

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD OF GOD

AUGUSTUS NICODEMUS LOPES, SEMINÁRIO TEOLÓGICO
PRESBITERIANO REV. JOSÉ MANOEL DA CONCEICAO, SÃO PAULO

Introduction

The title 'Theologian of the Holy Spirit' was not given to Calvin by his contemporaries but rather by modern scholars, in recognition of his importance as a theologian in this area of theology that is so much in the forefront today.

The title may confuse some people, as they might conclude that the main subject that Calvin wrote about and dedicated himself to was the Holy Spirit. Actually, although Calvin did write many things concerning the Holy Spirit, he never wrote a specific work on the subject, as did John Owen and Abraham Kuyper, whose books in this area are still fundamental for the present-day church.¹ Although he speaks frequently of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin did not reserve a chapter exclusively to this theme.² Some have criticized Calvin for not giving more direct attention to the Holy Spirit in his writings, specially in the *Institutes*. This criticism is unfair. There are plenty of reasons for this apparent lack of attention.

To begin with, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was not the focus of major debate between Calvin and the Roman Catholic Church at the time, nor of his struggle with the Radical Reformers, the Anabaptists and the 'Enthusiasts', known as the 'left wing' of the Reformation.³ Calvin spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit only when this subject concerned the critical issues undergoing debate, such as the doctrines of salvation, sanctification, the Scriptures, and the sacraments.

¹ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power* (r.p., Grand Rapids, 1960); Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (ET r.p., Grand Rapids, 1946). Other authors could be cited, such as the English Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, and, more recently, Benjamin B. Warfield and George Smeaton.

² Calvin writes on the deity of the Spirit in 1:13:14ff., and on his redemptive work (applying salvation) in Book 3, especially in chapters 1-2.

³ The term 'left' has been recently used by a few historians to refer to this group without any political connotation. See n. 14 below.

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Secondly, Calvin held the New Testament view that the Holy Spirit generally acted behind the scenes, as an agent of the Trinity. Although his actions were clearly perceptible, those who should always receive the pre-eminence were the Father and the Son. This conviction is reflected in Calvin's works and in his approach to various theological themes. There is practically no theological subject in which Calvin does not refer to the work of the Holy Spirit. His pneumatology is developed within the other areas of systematic theology, such as theontology (study of the Being of God), soteriology and ecclesiology.

This same approach is found reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is true that its authors, the Puritans, did not write an exclusive chapter on the Person and work of the Spirit. Benjamin B. Warfield, renowned Reformed Presbyterian theologian of the beginning of this century, suggests that the reason lies in that they preferred to write *nine* chapters rather than only one. An attempt made by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to meet the alleged deficiency produced an extra chapter in the Confession of Faith which, according to Warfield, was nothing more than a short summary of the nine original chapters.

Finally, one cannot demand an approach on the subject by Calvin (or by the authors of the Confession of Faith) specifically directed to the questions related to the rise of the Pentecostal movement, centuries after his death. Even so, Calvin is surprisingly current in what he has to say about the Spirit.

Why then the title 'Theologian of the Holy Spirit'? First of all, Calvin was the first clearly to systematize the biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that no one before him had written on the subject. However, few people prior to or after Calvin were so clear, simple and biblical in their writings.⁴ Warfield testifies to this:

The doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is a gift from John Calvin to the Church of Christ.... In the broad departments of 'Common Grace', 'Regeneration', and 'the Witness of the Spirit' in the third book of his *Institutes*, Calvin was the first to develop the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, and to give the whole doctrine of the

⁴ Cf. Warfield's introductory note in Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, p. xxvii.

⁵ For a list of the most important works on the Holy Spirit written after Calvin in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. ix-x.

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Holy Spirit a systematic organization, making it an indispensable possession of the Church of God.⁶

Secondly, Calvin fully integrated the doctrine of the Holy Spirit with the other themes and areas of theology, such as regeneration, sanctification, the methods of grace, the knowledge of God, among others. Calvin's pneumatology, in the same way, included and permeated all the other departments of the theological encyclopaedia. His theology is an organic unit, where the Spirit appears appropriately as the sovereign Dynamizer.

