the heavenly grace on which their life depends, and leading even the heathen to name God the Father of mankind.”¹⁰

Writing at about the same time as Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper regarded it as a given that Calvin had a doctrine of common grace. Kuyper asserts that Calvin, in his *Institutes*, had given the doctrine of common grace its “clearest expression.” Says Kuyper: while most people wish to soften the notion of human depravity and account for “the virtues” among the unregenerate as rooted in the unregenerate themselves, Calvin, with his doctrine of common grace, not only opposed all such explanations, but he offered his own superior explanation. Calvin posits a doctrine of grace in the midst of human corruption and depravity which restrains their full effects.¹¹ Kuyper makes occasional reference to Calvin throughout his three massive volumes on the doctrine of common grace, usually appealing to the Reformer in support of his own formulations.

Another writer who follows in the line of Bavinck and Kuyper is Valentine Hepp. Hepp, sharing Bavinck and Kuyper’s assessment of Calvin’s pivotal role in developing the doctrine of common grace, argues that the doctrine of common grace forms an essential component (*bestanddeel*) of Calvin’s theology.¹²

5. Herman Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” trans. G. Vos, in *Calvin and the Reformation*, edited by William Park Armstrong (New York, Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1909; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 117.

6. Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” 119.

7. Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” 119.

8. These words come from Calvin’s *Institutes* 2.2.17.

9. Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” 117-129.

10. Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” 118. Bavinck cites *Institutes* 1.3.1, 5; 1.5.3; and 2.218 in this connection.

11. Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Hōveker & Wormser, 1902-1904), I, 5-7. Kuyper writes further: “Calvin said this already in the first French edition [1541] of his *Institutes*: ‘*Nous avons à considérer, qu’en la corruption universelle, dont nous avons parlé, la grace de Dieu a quelque lieu, non pas pour amender la perversité de la nature, mais pour la restreindre au dedans.*’ The later Latin edition is shorter and more robust: ‘*gratia, non quae illam purget, sed intus cohibeat.*’” (*De Gemeene Gratie*, I, 6). Kuyper cites 2.3.3. “Calvin said this,” notes Kuyper, “already in the first French edition of his *Institutes*.”

12. V. Hepp, *Het Misverstand in Zake de Leer der Algemeene Genade* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1923), 14.

Some two decades after Bavinck and Kuyper, Fred Bronkema came to similar conclusions. He views common grace as a given in Calvin's theology. In fact, Bronkema set for himself the task of proving that Calvin's conception of common grace conforms to the synodical decisions that the Christian Reformed Church in North America reached in 1924 on that topic. Without going into the details of that synod's decision and the debate regarding common grace, suffice it to say that the key issue had to do with the favorable or gracious attitude of God toward all people. This "doctrine" of common grace was expressed under three points: (1) that God's favor or grace extended to all his creatures, including the non-elect; (2) that this grace manifest itself in the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in societal-life as well, benefiting elect and non-elect alike; and (3) that the unregenerate, because of the operation of this common grace, are able to perform "civic good" but remain unable to do "good works" born of redemption in Christ. Bronkema believes that all three of these elements can be found in Calvin's theology.¹³ It ought to be noted, however, that Bronkema does not address a sub-point of the first point of common grace which the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church implicitly affirmed in 1924, namely that the gospel is generally offered to sinners. This hotly controverted feature of the synodical decision is simply ignored in Bronkema's discussion.

Herman Kuiper, writing in the same year as Bronkema, likewise believes that Calvin is "the acknowledged discoverer of the doctrine of common grace."¹⁴ Kuiper, however, formalizes the idea of common grace in Calvin's thought, employing a variety of categories and terminological distinctions which give the appearance, even if not intended, that Calvin himself conceived of the doctrine with tight distinctions.¹⁵ For his part, Kuiper examines a variety of terms in Calvin's *Institutes* and his commentaries which, he says, are synonyms of grace in Calvin's writing, such as: goodness, kindness, liberality, benignity, beneficence, love, mercy, clemency, good will, and favor.¹⁶ Kuiper, unlike the above-mentioned authors, also directly links Calvin's treatment of common grace with the "free offer" of the gospel. In Kuiper's interpretation of Calvin, he sees the Reformer stressing with equal passion both the doctrine of reprobation and the "free offer" of the gospel, that is, "God shows great concern for the salvation of many who are not chosen unto life and in all sincerity offers Christ and the benefits of His redemptive death to reprobates and even pleads with them to flee to the asylum which He opens for them."¹⁷ We should observe that Kuiper believes he uncovers a contradiction in Calvin's thought at this point. Kuiper does not think it is possible to harmonize what Calvin apparently affirms regarding God's desire to save the non-elect with the Reformer's teaching regarding reprobation.¹⁸ For Kuiper, these are not "seeming" but "real" contradictions in Calvin's the-

13. Fred Bronkema, "The Doctrine of Common Grace in Reformed Theology or New Calvinism and the Doctrine of Common Grace" (Th.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1928), 142-143. For the text of the three points adopted by the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, see *Acta der Synode 1924* (Grand Rapids: Publishing Committee of the CRC, 1924), art. 132, pp. 145-147.

14. Herman Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace" (Ph.D. dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam; Goes, The Netherlands: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre; Grand Rapids: Smitter Book Co., 1928.), 1-2.

15. Herman Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace," 179-224.

16. Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace," 3.

17. Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace," 236.

18. Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace," 222.

ology.¹⁹ "We may as well try to budge a mountain of solid granite with our finger as endeavor to harmonize these declarations. There is nothing left for us but to agree that Calvin's writings contain irreconcilable paradoxes."²⁰

Eugène Choisy also sees a twofold grace operative in Calvin's theology: a general grace that God confers upon the wicked, which allows for the continuation of natural endowments of reason and morality, and a special grace that God bestows to the elect in order to effect salvation. Choisy links in Calvin's thought general grace to general revelation and special grace to particular revelation. While general grace has no salvific function and does not destroy in *all* men "the germ of sin," it does "restrain the power of sin" in the elect and non-elect alike.²¹ Similar conclusions are reached by Werner Krusche. Basically endorsing the work of H. Kuiper, Krusche notes that the doctrine (*Lehre*) of common grace (*allgemeinen Gnade*) has always enjoyed a distinct, if not a dominant, place in Reformed theology. By this grace the Holy Spirit preserves order in the midst of sin. Like Bavinck, Krusche sees Calvin conceiving of the realm of nature as a realm of grace. God acts graciously in both church and state, in both the community of faith and the community of culture. With the former in a special way; with the latter in common way (*allgemeiner Weise*).²²

Quirinus Breen is perhaps the most radical interpreter of Calvin in the direction of making "common grace" a doctrine that sanctifies "culture." Breen wonders whether Calvin, with his "theory" of common grace, has not enabled us to bless modern "secularism."²³ Although Breen acknowledges that Calvin did not employ the distinction between "common" and "special" grace (the Reformed scholastics did that, says Breen), these precise terms aptly express Calvin's view.²⁴ He interprets Calvin to say although the non-elect are "beneficiaries of common grace's gifts," what concerns God is not the non-elect but the gifts that God he has bestowed upon them.²⁵ Secular studies are the outstanding component of these gifts, according to Breen's reading of Calvin.²⁶ As for the use of the word "grace" in the face of reprobation, Breen finds this notion "not easy to live with" (for himself, not for Calvin), especially given that God sweetly allures men to himself with many and varied kindnesses, only to render them in the end more inexcusable.²⁷ But then he sees Calvin, too, as a theologian who did not avoid ambiguities and paradox. "Contradictions did not trouble him so long as content is drawn from Scripture."²⁸

These writers form a consensus in agreeing that Calvin has a clear doctrine of common grace, though they disagree as to its nature and implications. While some of them bring the offer of the gospel under the umbrella of this concept, others simply do not address the issue.

19. Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace," 223.

20. Kuiper, "Calvin on Common Grace," 223.

21. Eugène Choisy, "Calvin's Conception of Grace," in *The Doctrine of Grace*, edited by W. T. Whitley (New York: The MacMillan Co, 1932), 229.

22. Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 97-98.

23. Quirinus Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism*, 2nd edition (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), 165.

24. Breen, *John Calvin*, 166.

25. Breen, *John Calvin*, 169.

26. Breen, *John Calvin*, 167ff.

27. Breen, *John Calvin*, 169.

28. Breen, *John Calvin*, 177. In this connection Breen cites F. Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, 357-360.

Another group of interpreters of Calvin's theology are more guarded with respect to the question we are considering. They detect only the seeds of a doctrine of common grace in Calvin's theology, or what one has called the "embryonic" form of such a doctrine. They form a consensus in refraining from ascribing a doctrine of common grace to Calvin, but acknowledge that the idea or notion or beginnings of such a doctrine are present. For example, James W. Anderson notes that it is easy to superimpose the division of 'special' grace and 'common' grace on Calvin's theology, but such terms were not frequent in Calvin or used "in a way that 'special' always referred to the elect."²⁹ Thus Anderson, confining himself to an examination of Calvin's sermons and commentaries, simply deals with the doctrine of grace in Calvin's theology, examining its long reach to all sinners. Although he finds Calvin affirming a divine grace or love that "extends to the non-elect," he does not employ the term "common grace." Instead, Anderson explores how Calvin speaks of the extent of that "grace" and what it means that "God calls all men to salvation."³⁰

Richard A. Couch likewise does not find a doctrine of common grace in Calvin's theology. Instead, says Couch, what we find in Calvin's thought "is a concept of grace which is rather remarkably broad at some points and which may thus be called with some qualifications to the defense of those who have developed a concept of common grace."³¹ But he wants to give full weight to the fact that Calvin himself never gave the idea of common grace "systematic formulation." Thus, says Couch: "It seems quite clear that the neat distinction which was formulated in later Reformed theology was foreign to Calvin."³² Nonetheless, Couch cites Kuiper's work with approval, since it gathers up so many passages from Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries that pertain to the idea of common grace. For Couch, Calvin gives us "the beginnings of a common grace view," and many of the Genevan Reformer's remarks point "in the direction of a view of common grace."³³ Evidences of this "peculiar grace" of God is seen in "the stability of creation," human dominion over wild animals, and the remains of certain excellencies in humans after the fall, such as knowledge and truth. Each and all of these are open to and anticipate a "notion of common grace" or a "common grace type accounting."³⁴ Calvin acknowledges "the broad existence of human virtue," which can only be accounted for through "an intervention of divine grace."³⁵ Calvin also attaches the idea of grace to the national welfare, viewing government as a divine gift for the maintenance of public order and producing positive benefits for the common civil life. Grace is the source of this "very special gift."³⁶ Thus Couch is sympathetic yet guarded in his comments regarding Calvin and common grace.

J. Douma is another writer who does not detect in Calvin's thought "a *dogma* of common grace."³⁷ To be sure, notes Douma, Calvin speaks of

29. James William Anderson, "The Grace of God and the Non-elect in Calvin's Commentaries and Sermons" (Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976), 7.

30. Anderson, "The Grace of God," 4.

31. Richard Arden Couch, "An Evaluation and Reformulation of the Doctrine of Common Grace in the Reformed Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1959), 49.

32. Couch, "An Evaluation," 49.

33. Couch, "An Evaluation," 52, 53.

34. Couch, "An Evaluation," 54, 55, 56, 57.

35. Couch, "An Evaluation," 57.

36. Couch, "An Evaluation," 58-59.

37. J. Douma, *Algemene Genade: uiteenzetting, vergelijking, en beoordeling van de opvattingen van A. Kuyper, K. Schilder en Joh. Calvijn over 'algemene genade,'* (Goes, The Netherlands:

“common grace,” but never as a “dogma” or a “doctrine.” It is not even a “theme” he addresses formally. Calvin knows but *one* divine grace. This one grace, however, can be distinguished with regard to its *extent* and *effect*. As for its extent, this grace reaches both within and beyond the church; as for its effect, it leads some to repentance and proves non-efficacious for others. All grace is directed to the knowledge and praise of God. Thus, even the heathen are invited to the knowledge of God, though none of them attain salvation without Christ. For Douma, it is harmful to speak of Calvin and the doctrine (*leer*) of common grace. Douma's concern is polemical in spirit, wishing to set off sharply Calvin's use of the idea of common grace from the doctrine developed by Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands at the turn of the century, a development Douma views as a perversion of Calvin's teaching.³⁸

A like concern is echoed by Charles B. Partee. Partee believes that some Calvin scholars have misrepresented Calvin's notion of common grace, stating bluntly: “They expand, schematize, and *distort* Calvin's cautious remarks on the closely related topics of natural or general revelation, universal providence, and common grace.”³⁹ Although Partee affirms that Calvin has a doctrine of general or common grace in distinction from special grace, the Reformer did “not work out the implications” of such doctrines.⁴⁰ He believes that “common grace ought to be associated with universal providence and special grace with particular providence....”⁴¹ Thus Partee might actually come closer to the prior consensus we surveyed, but he clearly wants to distance himself from it.

Walter C. Campbell-Jack believes it is better not to assume that Calvin had a doctrine of common grace; instead, he begins with the purposes of God in providentially preserving the non-elect. Campbell-Jack sees Calvin accenting *God's concern for the elect* in the divine preservation of the reprobate. “God bestows His goodness on the unregenerate largely because He wishes to provide for the welfare of the Church....”⁴² Yet Campbell-Jack also asserts that “there is ample evidence that Calvin taught that there was a response of unmerited favour on the part of God towards unregenerate humanity.”⁴³ This however does not serve up a “doctrine of common grace.” God's goodness in sustaining the creation by his providence is not common grace, according to Campbell-Jack.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Campbell-Jack interprets what Calvin says about the preaching of the gospel as one of the most unmistakable evidences of divine goodness. “In the preaching of the Word there is made a ‘promiscuous’ offer of life, an offer received by elect and reprobate alike.”⁴⁵ Yet the offer of life is a double-edged sword, for in rejecting it the non-elect are culpable and without excuse.⁴⁶ It should be noted, however, that for Campbell-Jack the doctrine of common grace is to be identified with the doctrine of Abraham Kuyper, a doctrine Campbell-Jack alleges is founded on a foundation other

Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1981); “Calvijn heeft...geen dogma van de algemene genade gekend.”, 273.

38. Douma, *Algemene Genade*, 274-275.

39. Charles B. Partee, “Calvin on Universal and Particular Providence,” in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, edited by Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 71.

40. Partee, “Calvin on Universal and Particular Providence,” 71.

41. Partee, “Calvin on Universal and Particular Providence,” 71.

42. Walter Campbell Campbell-Jack, “Grace without Christ? The Doctrine of Common Grace in Dutch-American Neo-Calvinism” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1992), 199.

