

Governed and Guided by the Spirit

A Key Issue in Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

by I. JOHN HESSELINK

I. Introduction

Because I am focusing on what might appear to be one small facet of Calvin's understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life, it may be helpful to share some presuppositions before stating some theses in regard to this question. Thereby you can see where I am coming from and where I am going.

1. Although Calvin is frequently acknowledged as «the theologian of the Holy Spirit»¹ among the sixteenth century reformers, an important aspect of his doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been neglected, namely, how the Holy Spirit leads, guides, governs, and rules in the life of the believer².

2. A fundamental presupposition here is the close relationship of the Word (Scripture) and Spirit in Calvin's theology³. «The Spirit acts in and through the Word and the Word is confirmed by the Spirit»⁴. At the same time, however, it is generally agreed that Calvin allowed for a greater freedom of the Spirit over against the Word than Luther, who tended to unite them⁵.

¹ First, as far as I know, by B. B. Warfield, and subsequently by a number of Calvin scholars including Simon van der Linde, Werner Krusche, John Mackay, and H. Quistorp.

² *S. van der Linde*, who deserves the credit for writing the first substantial treatment of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, does not deal with this theme at all, even in his discussions of religion and piety, faith and regeneration (*Simon van der Linde, De Leer van de Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn*, Wageningen 1943, 232ff [abbr.: van der Linde, Leer]). Nor does *H. J. J. Th. Quistorp* take note of these phrases in his rather comprehensive study: *Calvins Lehre vom Heiligen Geist*, in: *De Spiritu Sancto*, Utrecht 1964 [abbr.: Quistorp, Lehre]. *Werner Krusche* is aware of these phrases in his magisterial study: *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, Göttingen 1957, (FKDG 7) [abbr.: Krusche, Wirken]; but he tends to be too apologetic lest a subjective tendency might be found in Calvin. One of the finest treatments of a related theme – the secret impulse of the Spirit (*arcano spiritus instinctu*) – is found in a surprising place, viz., the appendix to *Benjamin Charles Milner Jr.*, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, Leiden 1970, (SHCT 5), 197ff [abbr.: Milner, Doctrine].

³ See Institutes I.9.3 and IV.8.13. Here and elsewhere I am using the translation of *Ford Lewis Battles* in the Library of Christian Classics edition of the Institutes edited by *John T. McNeill*, Philadelphia 1960.

⁴ *Richard C. Gamble*, *Word and Spirit in Calvin*, in: *Calvin and the Holy Spirit*, ed. by Peter De Klerk, Grand Rapids 1989, 85 [abbr.: Gamble, Word]. In the same volume see also the paper by *Jelle Faber*, *The Saving Work of the Holy Spirit in Calvin*, 4f.

⁵ So e.g., Quistorp, *Lehre* 140.

3. A corollary of this thesis is the intimate relation between Christ and the Spirit in Calvin's thought⁶. *Benjamin Milner* affirms that «Calvin will not speak of the Spirit apart from Christ any more than he will speak of Christ without the Spirit»⁷, although there appear to be many exceptions to this rule if taken literally.

4. Such convictions separated Calvin from the «spiritualists» and «enthusiasts» (*Schwärmer*) of his day and their descendants in our own time, whether the heirs of Schleiermacher or the Pentecostals. As *Ford Lewis Battles* has demonstrated, Calvin's theology represents a *via media* approach between the extremes of Roman Catholicism on the right and the Anabaptists and Libertines on the left⁸. Even if one does not concur with Battles' thesis, it is generally agreed that Calvin would not countenance any understanding of the work of the Spirit which ran counter to the objective revelation we have in Christ and the Word.

5. Calvin was no mystic, in the usual sense of the word, but there are mystical strains in his thought. He not only taught a mystical union (*unio mystica*) with Christ⁹, but spoke frequently in a mystical fashion. For example, it is «the secret working (*arcana efficacia*) of the Spirit by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits»¹⁰.

6. Therefore, we should not be too surprised to discover that Calvin speaks again and again of the Spirit as governing, guiding, and leading the Christian in experiential ways that are apparently independent of any concrete scriptural teaching – though not, it must be added, in any way contradictory to it. As *Werner Krusche* warns, «There is no doubt that Calvin – and rightly so – had no isolated interest in a <leading> of the Holy Spirit as if this were the peculiar and decisive thing that can be said of what today is described as <the reality of the Holy Spirit>. For him the *directio spiritus* (direction of the Spirit) belongs constantly together with God's command, instruction, and warning in the Holy Scripture»¹¹.