Thirdly, Calvin rescued some aspects of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which had been buried in the medieval theology of the Roman Catholic Church, such as the relationship between the Word and the Spirit. Our purpose in this essay is to analyze, in detail, Calvin's contribution to our knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit or, in other words, the vital and organic relationship between the Spirit and the Word of God, the Scriptures.

Calvin's teachings profoundly influenced subsequent studies within Reformed circles. His emphasis on the sovereign work of the Spirit continues in the Reformed tradition among the English Puritans, particularly John Owen and Richard Sibbes, who gave us the most extensive and profound biblical theological studies about the Holy Spirit's ministry that exist in any language.

Calvin's Theological Context

Let us start by remembering that Calvin's theology was born and developed in the middle of an intense doctrinal conflict that marked the sixteenth-century Reformation. His doctrine of the Holy Spirit was shaped by his battle on two fronts. On one, he fought against the captivity of the Scriptures to the Roman Catholic Church, and on the other, against the abandonment of the Scriptures by the Radical Reformation.

1. The Roman Catholic Captivity of Scripture

Calvin and the Roman Catholic Church shared some convictions with respect to the doctrine of Scripture. To both, the Scriptures were the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible and authoritative. This view was not being questioned by Calvin, nor by the other Reformers. The point under debate between Calvin and the Catholics was

⁶ Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

the papal teaching that the authority of the Scriptures depended on the witness of the Church. The Roman Church affirmed that the canon of Scripture, and its preservation, divine origin and authority should be accepted by the faithful as true because the Church said so. The authority of Scripture, in other words, depended on the witness of the Church. In addition, the Church had the correct interpretation of Scripture; the collection of these interpretations formed the ecclesiastical tradition, which possesses as much authority as the Scriptures themselves. Thus, lay Catholics were debarred from reading and interpreting Scripture. They depended on the interpretation given by the Church. In this manner, the Word and its interpretation were captive under ecclesiastical authority.

Calvin rose up against this state of things, which had prevailed during the Middle Ages. He considered this teaching an insult to the Holy Spirit, and an abuse of authority by the Roman Catholic Church. To him, the true church was founded upon the Scriptures, and not the other way around. The authority of the Scriptures did not depend on the witness of the church, in fact quite the contrary: the church possessed authority only while it was within biblical doctrine. Calvin here appealed to Ephesians 2:20, where Paul teaches that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which is the teaching of the Scriptures.⁷ The Church simply *recognized* – it did not *establish or determine* – the inspiration and the authority of the books which made up the sacred canon.⁸

For Calvin, the main proof of scriptural authority and inspiration was that God himself spoke through them. Calvin called this the ‘internal witness of the Spirit’.⁹ To him, the natural human being could not be convinced of the divinity of the Scriptures by arguments presented by the church, logical and rational as they may appear (1 Cor. 2:14).¹⁰ It was the Spirit who persuaded the Christian to believe that God was speaking through the Scriptures, leading his heart to accept them, and giving him

⁷ *Institutes* 1:7:2, 4:2:1, 9. See also Calvin on Eph. 2:20, *Calvin's Commentaries... Galatians...*, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 154-6.

⁸ *Institutes* 1:7:1. See also chapters 7-9 of book 1, where Calvin develops the theme of scriptural authority.

⁹ *Institutes* 3:1:1, 1:7:5.

¹⁰ *Institutes* 1:8:13, 1:7:4. Cf. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, 1957), pp. 101-2.

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

full assurance of this, generating faith in his heart. In his *Institutes* and commentaries Calvin points to a few texts with this effect, such as 1 John 5:6-7, 2 Timothy 1:14-15, 1 Corinthians 2:10-16.¹¹

For John Calvin, what the Spirit had revealed in the Scriptures was sufficient and final. Mohammed, the pope and the 'Enthusiasts' were wrong when they claimed that the Spirit would be teaching new truths in the present. To Calvin, the Lord Jesus' words in John 14:25 made it clear that the Paraclete's ministry would consist not of revealing new truths which went beyond those already taught by the Lord Jesus and his apostles, but of illuminating the minds and hearts of believers, that they might understand and believe in the truths which were now registered in the Scriptures. He states: 'The spirit which introduces any invention foreign to the Gospel is a deceiver and not of Christ.'¹²