43. Campbell-Jack, “Grace without Christ?”, 200.

44. Campbell-Jack, “Grace without Christ?”, 206.

45. Campbell-Jack, “Grace without Christ?”, 219.

46. Campbell-Jack, “Grace without Christ?”, 219-220.

than the incarnation and Christ's atonement.⁴⁷ Thus, for Campbell-Jack, Calvin gives us at best the idea of common grace "in embryo."⁴⁸

There is one last group of writers that ought to be mentioned, namely those who do not detect in Calvin any notion of common grace whatsoever, arguing that any notion of common grace which might seem to reside in Calvin's theology is due to inconsistency in the Reformer's thinking. These writers, mostly coming from the Protestant Reformed Churches, are prepared to say that the Genevan Reformer, given his voluminous theological output, could not help but contradict himself from time to time. Herman Hoeksema is probably the spokesman most representative of this view. "It is possible and, in fact, very probable, that Calvin, though always emphasizing sovereign grace which is only for the elect, in the course of his development, contradicted what he himself had written in an earlier period."⁴⁹ As for those places in Calvin's literary corpus where the Reformer teaches that God is kind and merciful to every individual person, Hoeksema is quick to conclude that such sentiments in Calvin's thought do not square with his teaching that God has nothing but love for the elect and nothing but hatred for the reprobate. Hoeksema is convinced that Calvin's fundamental and predominant teaching is that "grace is not common but always particular and is never on the reprobate but always on the elect only."⁵⁰ Hoeksema maintains that when Calvin uses the Latin word *offerre*, the word does not carry the connotation of our English word *offer*.

With us the word *offer* has the connotation of willingness to give something to another which the latter may and can either accept or reject. That cannot be said of Christ or of salvation. A better translation, therefore, is *to present*. The gospel and Christ are "offered" that is, presented in the preaching to all that hear the gospel preached, both to the godly and to the ungodly, to the elect and reprobate alike.⁵¹

Consequently, God's grace is not common and the offer of salvation is not "well-meant." In fact, the opposite is true. "The preaching of the Word, according to Calvin, only aggravates the condemnation of the reprobate, is a testimony against them, and when it is a savour of death unto them, it is still a sweet savour unto God."⁵² For Hoeksema, the mere external call to repentance and faith is not "a well-meant offer of salvation." He reads Calvin as saying that the gospel is presented to sinners—with no offer of salvation to the reprobate—and consequently God is not in any manner whatsoever gracious or favorable or kindly disposed to the non-elect.⁵³ Although Hoeksema is quite ready to admit contradiction in Calvin's thinking, he is also ready to state emphatically that "Never, no not once, does Calvin teach that the preaching of the gospel is grace for all that hear." Likewise, "Never, no not once, does Calvin speak of a well-meant offer, on the part of God, to all that

47. Campbell-Jack, "Grace without Christ?", 226-227.

48. Campbell-Jack, "Grace without Christ?", 196.

49. Herman Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/11 (March 1, 1961): 244. Also see Hoeksema's *Calvin, Berkhof and H. Kuiper: A Comparison* (Grand Rapids: no publisher, n.d.). Besides Hoeksema, see Herman Hanko, "The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (2): the Reformers," in *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 16 (April 1983): 3-17, and David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), pp. 83-89.

50. Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/11 (March 1, 1961): 244.

51. Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/12 (March 15, 1961): 268.

52. Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/12 (March 15, 1961): 268.

53. Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/12 (March 15, 1961): 269.

hear the preaching."⁵⁴ He also bids us to remember that "when Calvin uses the word 'offer' it simply means 'to present.'"⁵⁵

II. Calvin's Treatment of the Offer of the Gospel

It is within the framework of these diverging interpretations of Calvin's theology in reference to the idea of common grace, and more particularly, the idea of the offer of the gospel, therefore, that the following exposition and analysis of Calvin's treatment of the gospel-offer and divine grace toward the non-elect must be understood. We look first at Calvin's exposition of the offer of the gospel and then turn to his defense of this idea against synergistic interpretations of key texts.

Calvin's Exposition of the Gospel-Offer

First we examine those places in Calvin's writings where he most explicitly addresses the question of a grace offered to all sinners.

In his Romans commentary, Calvin, commenting on Romans 5:18, writes the following: "Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered [*exposita est*] to all."⁵⁶ Then he adds, "Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered [*offerre*] by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him."⁵⁷ Calvin uses two different terms here: *to set forth* and *to offer*. The Latin term *offerre* can likewise mean *to show* or *to exhibit*. No doubt, a case could be made that Calvin is using these words as synonyms in this context. But a case can also be made that Calvin employs different terms in order to enrich and capture the full idea he wishes to convey. Indeed, the term *offerre* can also mean *to offer*, *to present (for the taking or for acceptance)*; and in ecclesiastical Latin it gains the sense of *to offer to God*, *to consecrate* or *dedicate*, *to devote*.⁵⁸ Consequently, we must let context determine meaning. Here Calvin draws a distinction between the offer of grace to all and the extending or receiving of what is offered. What is to be noted is that the offer is according to "the goodness of God" to all people "without distinction." Hence his use of the phrase "Paul makes grace common to all men." Also to be noted is that to limit the word *offerre* to the idea of a mere "exhibit" or "display" renders Calvin's sentence meaningless. Key is the phrase, "not all receive Him [Christ]." If Christ's sacrificial work is merely "displayed" to all people and not "offered," the question of *receiving* Christ is irrelevant, for there is nothing to be re-

54. Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/13 (April 1, 1961): 297.

55. Hoeksema, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 37/13 (April 1, 1961): 292.

56. "Communem omnium gratiam facit, *quia omnibus exposita est*, non quod ad omnes extendatur re ipsa," John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. J. W. Baum, A. E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, 59 volumes, Corpus Reformatorum (Braunschweig: Schwetschhke, 1863-1900), 49:101, hereafter cited as *CO*; English translations of Calvin's commentaries are taken from the Calvin Translation Society edition (Edinburgh, 1843-1855), cited as CTS, and from *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, 12 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963-74), cited as CNTC (here, CNTC, Rom. 5:18 [1540/'51/'56], 117-118).

57. Calvin, Comm. Rom. 5:18 [1540/'51/'56], "Nam etsi passus est Christus pro peccatis totius mundi, atque omnibus indifferenter Dei benignitate offertur, non tamen omnes apprehendunt." *CO*, 49:101; CNTC, 117-118.

58. See Charlton T. Lewis, ed., *A Latin Dictionary: Lewis and Short* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1879), 1259; P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1242-43; Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 179.

ceived in a mere display. Calvin appears to use the word *offerre* as it corresponds to the word *receive* (*apprehendere*), a term that means *to take hold of, to seize*.⁵⁹ Thus, his meaning is that what is offered is to be received, is to be seized, but of course not all do.

Calvin's comments on Romans 1:16 offer a ready explanation why *all* do not receive or "seize" Christ, for "God does not work effectually in all men...."⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit must labor in the human heart as "the inward teacher." Thus, while the gospel is in fact "offered to all for their salvation," the power of the gospel "is not universally manifest."⁶¹ Here Calvin distinguishes between an offer of the gospel to all people, an offer "for their salvation," and a manifestation of the gospel's "power." For Calvin, the offer of the gospel does not automatically entail the Spirit's mighty operation to effect faith and repentance in the sinner. Yet this does not minimize the "good news" of what is offered. That the gospel proves to be "the taste of death" for some is not to characterize the gospel itself in those terms. The gospel is "the doctrine of salvation," as such it "invites all to partake of salvation without difference...."⁶² Calvin then links the word *invitare* to *offerre*. "For Christ," he writes, "is there offered, whose proper office is to save that which had been lost, and those who refuse [*recusare*] to be saved by Him shall find Him their Judge."⁶³ We should note that Calvin's language of "refusal" comports with the language of offer and invitation. It will not do to make these terms to mean Christ is "displayed" to sinners. Calvin's language is that a genuine invitation is given—a genuine offer and a genuine refusal.