⁶ See Inst. III.1.2-3 and III.2.24.

⁷ Milner, *Doctrine* 130. Cf. Quistorp, *Lehre* 130.

⁸ *Ford Lewis Battles*, *Calculus Fidei – Some Ruminations on the Structure of Calvin's Theology*, in: *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser, Kampen 1979. *Battles'* thesis has been picked up and developed in other contexts by *Donald K. McKim*, *John Calvin, a Theologian for an Age of Limits*, in: *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. D. McKim, Grand Rapids 1984, 292ff; and *Richard Gamble*, *Word* 80f. Long before *Battles'* monograph, theologians like *Walter Kreck* were affirming much the same thesis: «Calvin, like the Reformation in general, battled on two fronts, against Rome and against the enthusiasts (*Schwärmer*)», *Walter Kreck*, *Wort und Geist bei Calvin*, in: *Festschrift für Günther Dehn zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, Neukirchen 1957, 178. Note: All translations from the German are mine.

⁹ Institutes III.2.24 and III.11.10, «Almost all of the more recent Calvin scholars are united in the conviction that a central teaching for Calvin was the *communio cum Christo* or the *insitio in Christum* whose light streams through every aspect of his theology, including his pneumatology», Quistorp, *Lehre* 133. The pioneering effort in this regard is *W. Kolffhaus' Christusgemeinschaft bei Johannes Calvin*, Neukirchen 1939 [abbr.: *Kolffhaus, Christusgemeinschaft*].

¹⁰ Institutes III.1.1.

¹¹ *Krusche, Wirken* 294.

There is massive evidence which indicates that in Calvin's theology the Holy Spirit plays a role that is far more mystical, experiential, and individual than is recognized by most Calvin scholars. *Willem Balke*, at the International Calvin Congress in Amsterdam in 1978, presented a paper on «The Word of God and Experientia»¹² and showed the significant place of experience in Calvin's theology, but in view of the evidence I shall present, his conclusions seem to me to be too cautious and conservative.

7. To state my thesis positively, the abundant references in Calvin's writings to the governing and guiding work of the Spirit suggest that although the concrete truths and injunctions of Scripture may be implied or understood and although Christ is always the model (exemplar) for our lives¹³, Calvin submits that we are given not only faith and assurance by the Holy Spirit but also both general and specific wisdom and direction for our lives quite apart from any explicit instruction in the Scriptures or preaching of the gospel. In short, the Spirit at times gives seemingly independent and secret guidance. The Spirit gives a sort of suprarational insight and understanding.

8. What we have here is an aspect of the doctrine of sanctification. To be governed by God's Spirit means to be reformed and transformed by God with the goal that Christ may be formed in us, i.e., by the renewal of the image of God.

II. Zur Sache – To the Matter at Hand

A. The Terminology

Calvin's preferred terms in describing this special, inner work of the Holy Spirit are the verbs used in the title of this paper: «govern» (gubernare or Fr. gouvernez) and «guide» (duco or dirigo Fr. conduire) and their nominative counterparts, «governance» (gubernatio) and «guide» (dux, Fr. conduite) or «guidance» (directio). Almost as frequent, however, is the verb «rule» (rego, which means «guide» as well as «rule»; Fr. moderer).

A prime illustration is found in two passages in II.3.10 of the «Institutes»: *«The Lord by his Spirit directs, bends, and governs our heart»¹⁴ and reigns in*

¹² *Willem Balke*, The Word of God and Experientia, in: *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor*, ed. W. H. Neuser, Kampen 1979, 19ff.

¹³ *Institutes* III.6.3: «Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example whose pattern (exemplar) we ought to express in our life.» Cf. a similar assertion in a sermon on Ephesians 4:23-26, «... our Lord Jesus Christ is given us for an example and pattern (pour exemple et patron) ...» (CO 51, 623).

¹⁴ «... suo Spiritu cor nostrum dirigere, flectere, moderari.» Note: Italic here and in the following quotations are mine.

it as his possession ... It is obviously the privilege of the elect that, regenerated through the Spirit of God, *they are moved and governed by his leading*»¹⁵.