The effect of Calvin's teaching was liberating.¹³ Through the emphasis on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit as the greatest evidence of the divinity and authority of Scripture, he liberated the Scriptures and their interpretation from the captivity imposed by the medieval church, and put them back where they truly belonged, in the hands of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the evaluation of a few Catholics who led the Counter Reformation in the seventeenth century was correct, in that one of the major differences that existed between Rome and Geneva was found in their doctrines about the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Radical Reformers' Disdain for the Word

Calvin's other battle front was against the teachings of the Radical Reformation, known as the 'left wing' of the Reformation.¹⁴ There were

¹¹ *Institutes* 3:1:1, 3:2:33-4, 2:2:20, 1:7:5. See also *Calvin's Commentaries: First Epistle... to the Corinthians*, tr. J.W. Fraser (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 58-64, on 1 Cor. 2:10-16; *The Gospel according to St John 11-21...*, tr. Parker (Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 302-3, on 1 Jn. 5:6-7; ... *Second Epistle to the Corinthians...*, tr. T.A. Smail (Edinburgh, 1964), pp. 302-3, on 2 Tim. 1:14-15.

¹² *Calvin's Commentaries: St John 11-21...*, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh, 1961), 88.

¹³ We should justly note that Calvin owes much of this perspective to the pioneer teachings of Martin Luther, who already had, before Calvin, cried out against this state of things.

¹⁴ See note 3 above.

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

various groups within this sector of the Reformation movement. To begin with, there were the Anabaptists, the 'Fanatics', the 'Spiritualists' and the Antitrinitarians, who 'though different in their purposes and in their doctrines, had in common the desire to see a much more radical reformation than that propagated by Luther and Zwingli'.¹⁵ The controversy between Calvin and the Anabaptists concentrated itself on issues such as infant baptism, predestination, church government, the relationship between church and state, and the interpretation of the Scriptures.¹⁶

Calvin concentrated some of his writings in the fight against the excesses of the 'Enthusiasts' or 'Fanatics' (as they were known) in the area of new contemporary revelations from the Spirit. He wrote a treatise in 1545 entitled *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertines qui se nomment spirituelz* (*Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines who are called 'Spirituals'*).¹⁷ Calvin frequently mentions this movement either directly or through implicit suggestions in his *Institutes* and commentaries.

The 'Enthusiasts' emphasized the didactic ministry of the Spirit, a point which had been rescued by the Reformers. However, they went beyond them, claiming to be taught directly by the Spirit through new revelations, received through an inner light. They affirmed that the Spirit could not be restricted to written words, for that would lessen his sovereignty. To test the spiritual manifestations would be to dishonour the Spirit. They reached the point of ridiculing those who clung to the Scriptures, for they considered them an inferior and temporary form of revelation, and criticized Calvin and the other Reformers for clinging to 'the letter that kills'.

The 'Enthusiasts', therefore, were a reaction against the slavery of the Scriptures to the church which had been supreme until the Reformation, but a reaction which went too far. Calvin naturally sympathized with the 'Enthusiasts' on various points. For both, the Scriptures, as the Word of

¹⁵ William Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. W. Heynem (Grand Rapids, 1981), p. 2.

¹⁶ For a more profound analysis of Calvin's debate with the Anabaptists consult Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*.

¹⁷ This work is found published in French in *Corpus Reformatorum*, in Calvin's *Opera* 7, cols 145-248. There is an English translation by B.W Farley, *John Calvin, Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids, 1982).

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

God, were not captive to interpretation by the Roman Catholic Church, but should be freely examined by all. Calvin, however, seriously questioned the separation between the Spirit and the Word, and considered any tendency in this direction to be 'demented'.¹⁸ He also doubted that these 'new revelations' were a work of the Holy Spirit, and even suspected that those who claimed to receive new revelations, which exceeded the Scriptures, were being guided by a Spirit other than God's. Calvin believed in the reality and action of lying spirits, and that Satan was constantly deluding people, trying to draw them away from truth, transfiguring himself into an 'angel of light' (2 Cor. 11:3, 14). To him, 'new revelations' were really the inventions of lying spirits and did not come from the Holy Spirit, fulfilling passages such as 1 Timothy 4:1-2.¹⁹