We next turn to Calvin's comments on John 3:16, for here once again we find Calvin unashamedly using offer language. As for the words, "*That whosoever believeth on him should not perish*," Calvin maintains that the apostle uses "a general term, both to invite indiscriminately all to share in life and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers."⁶⁴ For Calvin, the invitation is itself the basis for rendering unbelievers without excuse. Implicit here is the idea of rejecting what is offered or spurning the invitation given. If there is no invitation, there is no ground for being rendered the more culpable and inexcusable. Therefore Calvin seems to be saying that the indiscriminate invitation to "share in life," the eternal life Christ bestows, brings with it penalty if the offer is despised.

Calvin also comments on the word "world." This word shows that God "is favourable to the whole world when He calls all without exception to the faith of Christ, which is indeed an entry into life."⁶⁵ Here Calvin ties God's "favor" to the whole world to "calling all" to faith. The import Calvin gives to the word "favor" is not here delineated, but it seems to mean that God acts out of his own goodwill, kindness, and/or graciousness rather than according to his

59. See Charlton T. Lewis, ed., *A Latin Dictionary*, 143.

60. Calvin, Comm. Rom. 1:16 [1540/'51/'56], CNTC, p. 27.

61. Calvin, Comm. Rom. 1:16 [1540/'51/'56], "Offertur quidem evangelium omnibus in salutem, sed non ubique apparet eius potentia," OS, 49:19; CNTC, 27.

62. Calvin, Comm. Rom. 1:16 [1540/'51/'56], "Ergo, quum evangelium omnes ad salutem indifferenter invitet, proprie vocatur salutis doctrina," OS, 49:20; CNTC, 27.

63. Calvin, Comm. Rom. 1:16 [1540/'51/'56], "Christus enim illic offertur, eius proprium munus est servare quod perierat. Qui autem servari ab eo recusant, iudicem experiuntur." CO, 49:20; CNTC, 27.

64. Calvin, Comm. John 3:16 [1553], "Et universalem notam apposuit, tum ut promsicue omnes ad vitae participationem invitet, tum ut praecidat excusationem incredulis." CO, 47:65; CNTC, 74.

65. Calvin, Comm. John 3:16 [1553], "Tametsi enim in mundo nihil reperietur Dei favore dignum, se tamen toti mundo propitium ostendit, quum sine exceptione omnes ad fidem Christi vocat, quae nihil aliud est quam ingressus in vitam." CO, 47:65; CNTC, 74.

justice or what human merit would require. The scope of the word is here defined by the phrase "the whole world." However, the life promised to the whole world, to all, is only along the way of faith; and this faith is "not common to all."⁶⁶ For not only is Christ "displayed to all," Calvin also uses the phrase "Christ is open to all."⁶⁷ I take "open" to be the converse of "closed." Christ is not closed to all, but open. This comports with *offer-language*. The idea seems to be that Christ is available or accessible to all sinners, if they will seek him. "[B]ut God," Calvin states, "opens the eyes only of the elect that they may seek Him by faith."⁶⁸

As we saw with Calvin's comments on Rom. 1:16, so here Calvin notes that the proper office of the gospel is salvation. That the gospel brings judgment and that Christ becomes a stone of stumbling for some is not the gospel's proper import or purpose. Such is to be regarded as "accidental" or "foreign" to the gospel.⁶⁹ "For those who reject the grace offered in Him [Christ] deserve to find Him the judge and avenger of such unworthy and shocking contempt."⁷⁰ This strong language fits with the idea of "grace offered," for how could be it contemptible for a person to refuse to embrace what is *not* offered to him? To reject life in Christ, and that life requires faith, is to extinguish the light of the gospel. If a gospel-invitation is rejected, nothing is left for gospel-rejecters but death.⁷¹

In commenting on Matthew 23:37 ('*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together...*'), Calvin says that this expression shows us God's own "maternal kindness;" God as it were "bares His breast to us."⁷² That sinners are not gathered by God is due to "our rough nature" which is "quite monstrous."⁷³

Calvin takes the "I" in this passage to refer to Christ "in the Person of God" so that the lament and rebuke of these words "belong to His eternal Godhead."⁷⁴ This means that it is *not* merely the *human nature* of Christ which exhibits "the gestures of a mother's love."⁷⁵ Thus we do well to observe that the language of love and kindness which Calvin employs in expositing this verse is a *divine* love and kindness toward those who reject the call of the gospel. When the Word of God is proclaimed to sinners God himself comes, as it were, like a mother hen to gather her chicks. This is why it is a monstrosity for sinners to reject God's "great goodness" manifest in this way.⁷⁶ In fact, in contrast to the gospel-exhortations of the old covenant dispensation, the divine invitation through Christ "is far more familiar and kind."⁷⁷ Consequently, a "dreadful vengeance awaits us as often as the teaching of His Gospel is put before us, unless we quietly hide ourselves under His

66. Calvin, Comm. John 3:16 [1553], CNTC, 75.

67. Calvin, Comm. John 3:16 [1553], "Patet enim omnibus Christus ac expositus est..." CO, 47:65; CNTC, 75; "For Christ is made known and held out to the view of all..." CTS, 125.

68. Calvin, Comm. John 3:16 [1553], "...solis tamen electis oculos Deus aperit, ut fide ipsum quaerant." CO, 47:65; CNTC, 75.

69. Calvin, Comm. John 3:17 [1553], p. 76. In another place Calvin writes: "But the proper function (*proprium officium*) of the Gospel is always to be distinguished from what we may call its accidental function (*ab accidentalibus*), which must be imputed to the depravity of men by which life is turned into death." (Comm. 2 Cor. 2:15 [1546], CNTC, 35)

70. Calvin, Comm. John 3:17 [1553], CNTC, 76.

71. Calvin, Comm. John 3:18 [1553], CNTC, 76.

72. Calvin, Comm. Matt. 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 68.

73. Calvin, Comm. Matt. 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 68.

74. Calvin, Comm. Matt. 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 69.

75. Calvin, Comm. Matt. 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 68.

76. Calvin, Comm. Matt. 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 68.

77. Calvin, Comm. Matt. 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 68.

wings, in which He is ready to take us up and shelter us.”⁷⁸ The depth of human depravity is manifest in refusing “God’s goodness.”⁷⁹ In this connection Calvin takes up a polemic against certain misuses of this text, which we will return to later in this essay. For now, we note that Calvin establishes a parity between invitation or call and the penalty for spurning that invitation. The invitation itself is cast in the startling image of maternal love and tenderness—an invitation specifically and unremittingly issued to despisers of it.⁸⁰

Another place where Calvin speaks in clear gospel-offer language is Jeremiah 7:25-26. In his lectures on this text Calvin offers the following instruction: “We may hence learn a useful doctrine,—that God rises to invite us, and also to receive us, whenever his word is proclaimed among us, by which he testifies to us his paternal love.”⁸¹ Here Calvin defines the invitation as reception or at least demonstrates that the intention of invitation is reception; that is, the reason for God rising to invite sinners to himself is also to receive them. This invitation is nothing less than an expression of his “paternal love.”⁸² Calvin also explains that although God employs men as the instruments who proclaim his word, the Lord “comes forth in a manner himself to meet us, and rises early as one solicitous for our salvation.”⁸³ The “our” in “our salvation” does not refer only to the elect, for God rises early even to those who “slumber and sleep” for the promotion of “their salvation,” “to draw them to himself.”⁸⁴ Precisely for that reason their slumbering deserves reproof as “impiety.” When the Jews hardened themselves against and despised God, rejecting his prophets, they “carried on war even with his favour and kindness.”⁸⁵ Here, once more, we see Calvin linking the call of the gospel to the goodwill of God. Likewise, as before, we also see Calvin linking punishment to an abuse of God’s forbearance and kindness.⁸⁶