From the Geneva Catechism:

After defining repentance as the hatred of sin and the love of righteousness, Calvin adds, «these things lead us to denial of self and mortification of the flesh, so that we yield ourselves to *be ruled by the Spirit of God*, and bring all the actions of our life into obedience to the divine will»¹⁶. Concerning «wicked men and devils», «Although God does not *govern them by his Spirit*, yet he checks them by his power, as with a bridle ...»¹⁷.

From the commentaries:

«God is present with his elect, whom he *governs* by the *special grace of his Spirit*»¹⁸. The sum of it (the mortification of the flesh and newness of life) appears from this, that we are God's children, when *his Spirit rules (moderatur) and governs our life*»¹⁹.

From the sermons:

«When we pray for God to *guide (conduise) and govern us by his Spirit* in that enterprise, people cannot take offense at what has been said openly with charity»²⁰. «He (Christ) is given to us for our sanctification, in order that we should be *governed by his Spirit*»²¹.

From his polemical writings:

«Scripture teaches that none but the elect are *led by the Spirit of God*. What rectitude can there be in man apart from *the leading of the Holy Spirit?*»²² And in his preface to his tract against the Anabaptists addressed to the ministers in Neuchâtel: «May He (the Lord) always *guide you by his Spirit* that by

¹⁵ «... ipsius ductu agantur ac gubernentur.» Later in this section Calvin cites John 6:44 and comments: «One may ... conclude from John's words that the hearts of the pious are so effectively governed by God (sic efficacitur gubernari divinitus est) that they follow him with unwavering affection.» Calvin occasionally uses the same sorts of phrases with God rather than the Holy Spirit as the subject of the action, e.g., «... none of us remains settled in his opinion from morning to night unless he is *governed by God*. When we hear the gospel preached, then, we must have *God's Spirit to guide and govern us*, so that we may thoroughly embrace our Lord Jesus Christ and by him have access to the Father», Sermon No. 14 on Eph. 2:16-19 (CO 51, 418), underlining mine. «Insofar as we are in the world, let us recognize that *God governs us here*, that he shows us the road in order that we might be not errant pilgrims who ramble about from pillar to post, but that we might be *led as if by his hand*», Sermon No. 1 on Deut. 4:44-5:3 (CO 26, 246), italic mine.

¹⁶ Q. 128 (OS II, 96).

¹⁷ Q. 28 (OS II, 58).

¹⁸ Comm. Gen. 21:20 (CO 23, 305).

¹⁹ Comm. 1 John 3:23 (CO 50, 345).

²⁰ Sermon No. 11 on Deut. 5:20 (CO 26, 367).

²¹ Sermon No. 29 on Eph. 4:20-24 (CO 51, 613).

²² The Eternal Predestination of God, translated by J. K. S. Reid, London 1961, 134.

means of your ministry you might serve Him to His honor as well as to the salvation of His poor people»²³.

Finally, from his prayers:

«... that thou mayest govern us according to thy will, and so rule all our affections by thy Spirit, that we may through the whole of our life strive to glorify thy name ...»²⁴. «Rule us by the Spirit, that we may meekly and obediently submit to thee ...»²⁵.

This is only a sampling; such illustrations could be multiplied many times over. They are found in all of Calvin's writings, particularly in the «Institutes», commentaries, and sermons²⁶.

B. One Meaning – A Special Aspect of Sanctification

Already, in this brief sampling, one motif is evident. The governing, guiding, and ruling work of the Spirit in the life of the believer is principally an aspect of the doctrine of sanctification. In the passages cited thus far the role of the Holy Spirit is similar to that of the «secret» or «inward» testimony of the Spirit relative to the authentication of the Scriptures as the Word of God²⁷. However, in all the cases cited above, this internal, secret work of the Spirit is different. It does not relate directly either to the self-authentication of Scripture or its understanding, although it comes close to the latter at times. Nor does it relate to the origin of faith, which is «the principal work of the Holy Spirit»²⁸.

In these instances the special role of the Holy Spirit is rather that of implementing and assisting the life-long process of mortification and vivification, which is the way Calvin describes conversion or repentance²⁹. More specifically, as we have seen, this special work of the Spirit helps us to obey God's will and thereby glorify him. Since God's will for our lives is revealed in his law³⁰, one might conclude – as does *Werner Krusche* – that «the obedience, to which the

²³ Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines, translated by *Benjamin Wirt Farley*, Grand Rapids 1982, 18.