The Holy Spirit and the Word of God

Calvin did not limit himself to criticizing the errors of the 'Enthusiasts'. He presented, in a positive and constructive way, the biblical teaching on the divine direction for the church living after apostolic times. In Book 1 of his *Institutes*, where he writes on 'The Knowledge of God as Creator', Calvin gives the following title to chapter 9: 'Fanatics, abandoning Scripture and flying over to Revelation, cast down all the principles of godliness.' In this chapter, the Reformer deals with the teaching of the 'Fanatics', as they were known at the time, from the standpoint of the inseparable relationship between the Spirit and the Word.²⁰

1. The Spirit Speaks through the Scriptures

Calvin's central point was that the Spirit speaks through the Scriptures. Not that the Spirit was restricted to the preaching of the Word and to the sacraments, but that he could not be dissociated from either of them. The Spirit has been given to the Church, not to bring new revelations, but to instruct us in the words of Christ and the prophets. According to Calvin, the Spirit seals our minds when we hear and receive the word of truth with faith, the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1:13). He limits himself to guiding Christians and illuminating their understanding of what he has heard and received from the Father and the Son, and not from himself (John 16:13). As the divine teachings are found in the Scriptures, the

¹⁸ *Institutes* 1:9:1.

¹⁹ *Institutes* 1:9:2.

²⁰ For a deeper study, see W. Kreck, 'Wort und Geist bei Calvin,' in *Festschrift für Günther Dehn* (Neukirchen, 1957), pp. 168-73.

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

work of the Spirit consists in illuminating them, causing these teachings to be understood by the faithful.

Against the disdain for the Scriptures on the part of many 'Enthusiasts', Calvin cited the example of the apostle Paul, who, although caught up to the third heaven where he received extraordinary revelations (2 Cor. 12:2), still never held disdain for the Scriptures, as if they were an inferior form of revelation, but recognized them as being sufficient and effective, by the grace of the Spirit, for edifying the church in all things concerning the kingdom of God (2 Tim. 3:15-17; cf. 1 Tim. 4:13).²¹

2. The Spirit is Recognized by his Harmony with the Scriptures

Another important point stressed by Calvin in the *Institutes* was that the working of the Holy Spirit could be recognized by his harmony with the Scriptures, which had been inspired by the Spirit himself.²² Calvin wishes to present a criterion by which the church could discern in a safe way, in the environment of religious experience, what really came from the Spirit of God, and what came from false spirits. For him, there was only one safe and infallible criterion: the Spirit speaking through the Scriptures. In this way, there would not be any diminution of the Holy Spirit's power and glory when it agreed with them, since he himself had inspired them. It would be to agree with himself, and what dishonour could there be in this? To test the manifestations which supposedly came from the Spirit, using the sieve of the Scriptures, was, in reality, pleasing to him, for he himself had determined that the church should so proceed with respect to spiritual manifestations.²³ For Calvin, there could be no contradiction between biblical teaching and the work of the Spirit in the post-apostolic times; and it is for that reason that he frequently refers to the Scriptures as the 'image of the Spirit'.²⁴

²¹ *Institutes* 1:9:1; cf. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, p. 130.

²² *Institutes* 1:9:2.

²³ *Institutes* 1:9:2. Passages such as 1 Cor. 12:1-3, 14-29 and 1 John 4:1, among others, establish doctrinal criteria by which one may judge prophecies and prophets.

²⁴ *Institutes* 1:9:2-3.

3. The Spirit's Sovereignty

The last point to which I wish to refer is Calvin's insistence on the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in this intimate relationship with the Word of God. For him, the Word is the instrument by which God gives the Spirit's illumination to believers.²⁵ Thus, Christ speaks today through the ministry of the gospel, when it faithfully exposes the Word. The Spirit makes the exposed Word effective in the hearts of those who hear it. At the same time, the Spirit-Word relationship is not magical or automatic. The Word is not like a talisman, which liberates its magical powers when called upon to do so, at the whims of its possessor. The efficacy of the Word, on the contrary, is totally dependent on the sovereignty of the Spirit.²⁶ For Calvin, Paul's statement that we are ministers of a new covenant, of the Spirit who quickens (2 Cor. 3:6), is not a guarantee that our preaching will always be accompanied by the quickening power of the Spirit. Pastors do not hold the power to dispense the Spirit's grace to anyone they wish or at any time they want to. The Spirit turns the preached Word into an effective Word through a sovereign act.²⁷

In this manner, the eloquence, skill, knowledge and fervour of the preacher are in vain if the grace and power of the Spirit are not present. It happens this way because the honour should always be Christ's, and not the preacher's.