What is more, we should not miss that, for Calvin, the proclamation of the gospel can never be a mere display or an announcement of a message. In Calvin’s theology of preaching, while humans are the outward instruments who speak the words, in faithful preaching it is Christ who speaks. In other words, the agent who communicates is Christ himself. The content of the gospel, Christ, is likewise the messenger of the message. Hence the language Calvin employs in expounding this passage, where the faithful may find tranquility in God’s promises spoken through the prophets, makes clear that God himself addresses sinners, for the divine promises are conveyed to us “as though God himself had spoken them to us.”⁸⁷ Commenting on Isaiah 65:2 Calvin writes:

The Lord never speaks to us without at the same time ‘stretching out his hand’ to join us to himself, or without causing us to feel, on the other hand, that he is near to us. He even embraces us, and shews the anxiety of a father,

78. Calvin, *Comm. Matt.* 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 68.

79. Calvin, *Comm. Matt.* 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 69.

80. See Calvin, *Comm. Matt.* 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 68.

81. *Lectures Jer.* 7:25-26 [1563], “Et hinc colligi debet utilis doctrina, Deum scilicet surgere ut nos invitet atque amplectatur, quoties verbum eius profertur in medium, quo testatur nobis paternum suum amorem.” *CO*, 37:696; CTS, 403.

82. *Lectures Jer.* 7:25-26 [1563], CTS, 403.

83. *Lectures Jer.* 7:25-26 [1563], CTS, 403.

84. *Lectures Jer.* 7:25-26 [1563], CTS, 403.

85. *Lectures Jer.* 7:25-26 [1563], CTS, 403.

86. *Lectures Jer.* 7:25-26 [1563], CTS, 403.

87. *Lectures Jer.* 7:25-26 [1563], CTS, 403.

so that, if we do not comply with his invitation, it must be owing entirely to our own fault.⁸⁸

Although we cannot explicate this matter further at this point, we simply observe that since, for Calvin, it is “God himself who comes to meet us,” and “rises early as one solicitous for our salvation,” in the preaching of the gospel all sinners, elect and non-elect alike, are confronted by and hear the words of God himself, bidding them to repent and believe. That fact, as Calvin seems to make clear here, does not comport with rendering the idea of “offer” or “invitation” to a mere announcement without a call to commitment or a display of the gospel without a summons.⁸⁹

These places in Calvin's writings are sufficient to demonstrate that Calvin freely employed the language of “offer” and “invitation,” terms that apply to all sinners. The various passages we have considered likewise demonstrate that Calvin linked the language of gospel-offer unto all sinners to the notion of God's love, favor, kindness, or goodness. For Calvin, this language encompasses a kindness of God toward all *sinners*. Indeed, in such contexts, Calvin does not necessarily feel obliged to distinguish elect and reprobate sinners from one another. Moreover, we see that the weightier penalty which awaits those who reject the gospel is tied directly to the reality of the invitation. The offer of mercy is as genuine as the rejection of it. For Calvin, the reality of the one is commensurate with the reality of the other.

In expounding Calvin's conception of the offer of the gospel and how he relates that offer to divine grace, it remains for us to examine how he deals with this question in a polemical context. We next turn our attention to those places in Calvin's theological corpus where he engages in such polemics.

Calvin's Defense of the Gospel-Offer

As Calvin seeks to refute those who would turn various Scripture-texts in a synergistic direction—particularly the so-called universalistic texts of Ezekiel 18:23, 32, 1 Timothy 2:4, and 2 Peter 3:9—he comes to address the relation between God's will of decree and God's will of precept. Many of Calvin's opponents charged him with teaching that God has a double-will—a charge Calvin passionately denied. What Calvin sought to teach is that God's will is one, but it may be distinguished. For his part, Calvin urged readers of Scripture to look to God's will revealed in the gospel, to follow its directives, arguing that any seeming incongruities between God's will of decree and his will of precept are rooted in the limitation of human understanding. Besides, since God's secret will is *secret*, believers should follow Scripture.

88. Comm. Isa. 65:2 [1551], CTS, 378.

89. In support of my comments about Calvin's doctrine of preaching, see T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); John H. Leith, “Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in the Light of Recent Research,” *Review and Expositor* 86 (Winter 1989): 29-44; Richard Stauffer, “Les Discours a la premiere personne dans les sermons de Calvin,” *Regards contemporains sur Jean Calvin* (Paris, 1965); Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (1953; rpr., Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982); Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960); J. Mark Beach, “The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Gospel: Luther and Calvin on the Nature of Preaching,” in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 77-134; Dawn DeVries, “The Incarnation and the Sacramental Word: Calvin's and Schleiermacher's Sermons on Luke 2,” in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, editors, David Willis and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 386-405.

We begin with Ezekiel 18:23, 32, as Calvin expounds these verses in his treatise *The Eternal Predestination of God* (1552). These words (“*God have no pleasure in the death of the wicked...but that the wicked turn from his way and live*”) are, says Calvin, “*conditional*” in character. The *conditional promises* of God, the very promises “*which invite all men to salvation,*” do not prove with absolute certainty what “*God has decreed in His secret counsel, but declare only what God is ready to do to all those who are brought to faith and repentance.*”⁹⁰ Calvin is aware that this explanation elicits the allegation that he attributes to God a double will and depicts him as a mocker of men. But Calvin urges readers to see the conjunction between the divine imperative that sinners turn from their iniquity and the divine delight in their salvation. God does not disappoint anyone who turns from his wicked way, for the reward of eternal life is bestowed upon all who do. God thus takes pleasure in repentance, since “*He invites all men to it by His Word.*”⁹¹ The offer of life is *conditional*, that is, God “*enlightens all men with the external doctrine of conditional life.*”⁹² There is nothing here, says Calvin, that runs contrary to God’s eternal counsel. God has “*decreed to convert none but His own elect*” and God issues his call whereby he “*invites all men unto eternal life.*”⁹³ Although “*the gift of conversion is not common to all men,*” and sinners certainly do not turn to the Lord by their own strength or inclination, nonetheless the gospel-offer stands: God delights in repentance and calls sinners to repentance.⁹⁴ As noted before, there is no justification for making the word “*invite,*” as Calvin uses it here, to mean something less than a call to come to Christ or a summons. Calvin does not engage in any theological word games. He doesn’t try to do deductivistic exegesis from the secret decree. He lets the words of the text carry their own meaning, without trying to theologize his way out of a conundrum.

This becomes more evident when we look at how Calvin explicates these same verses in his lectures on Ezekiel. What God reveals to us in the law and the prophets is unmistakable: “*God announces his wish that all should be saved.*”⁹⁵ Indeed, the whole tendency of the gospel message is that “*all are promiscuously called to salvation.*”⁹⁶ Calvin asserts that the reason that God does not delight in the death of the one who perishes is because he “*invites all to repentance and rejects no one.*”⁹⁷ In fact, God “*calls all equally to repentance, and promises himself prepared to receive them if they only seriously repent.*”⁹⁸ These words do not refer to God secret counsel as such but come to “*miserable men*” so that “*they may apprehend the hope of pardon, and repent and embrace the offered salvation.*”⁹⁹ There is no duplicity in God, for he “*always wishes the same thing, though by different ways, and in a*

90. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God & the Secret Providence of God*. 2 vols. in 1, trans. Henry Cole (London, 1856-57; repr. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Co., n.d) [1552], p. 99.

91. Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, “The Eternal Predestination of God” [1552], 99-100.

92. Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, “The Eternal Predestination of God” [1552], 100.

93. Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, “The Eternal Predestination of God” [1552], 100.

94. Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, “The Eternal Predestination of God” [1552], 100.

95. Calvin, Lectures Ezek. 18:32 [1565], “...nempe Deum respectu legis et totius propheticae doctrinae pronuntiare se velle omnes salvos.” CO, 40:459; CTS, 266.

96. Calvin, Lectures Ezek. 18:32 [1565], “...reperiemus vocari omnes promiscue ad salutem.” CO, 40:459; CTS, 266.

97. Calvin, Lectures Ezek. 18:32 [1565], CTS, 266.

98. Calvin, Lectures Ezek. 18:23 [1565], “...quia omnes indifferentur ad eos reipiendo, modo serio resipiscant.” CO, 40:445; CTS, 247.

99. Calvin, Lectures Ezek. 18:23 [1565], CTS, 247.

manner inscrutable to us.”¹⁰⁰ It is not for us to pry into God’s secrets. Calvin bids us to follow God’s word, in which the divine will “is made plain to us and to our children.”¹⁰¹

If this seems to present us with an unsolvable puzzle, in that God calls sinners to repentance whom he has not chosen for eternal life, Calvin argues that we cannot judge this matter. Yet he believes he unties the knot with this explanation:

[God] does not leave us in suspense when he says, that he wishes all to be saved. Why so? for if no one repents without finding God propitious, then this sentence is filled up. But we must remark that God puts on a twofold character: for he here wishes to be taken at his word. [That is,]...the Prophet ... wishes to keep our attention close to God’s word. Now, what are the contents of this word? The law, the prophets, and the gospel. Now all are called to repentance, and the hope of salvation is promised them when they repent: this is true, since God rejects no returning sinner: he pardons all without exception; meanwhile, this will of God which he sets forth in his word does not prevent him from decreeing before the world was created what he would do with every individual....¹⁰²

We find a similar set of issues in Calvin’s explanation of 1 Timothy 2:4 (*‘...God our Saviour; who willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth’*). Calvin observes that the apostle links God’s willingness that all should be saved and their coming to a knowledge of the truth.¹⁰³ Again, Calvin faces opponents who wish, by this text, to subvert the doctrine of predestination and teach that people are responsible, according to their own power of free will, to come to salvation. Calvin argues, to the contrary, that this text shows us God’s desire to include all orders of men in the way of salvation. “God has not closed the way unto salvation to any order of men; rather, he has so poured out his mercy that he would have none without it.”¹⁰⁴ Although salvation was at once time confined to a certain people, God now means to show mercy to all the world, even to those who once were shut out from the hope of salvation.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, this text, with others, proclaims that “there is ready pardon for all sinners, provided they turn back to seek it.”¹⁰⁶

[The apostle] is showing that God has at heart the salvation of all men, for He calls all men to acknowledge His truth. This is an argument from an observed effect back to its cause. For if ‘the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for every one that believeth’ (Rom. 1.16) it is certain that all those to whom the Gospel is preached are invited to a hope of eternal life. In short, since calling is proof of secret election, so God admits into possession of salvation those to whom He gives a share in His Gospel, for the Gospel reveals to us God’s righteousness which guarantees an entrance into life.¹⁰⁷

Calvin is arguing here that calling and election go together. Whereas not all of those whom are called are elect, all the elect are called. All sinners must

100. Calvin, *Lectures Ezek. 18:23* [1565], CTS, 247.

101. Calvin, *Lectures Ezek. 18:32* [1565], CTS, 267.

102. Calvin, *Lectures Ezek. 18:23* [1565], CTS, 248.

103. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.16.

104. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.16.

105. John Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:4 (The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter.) [1554], 149.

106. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.16.

107. Calvin, *Comm. 1 Tim. 2:3-4* [1548], “Postremo autem Deo cordi esse omnium salutem demonstrat, quia omnes ad veritatis suae agnitionem vocet.” *CO*, 52:268; *CNTC*, 208.

recognize this. Calvin is also ready on the draw for those who contest his exposition of this text, for even if one argues that these words of this text should not be confined to *classes* of people but should be understood to include all people, Calvin has a ready answer, namely that the destiny of every individual is still determined by God. "For although it is true that we must not try to decide what is God's will by prying into His secret counsel, when He has made it plain to us by external signs, yet that does not mean that God has not determined secretly with Himself what He wishes to do with every single man."¹⁰⁸ In other words, Calvin refuses to set God's secret counsel against his will of precept which is revealed to us in the gospel.

God chooses whom he will to eternal life, yet those whom he chooses come from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people. "[N]o nation of the earth and no rank of society is excluded from salvation, since God wills to offer [*proponere*] the Gospel to all without exception."¹⁰⁹

For this reason, the church should pray for all such orders of people, which practically speaking means we should pray for *all* people, that God might show his mercy to the same. Although what is immediately in view here is for all orders of people to come to salvation, particularly kings and rulers, so that the church might enjoy "quiet, peace and safety," Calvin also recognizes that it is incumbent upon believers to pray for all people who come under the call of the gospel.¹¹⁰ "There is a duty of love to care a great deal for the salvation of all those to whom God extends His call and to testify to this by godly prayers."¹¹¹ Since God would have all the world to be saved, says Calvin, he bids believers, insofar as it lies with them, to seek its salvation.¹¹² This is a theme that Calvin particularly emphasizes in his sermon on this text:

...albeit there be at this day an horrible forlornnesse, so that it may well seeme that we are verie miserable creatures, vtterly cast away and condemned, yet must wee labour as much as we can to drawe them to saluation whiche seeme to be farre off, and aboue all thinges let vs pray to God for them, waiting patiently till it please him to shewe his good will towarde them, as he hath alreadie shewed it vpon vs.¹¹³

We also find in Calvin's sermon on this text a frequent use of universalistic language and the idea of a gospel-offer: "... but when Iesus Christ came to be a common Sauiour for all in generall, he offred the grace of God his father, to the end that all might receiue it."¹¹⁴ "And we must not restraine his fatherly goodnesse either to our selues onely, or to some certeine num- of people. And why so? For he sheweth that he will be fauourable to all."¹¹⁵ "...that as far as we can perceiue, God woulde haue all men to be saued, whensoever

108. Calvin, Comm. 1 Tim. 2:3-4 [1548], CNTC, 208.

109. Calvin, Comm. 1 Tim. 2:3-4 [1548], "...quia omnibus sine exceptione evangelium proponi Deus velit...." CO, 52:268; CNTC, 208-209.

110. See John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God & the Secret Providence of God*. 2 vols. in 1, trans. Henry Cole (London, 1856-57; repr. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Co., n.d) [1558], 275-76 and Comm. 1 Tim. 2:3-4 [1548], CNTC, 209.

111. Comm. 1 Tim. 2:3-4 [1548], CNTC, 209.

112. John Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus*. trans. L. T. London, 1579; 16th-17th century facsimile editions reprint (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 148.

113. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 160.

114. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 150.

115. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 150.

and howe oft so euer hee appointheth his Gospell to be preached vnto vs."¹¹⁶ "...and let vs marke first of all when the Gospel is preached vnto vs, that it is as muche as if God reached out his hand . . . and saide vnto vs, Come to mee."¹¹⁷ Because of the intimate and personal nature of such a call to salvation, "It is a matter which ought to touch vs to the quicke, when we see that God cometh to seeke vs, and waiteth not till we come to him, but sheweth that he is readie to be made at one with vs, although we were his dealy enimies...."¹¹⁸

Calvin's treatment of the double-will canard also finds an interesting defense in his sermon. Although this text does not have in view God's eternal counsel, revealing to us only God's will and pleasure insofar as we may know it, nevertheless, argues Calvin, we do discover that Scripture speaks of God's will in a twofold way.¹¹⁹ Scripture does this because of our "grosseness and rudenesse." God must change "his owne hue" if we would understand his will.¹²⁰ God's will isn't double, but he sometimes speaks as though it were in order "to applie himselfe to our weakenes, bycause that our vnderstanding is grosse and heauie as leade."¹²¹ Calvin emphasizes that it is the revealed will of God that is "profitable for vs." His will revealed to us in Scripture is a "sure certificate," which relieves believers of doubt concerning their election, for one cannot know God's secret counsel—certainly no copy of it is given to them.¹²² The revealed will of God is open for us, so that whenever his word is proclaimed all are thereby called and exhorted to repentance.¹²³ If God exhorts all men generally, notes Calvin, we may fairly judge that it is the divine will that "all men shoulde be saued...."¹²⁴ Moreover, we may fairly conclude from God's revealed will that if God "exhort vs to repentaunce, that he is readie to receiue vs when wee come vnto him."¹²⁵

Calvin uses an illustration, "a similitude," from God's relationship with Israel and the nature of the promise given in circumcision to clarify and strengthen his argument. The sign of circumcision was a divine call to all who received it, yet, notes Calvin, a special grace was given only to some of Abraham's seed. Similarly, the call of God reaches many but some receive a special grace.¹²⁶ Indeed, those whom God brings to faith are the recipients of this "special grace."¹²⁷

As for the charge that sinners can't come to God unless he enables them, and thus God is responsible for sinners not coming to him and heeding the call, Calvin says:

Oh, this is not in any wise to be allowed of, for God calleth vs sufficiently vnto him, and we can not accuse him of crueltie, or that he was wanting vnto vs. For if we had not his worde, yet must we needes confesse that hee is iust although we know not the cause that moueth him to deprive vs of it. But when

116. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 156.

117. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 157.

118. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 157-158.

119. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 152.

120. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 152.

121. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 153.

122. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 153, 154.

123. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 153, 154.

124. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 153, 154.

125. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 156.

126. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 157.

127. See Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 151.

we are called to come to God, and we know, that he is ready to receiue vs, if we do not come, can we denie but that we are vnthankful and slack?¹²⁸

The gospel also has the purpose of rendering sinners “voide of excuse.” This is directly linked to the gospel-offer, “seeing that God had alreadie shewed vs that he was redie to receiue vs to mercie, if we had come to him....”¹²⁹ The consequence is certain: “our condemnation shall no dout be increased, if we be so wicked, as to drawe backe, when as he calleth so mildly and louingly.”¹³⁰

We discover in Calvin’s treatment of 1 Timothy 2:4 that the divine call to repentance isn’t a mere display of Christ. God does not act deceitfully. It is not for us to know why God hasn’t willed the salvation of all people. It is for us to know that God lovingly calls all people to himself, and we may take God at his word. Whatever incongruity persists in our mind on this matter is rooted in our humanity, for God must accommodate himself to our meager capacity.

The last passage we consider is Calvin’s exposition of 2 Peter 3:9 (‘...not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.’). The puzzle here is simple to define but not as simple to solve: if God does not wish any to perish, why do so many in fact perish? Again Calvin turns to the question of God’s will. God’s secret decree in not in view here, says Calvin. Instead what we discover is God’s “loving-kindness as it is made known to us in the Gospel.”¹³¹ The revealed will of God is the avenue by which “God stretches out His hand to all alike....”¹³² This doesn’t negate God’s sovereign choice of divine predestination, for “He only grasps those (in such a way as to lead to Himself) whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world.”¹³³ For Calvin, God wills to call all, but not to convert all.¹³⁴ Thus he sees no disharmony between divine election and the universal call of the gospel. Mercy is “extended to all, provided they seek after it and implore it.” Mercy isn’t, however, bestowed to all.¹³⁵ “[T]here is a wide and wonderful difference between these two things—that the hearts of men are made of God ‘fleshly’ out of ‘stony’ heart, and that it is thus that they are made to be displeased and dissatisfied with themselves, and are brought, as suppliants, to beg of God mercy and pardon; and that after they are thus changed, they are received into all grace.”¹³⁶

If we seek to discover “in what sense” God desires or wills the salvation of all, we seek what God is not pleased to show us. This is “a matter not here to be inquisitively discussed.”¹³⁷ Thus Calvin objects to those who would treat these words as though they revealed to us God’s secret will of decree, thereby indicating that God decrees the salvation of all. Clearly God has not willed to reveal the truth of the gospel to all people, for many have perished without ever having heard the gospel and the message of redemption has not come to all nations, at all times, all at once. It is also clear that God has not opened

128. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 158-159.

129. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 160

130. Calvin, 1 Tim. 2:3-5, The 13. Sermon vpon the second Chapter [1554], 160; also p. 156.

131. Calvin, Comm. 1 Pet. 3:9 [1551], CNTC, 364.

132. Calvin, Comm. 1 Pet. 3:9 [1551], “Omnibus enim promiscue manum illic porrigit Deus...,” *CO*, 55:476; CNTC, 364.

133. Calvin, Comm. 1 Pet. 3:9 [1551], CNTC, 364.

134. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.16.

135. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.17.

136. Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, “The Secret Providence of God,” [1558], 276.

137. Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, “The Secret Providence of God,” [1558], 277.

the eyes of all to the truth of the gospel. The Spirit's work of illumination, by which God actually dispenses his grace of salvation unto sinners so that they believe, comes to few.¹³⁸ Therefore Calvin asks: "Since no one but he who is drawn by the secret influence of the Spirit can approach unto God, how is it that God does not draw all men indiscriminately to Himself, if He really 'willeth all men to be saved' (in the common meaning of the expression)?"¹³⁹ His answer: "It is, therefore, an evident conclusion, flowing from this discrimination which God makes, that there is, with Him, a secret reason why He shuts so many out from salvation."¹⁴⁰ It would seem that because of this "secret reason" Calvin has no trouble saying, in another place, that God's "wondrous love towards the human race" is displayed in the words of 2 Peter 3:9. God desires the salvation of all people, for, says Calvin, "God is prepared to receive all men into repentance, so that none may perish," observing that repentance precedes salvation, that is, without repentance there is no salvation.¹⁴¹ God even delays his judgment upon the world in order to "call the whole human race to repentance."¹⁴² And what is true for the world as a whole is true for each individual. "God sustains men by prolonging each man's time for him to repent."¹⁴³

In this connection we return to Calvin comments on Matthew 23:37, a passage we examined earlier.

[T]he will of God as mentioned here must be judged by the result. Seeing that in His Word He calls all alike to salvation, and this is the object of preaching, that all should take refuge in His faith and protection, it is right to say that He wishes all to gather to Him. Now the nature of the Word shows us that here there is no description of the secret counsel of God (*arcanum Dei consilium*)—just His wishes. Certainly those whom He wishes effectually to gather, He draws inwardly by His Spirit, and calls them not merely by man's outward voice. If anyone objects that it is absurd to split God's will (*duplicem in Deo voluntatem fingi*), I answer that this is exactly our belief, that His will is one and undivided: but because our minds cannot plumb the profound depths of His secret election (*ad profundam acrae electionis abyssum*) to suit our infirmity, the will of God is set before us as double (*bifariam*).¹⁴⁴

Does Calvin thus flagrantly contradict himself, as some interpreters of his thought allege? I don't think so. He distinguishes God's will of precept from God's will of decree, just as he distinguishes calling as such from conversion. Both of these were common distinctions in Augustinian theology. Regarding calling and conversion, Calvin's contemporary, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500-1562), serves as an example. Vermigli recognizes two kinds of calling (*duplex vocationis genus*), "one ordinary and the other effectual."¹⁴⁵ Effectual calling brings conversion in the sinner through God's word and by the Spirit's operation. "But the other [calling] is general, by which the prom-

138. Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, "The Secret Providence of God," [1558], 277.

139. Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, "The Secret Providence of God," [1558], 277.

140. Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, "The Secret Providence of God," [1558], 277-278.

141. Calvin, Comm. 1 Pet. 3:9 [1551], "Mirus hic erga humanum genus amor, quod omnes vult esse salvos, et ultro pereuntes in salutem colligere paratus est." "...quod paratus est Deus omnes ad poenitentiam recipere, ne quis pereat," CO, 55:475; CNTC, 364.

142. Calvin, Comm. 1 Pet. 3:9 [1551], CNTC, 364.

143. Calvin, Comm. 1 Pet. 3:9 [1551], CNTC, 364.

144. Calvin, Comm. Matt. 23:37 [1555], CNTC, 69.

145. Peter Martyr Vermigli, "Free Will: Common Places, Appendix," in *The Peter Martyr Library, Volume Four, Philosophical Works: On the Relation of Philosophy to Theology*, translated and edited with introduction and notes by Joseph C. McLelland, Volume XXXIX Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies (Kirksville, Missouri: 1996), 298.

ises of God are offered through the outward or inward word, though not with such efficacy that souls are healed.”¹⁴⁶ In fact, Vermigli addresses a common calumny that all the Reformers faced from synergistic opponents.

Yet they say: but when God calls he does not pretend but calls in truth. Nor do we say that God plays; we say that he calls truly because it is he himself that calls. For they are not revelations of good things and motions toward doing well unless they come from the true God; whatever he proposes, such as commands and promises, are true and not prone to falsehood. Thus he truly calls even those whose vocation is not effectual.¹⁴⁷

Vermigli repeatedly cites from Augustine’s works in this regard, particularly his *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, and also from Zwingli’s *De Providentia*. There can be little doubt that Calvin was well familiar with the same sources and the theology they contained.

In ways similar to Vermigli, Calvin portrays God as genuinely offering salvation to all sinners, this being an expression of divine love, but it is not for us to know why God doesn’t choose to convert all to whom that call of salvation comes. Calvin is content to leave this “unresolved.” He does not allow God’s will of decree to trump his will of precept. God speaks to us in Scripture and we must take God at his word, even if we cannot fully understand all of his ways. That is why Calvin does not shy away from using the language of Scripture in this regard, that is, he freely employs offer language. For Calvin, insofar as God has revealed himself in Christ, sinners—all sinners—have no reason to believe that God is not calling them repent and believe; on the contrary, they have every reason to believe that he is. Indeed, for Calvin, such universalistic language brings simultaneously a blessing to the godly and a rebuff to the ungodly: while the consciences of the godly are consoled, the excuses of the wicked are subverted, for they reject, “out of their own ungratefulness,” what is offered to them, namely sanctuary from their bondage to sin.¹⁴⁸

III. Conclusions regarding Calvin’s Treatment of Divine Grace and the Offer of the Gospel

What conclusions may be drawn from the way Calvin handles the question of the offer of the gospel and, in that connection, his use of “divine grace” language toward all sinners? Admittedly, we have not surveyed every instance in Calvin’s writings where he addresses these matters, nor have we examined the way Calvin treats God’s fatherly favor in other contexts, such as the divine provision of necessities for the sustaining of life or the preservation of certain natural gifts in humans after the fall into sin. We have examined, however, certain places in Calvin’s literary corpus where he clearly focuses his attention on the nature of the call or offer of the gospel, and in that connection links this discussion to God’s favor toward all people. In addressing this question, Calvin is forced to handle the complex issue of the relation between God’s will of decree and will of precept. Thus, while the following conclusions are drawn from a limited range of material, this material ade-

146. Vermigli, “Free Will: Common Places, Appendix,” 299.

147. Vermigli, “Free Will: Common Places, Appendix,” 313.

148. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.17.

quately represents, I think, Calvin's reflection on the issue of the gospel-offer and divine grace.

First, we have seen that Calvin is not squeamish about using offer language. He employs a variety of terms, particularly the words *to offer*, *to invite*, and *to call*. Although some interpreters of Calvin's writings have tried to argue that by his offer-language Calvin means only to say that the gospel is presented (displayed, exhibited) to certain sinners—Hoeksema, for example—this claim does not hold up to close analysis. While it is true that Calvin sometimes uses "display" language, he clearly views the gospel, which has Christ as its content, as a summons and call to sinners to heed, elect and reprobate alike. The divine decree of election and reprobation does not short-circuit the gospel summons, confining the offer of salvation—which is the central message in the summons to repent and believe—to the elect. Calvin is content to say that God wills the salvation of all. If we press Calvin to define for us, in what sense God wills the salvation of all people, he insists that God has not revealed that to us. What should be noted, however, is that Calvin does not say God has not willed the salvation of all *in any sense*.

Second, in addressing the matter of the offer of the gospel to sinners, thus to elect and non-elect alike, Calvin does not refrain from talk of divine mercy, fatherly favor, paternal love, maternal kindness, goodness, and grace directed toward all people. In using such language, Calvin does not feel compelled to explain himself or even to offer careful distinctions between a love for the elect versus a love for the non-elect. Although such distinctions can be found in his theology, when Calvin uses such forms of address he does not work with strict categories in every instance. This seems to suggest that Calvin followed his own advice: to follow God's revealed will in Scripture and not to over-theologize or tidy up the language of the Bible. Consequently, I contest the charge made by Kuiper and Hoeksema that Calvin contradicts himself. Calvin construes the relation between the offer of the gospel, divine reprobation, and a fatherly kindness toward all sinners in a way that leaves questions unanswered, but that isn't a contradiction. It appears that Kuiper and Hoeksema impose their own theological agenda on Calvin at this point—perhaps, the Reformer's deliverances on this set of issues does not fit with their own theological predilections. For his part, Calvin does not think that his ideas about a general grace of God, with the rich vocabulary he employs to articulate the same, are inconsistent or incompatible with his doctrine of predestination.

Third, from this analysis of select passages from Calvin's writings, I agree with the "second trajectory" of Calvin's interpreters who conclude that it is both anachronistic and overblown to talk of Calvin's "doctrine" of common grace. However, I think we are warranted in saying that some notion of a non-salvific divine kindness or goodness toward the non-elect pulses through his theology, mostly in an emergent form. In his language regarding the offer, Calvin links a divine favor or kindness for all to the divine summons of the gospel addressed to all. Thus it would seem to be the case that insofar as Calvin gives expression to an idea of common grace in his thought, though undeveloped and unformulated, we may say that the offer of the gospel to all sinners forms a constituent of it. I thus find myself in agreement with Kuiper, Anderson, and Campbell-Jack insofar as each of these writers discerns a notion of the offer of the gospel in Calvin's theology. Campbell-Jack rightly sees Calvin giving us the idea of common grace in embryonic form, but he practi-

cally “aborts” the idea itself since he wrongly conceives of the “doctrine” of common grace to refer to Abraham Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace.

In my judgment, the idea of common grace in Calvin’s theology needs further analysis and scholarly discussion. In particular, work needs to be done, far more than I have been able to do here, to determine how Calvin’s treatment of divine grace and the offer of the gospel differs from or simply echoes what his immediate theological predecessors, colleagues, and contemporaries said on the same topic.