²⁴ Prayer following the exposition of Amos 4:12, from *Devotions and Prayers of John Calvin*, compiled by *Charles E. Edwards*, Grand Rapids 1954, 45.

²⁵ Following the exposition of Hosea 5:1, *ibid.* 17.

²⁶ I have not examined the correspondence for such phrases, but I suspect that there, too, such exhortations might be found.

²⁷ *Institutes* I.7.4. Cf. I.7.5.

²⁸ *Inst.* III.1.4. Cf. III.2.8, 35, 39. It is by «the secret energy (efficacia) of the Spirit» that «we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits», *Inst.* III.1.1.

²⁹ For Calvin, conversion and repentance are almost identical. «The whole of conversion to God is understood under the term <repentance>, and faith is not the least part of conversion», *Inst.* III.3.5. Cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 88.

³⁰ «The precepts of the law ... comprehend the will of God» (*Inst.* I.17.2). «God has revealed his will in the law» (*Inst.* II.8.59, cf. II.8.5).

Holy Spirit frees (us) is ... obedience vis-à-vis (gegenüber) God's righteousness, i.e., vis-à-vis the law of God»³¹.

This is a valid assertion, one which could be further validated by evidence *Krusche* does not cite. For example, in a sermon on Ephesians 2:8-10, Calvin says that God must not only teach us what is good through the Scriptures, but must also «reform us and so guide and govern us by his Holy Spirit that there may be agreement (accord) between our life and his law»³². He concludes this sermon with the prayer: May God «so uphold us and govern us by his Holy Spirit that our whole endeavor may be nothing else than to frame our life after his only law»³³.

But there is more to this guidance and governance of the Spirit than simply a general desire to be obedient to God's will as revealed in the law. The Holy Spirit is more than an inspirer and enabler. To be guided, governed, and led by the Spirit in this context implies receiving special guidance, insight, and strength. All Christians receive the Holy Spirit from Christ, but there are degrees of empowering. The presence of the Spirit in the lives of Christians is not a static thing. For Calvin, the intensity or nature of the Spirit's guidance may vary according to the specific needs of a given situation.

We tend, for example, to be fickle, unstable, and opinionated, says Calvin, unless we are «governed by God» and «have God's Spirit to guide and govern us»³⁴. The implication is that for us to maintain stability in the Christian life, a constant, ever-renewing guidance of the Spirit is necessary. Hence we «must ask of the Lord the Spirit of discretion and fortitude and with his direction we shall know what is expedient, and boldly carry through what we are sure is laid upon us»³⁵.

This kind of wisdom and discretion is not a permanent possession. This is why we constantly need to look to the Lord for the guidance of the Spirit. We see this in the case of David, who in Psalm 143:10 asks, «Let thy good Spirit lead me ...». Calvin comments: David «desires the guidance of the Spirit, not merely as he enlightens our minds, but as he effectively influences the consent of our hearts, and as it were leads us by the hand ... We should always seek the guidance of God's Spirit to keep them (passions) in moderation»³⁶.

The reason we need this constant guidance and governing of the Spirit is because no Christian knows the fullness of the Spirit, for Christ has only «partly enlightened us already by his Holy Spirit». Hence we are to pray that «it may please him to increase his grace in us more and more until he has communicated it

³¹ *Krusche*, Wirken 228. In support of this contention *Krusche* cites Comm. on Hosea 14:5; Hom. 1 Sam. 10:6; Inst. II.2.8; and Comm. John 8:32.

³² Sermon No. 11 on Ephesians (CO 51, 384).

³³ The prayer is not included in the Calvini Opera but is found in the English translation by *Arthur Golding* (revised): John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians, Edinburgh/Carlisle, Pa. 1973/5, 168.

³⁴ Sermon No. 14 on Eph. 2:16-19 (CO 51, 418).

³⁵ Comm. on Harmony of the Gospels, on Mt. 10:32 (CO 45, 291).

³⁶ Comm. Ps. 143:10 (CO 32, 683).

wholly to us, and in the meantime to uphold us and govern us by his Holy Spirit ...»³⁷.