Calvin's Influence on the Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith was drawn up in the seventeenth century, almost a hundred years after Calvin's death, by Puritan pastors and theologians, gathered with this end in mind by the English Parliament, at the Westminster Assembly. The goal of the scholars who gathered there during many years was one: to organize biblical doctrine in a systematic fashion, using the principles of interpretation inherited from the Reformation. Its authors were deeply influenced by John Calvin. This influence can be clearly detected in the Confession's teaching about the Holy Spirit, specially in the relationship between the Spirit and the Word.

²⁵ *Institutes* 1:9:2-3.

²⁶ Calvin's *Commentaries: Epistle... to the Hebrews...*, tr. W.B. Johnston (Edinburgh, 1963), pp. 50-53, on Heb. 4:12.

²⁷ Calvin's *Commentaries: The Second Epistle... to the Corinthians*, tr. T.A. Smail (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 43.

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Thus, in its chapter on the Scriptures, the Confession declares, in the best Calvinist terms, that the authority of the Scriptures does not depend on the witness of man or of the church, but of God (1.4); that our certainty in its infallible truth and divine authority comes from the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (1.5); that the Scriptures may not be added to at any time, not even by revelations from the Spirit, or by human traditions (1.6). The Confession declares, with Calvin, that the intimate revelation of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of the things revealed in the Word (1.6), and that, ultimately, the supreme Judge by which all religious controversies must be examined is the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures (1.8).

Relevance of Calvin's Teaching Today

The influence of the Neo-pentecostal (or charismatic) movement, arising in the 1960s, has made itself felt in a deep way in the historical evangelical denominations. We cannot deal with the movement as a monolithic block – there are, within it, various strains and ramifications of thought, which make generalizations unfair. However, when it appears in all its liberty Neo-pentecostalism manifests a belief in new revelations through prophecies and tongues, visions and dreams, all attributed to the Holy Spirit, the 'wind' of the Spirit. There are pastors who presume to have control over the Holy Spirit, and to bestow him through the laying on of their hands, to cast him upon people by blowing upon them, *etc.* These super-pastors even determine when the Spirit will heal or act, for they schedule healing and liberation meetings in advance, things which not even the Lord Jesus and his apostles did.

Evangelical denominations (including the Presbyterian!) are shocked and greatly surprised by these teachings. Many of their local churches have adopted, in varying degrees, the practices and doctrines of Neo-pentecostalism. Can we receive help from Calvin's teachings at this time?

To begin with, Calvin's teaching about the internal testimony of the Spirit comes to remind the church that, in these difficult times, it must ask God for the Spirit's intimate illumination so that it may understand and apply the Scriptures to its life and mission. We run the risk of thinking that Calvin, in his fight against the 'Enthusiast' excesses, fell into extreme, cold scholasticism. Balke relates what really happened: 'Calvin, the theologian of the Holy Spirit, wanted to guard himself

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

against fanaticism without limiting the liberty of the Spirit.’²⁸ Like Calvin, we should guard ourselves from the excesses of the day, simultaneously submitting ourselves to the freedom of the Spirit as we seek his illumination. However, for that to happen, local churches, councils and organizations of the churches must repent and their lives must be cleansed. We need to turn back to God in prayer, begging for the Spirit’s illumination, as directs the Pastoral Letter of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil about the Holy Spirit:

At the same time as he directs the Church to guard itself from an interpretation of Scripture which comes from the mistaken hermeneutical principles of the Neo-pentecostal experience, the Church also warns against an intellectualized and dry interpretation of Scripture, which forgets the necessary illumination of the Spirit for their comprehension and that God promises to teach those who seek to walk in righteousness and holiness with him (Ps. 119:18, 33-4; Luke 24:44-5).²⁹

Secondly, Calvin challenges us to examine all spiritual manifestations by the standard of the Word of God, as to their nature, purpose and method. This practice correctly presumes the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself. The Scriptures were inspired by him. Although the Spirit acts in different ways at different times, he never does so in contradiction of what he has revealed in the Word. We should be open to the fact that the Spirit has emphasized different aspects of the Word in different periods – though never going beyond it or against it.

Thirdly, Calvin’s teaching alerts us against those who claim to have total control over the Spirit, who claim to give the baptism of the Spirit through the laying on of hands, who teach immature and careless Christians to speak in tongues. He alerts us to reject every teaching, movement, cult, and liturgy where the Word of God is not given the focus due to it. If the Spirit speaks through the Word, the Word must be the centre.

Many Presbyterians consider themselves Calvinists and Reformed, but how many actually realize the implications of the Reformed Calvinist

²⁸ Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, p. 326.

²⁹ ‘O Espírito Santo Hoje – Os Dons de Línguas e Profecia’, in *Cartas Pastorais* (São Paulo: Casa Editora Presbiteriana, 1995). The document was drawn up by the Standing Commission of Doctrine of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil.

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

teaching about the work of the Spirit for the Neo-pentecostal practices that are accepted in many of our churches? Calvin was, in fact, a man of the Holy Spirit, who when guided by him became God's main instrument for the Reformation of the sixteenth century, a movement which really was one of the greatest spiritually that ever happened in the Christian church, after the apostolic period. We all want a spiritual revival of this same magnitude. Calvin, who lived and ministered in the middle of that tremendous manifestation of divine power, was not afraid to offend the Spirit, but asked in a meticulous and deep manner, about the truthfulness of the phenomena which always accompany the great spiritual movements of history. If on one hand we should not be afraid of what the Spirit might do, on the other hand we should fear the spurious works of the false spirits, as well as our own deceitful heart.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the 'age of the Holy Spirit', as it is known amidst many Neo-pentecostal groups, began not in 1906, with the meeting on Azusa Street, Los Angeles, but on the day of Pentecost. There is abundant biblical evidence for this. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter declared that the Spirit's coming was inaugurating the last days (Acts 2:16-21). The other apostles taught, in like manner, that the last days, the dispensation prior to the final judgement day, had already come (1 Cor. 7:29; 1 John 2:18). I emphasize this point because some might argue that we are living today in the 'age of the Spirit', and that Calvin lived before this age. Those who believe in this way claim that today the Spirit is acting in a much more intense and even different way than he did at the time of the Reformation, and that consequently what Calvin experienced and taught is, in a way, out of date. However, the Scriptures teach us that the church has already been living in the last day, the dispensation of the Spirit, ever since the apostolic period. Calvin lived and taught in the plain Spirit-age, just as we live and struggle today. Calvin's teaching, since it is biblical, could serve us as a road-guide, indicating the narrow and balanced path between a life of godliness and a mind stayed in the doctrines of grace.

words equate the Holy Spirit with God; he spoke as if the Spirit and God were one and the same. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit, the Helper, was different from Himself. The Father would send the Helper, the Spirit of truth, after Christ departed. The Spirit would speak through them about Jesus (John 14:25â€“26; 15:26â€“27; 16:7â€“15). All three Persons Jesus mentions are God while being distinct from each other within the Trinity. The three members of the Trinity show up, together yet distinct, at Jesusâ€™ baptism. As Jesus comes up from the water, the Spirit descends on Him like a dove O Most Holy Spirit, Thou life, light and consolation, hope and delight of all: Vouchsafe Thy gifts unto those who acknowledge Thee to be God, equally enthroned with the Father and the Son; and grant them remission of sins. Ode 7. Irmos: The melodious music of instruments sounded forth, calling men to worship the inanimate idol wrought of gold; but the radiant grace of the Comforter preferreth that they cry: O Holy Trinity, Who art equal in power and equally without beginning, blessed art Thou! Refrain: Glory to Thee, O our God, glory to Thee!Â Theologizing, let us hymn the Son, the Spirit and the unoriginate Father in a single Essence and three Persons, [crying]: O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou! Refrain: Glory to Thee, O our God, glory to Thee!