It is not only our tendency toward instability and our passions which need to be checked by the rule of the Spirit; our reason also «is overwhelmed by so many forms of deceptions, is subject to so many errors ..., is caught in so many difficulties, that it is far from directing us aright». Accordingly, we need «continued direction at every moment». This is why we turn «to the Holy Spirit who <knows that all the thoughts of the wise are futile> (1 Cor. 3:20; cf. Ps. 94:11) ...»³⁸.

Another aspect of sanctification which Calvin highlights with the use of these termini technici is one that may well be autobiographical in character. In his own conversion experience he was «subdued to teachableness (ad docilitatem)»³⁹. Likewise, we too tend to be arrogant and «would sooner be beaten down by the lashes of adversity than be corrected, if he (the Lord) did not by his Spirit render us teachable»⁴⁰. As a result, in his prayers Calvin would occasionally pray: «Rule us by thy Spirit, that we may meekly and obediently submit to thee, and with such teachableness that we may become wise ...»⁴¹.

Thus the whole life of sanctification is one of being continually led and renewed by the Spirit and thereby gradually restored in the image of God. This is realized in particular when we celebrate the sabbath day according to its primary purpose, viz., «to cease from our own works, that the Lord may work in us»⁴². In response to the question, «How is that done?» Calvin answers, «By mortifying the flesh, that is, renouncing our own nature, so that God may govern us by his Spirit»⁴³. Calvin then explains that this is something that is not done only one day a week, but «is to be done continually ... all our life»⁴⁴.

C. Other Illustrations of Special Guidance

The necessity of such continual guidance and direction of the Spirit was necessary not only for David and the saints of the old covenant as well as Christians in our time; it was also necessary for the apostle Paul who relied on the leading of the Spirit in his missionary journeys and activities. With this we move from the role

³⁷ Prayer at the conclusion of Sermon No. 11 on Eph. 2:8-10, 168.

³⁸ Inst. II.2.25.

³⁹ Preface to the commentary on the Psalms (CO 31, 21).

⁴⁰ «nisi spiritu suo nos ad eam docilitatem componeret», Inst. II.5.13.

⁴¹ Prayer following the exposition of Hosea 5:1, p. 17. Cf. prayer following exposition of Joel 2:1 (p. 33): «Grant that ... we may surrender ourselves to thee and become so teachable and submissive that wherever thou guidest by thy Spirit thou mayest follow us with every blessing.»

⁴² Geneva Catechism, Q. 172 (OS II, 102). Cf. Inst. II.8.29. Concerning the fourth commandment: «First, we are to meditate throughout life on an everlasting Sabbath rest from all our works, that the Lord may work in us through his Spirit.»

⁴³ Ibid., Q. 173 (OS II, 102).

⁴⁴ Ibid., Q. 174 (OS II, 103).

of the Spirit in sanctification, particularly repentance as a life-long activity, to special acts of guidance by the Spirit in daily affairs and crucial life decisions.

«There is no doubt», says Calvin, «that he himself (Paul) was encouraged in no ordinary way to carry on when he knew that he had the Spirit of God as the guide of his life and actions.» Hence, he «did not teach anywhere except by the guidance (manucente) of the Spirit ...»⁴⁵. Moreover, because he had such wide-ranging responsibilities «he needed the extraordinary direction (singulari directione) of the Spirit»⁴⁶.

Other illustrations of an extraordinary leading of the Spirit Calvin sees in the gospel story of the woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years. What led her to believe that by touching Christ's garment she would be healed? Calvin concludes that such a rash act was due to «a unique prompting (singularis impulsus) of the Holy Spirit». He hastens to add that such a case «should not be forced into a general rule»⁴⁷. Yet, in a variety of contexts he suggests that it is not all that unusual for the Spirit to move a believer to do some unusual thing.

Another illustration is «the unique and extraordinary movement of the Spirit»⁴⁸ in the case of the cripple in Lystra who was healed by Paul. Calvin notes that «God does not command us to hope for anything we like on the spot», yet God by this special working of his Spirit «prepared the cripple's mind beforehand and made him capable of this new experience». Again, Calvin shows his conservatism by cautioning that incidents «like this must not be made into a common rule», although all of God's children «are endowed with the Spirit of adoption»⁴⁹.

Such cautions notwithstanding, Calvin frequently points to a more common phenomenon in regard to the leading and guidance of the Spirit, i.e., that all believers can anticipate – providing they seek God's help with the right attitude – a special guidance of the Spirit in making various kinds of judgments and decisions. Accordingly, when David prays, «teach me that I may do thy will», Calvin interprets this request as for something far more important than seeking deliverance, «but what is of still greater importance, viz., the guidance of God's Spirit, that he might not deviate to the right hand or the left, but be kept in the part of rectitude»⁵⁰.

We have another model in Daniel who «was directed by God's Spirit» to make prudent requests. At crucial times he «did not speak rashly or of his own will, but by the impulse (instinctu) of the Holy Spirit». «He would not have spoken thus, except under the guidance and direction (duce et magistro) of the Spirit»⁵¹.

⁴⁵ Comm. Acts 16:6 (CO 48, 373).

⁴⁶ Ibid. In a similar vein Calvin sometimes likens stubborn, unruly human nature to wild horses. His corresponding prescription is for us to be «like quiet horses (and) let ourselves be turned and guided by his (God's) hand», Comm. Acts 9:5 (CO 48, 202).

⁴⁷ Comm. Mt. 9:20 (CO 45, 257).

⁴⁸ Comm. Acts 14:9 (CO 48, 321).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Comm. Ps. 143:10 (CO 32, 683).

⁵¹ Comm. Daniel 1:11 (CO 40, 549).

In this passage we encounter for the first time another expression which becomes a veritable terminus technicus in Calvin's writings, particularly the commentaries and sermons, viz., «by a secret impulse of the Spirit/God (arcano spiritus/Dei instinctu)». *Benjamin Milner* has made a special study of this term and points out that it is used in two quite different contexts, viz., in connection with both the godly and ungodly⁵². Even in the case of the former, «the most important references to the <secret impulse> are those instances in which it seems to take the place of, or to obviate the need for, objective revelation»⁵³. This is basically the same point I have been making in regard to the corollary notion of being governed and guided by the Spirit.

Milner provides many illustrations to confirm his point. Here, one must suffice. In commenting on the sudden recognition of the risen Lord by the Emmaus disciples, Calvin observes:

Their recognition of Christ led the disciples to a lively perception (vivo sensu) of the secret and hidden grace of the Spirit which he had formerly bestowed upon them. For God sometimes works upon his people in such a manner that for a time they are not aware of the power of the Spirit (of which, however, they are not destitute), or at least that they do not recognize (agnoscat) it distinctly, but only perceive (sentiant) it by a secret impulse⁵⁴.

Here we must rest our case, although much more evidence could be brought to bear on the thesis that the «objective» Calvin turns out to be remarkably subjective in this particular aspect of his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. At times he even seems to come dangerously close to the very enthusiasts (Schwärmer) whom he so vigorously attacks and refutes⁵⁵. Yet, in our enthusiasm – or alarm, as the case may be – in regard to this discovery, we should keep in mind certain basic principles which are crucial to a proper understanding of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

III. Word and Spirit – No New Revelations

In all of the illustrations cited above Calvin never suggests that anything we are moved or led to do by the Spirit contradicts or undercuts the revelation we have in

⁵² *Milner*, *Doctrine*, appendix, 197ff.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 198. «In general, then, Calvin adduces this <secret impulse of the Spirit> to authenticate any thought, speech or action of the godly which lacks objective warrant, i.e., objective expression of the divine will – ordinatio Dei», *ibid.*, 199f.

⁵⁴ *Comm. Lk. 24:32* (CO 45, 809). In the case of the ungodly, however, when directed by a secret impulse of God (not the Spirit), they do so unconsciously and unwillingly. See *Milner*, *Doctrine* 200f.

⁵⁵ *Krusche* astutely observes that Calvin, despite his close identification of Word and Spirit, is not caught up (befangen) in an anti-enthusiast complex so that he refuses to entertain any ideas of a «leading» of the Holy Spirit, *Krusche*, *Wirken* 290. However, the conclusions *Krusche* draws on the following page are unduly cautious and fail to do justice to the seemingly radical character of some of Calvin's utterances.

Jesus Christ and the written Word. However secretly, freely, or independently the Spirit may operate in the lives of believers, that wisdom or counsel is consistent with the revealed Word. As Calvin warns in his tractate against the Libertines, «We choke out the light of God's Spirit if we cut ourselves off from his Word»⁵⁶.

To be governed and guided by the Spirit may mean new insights, deeper understanding, empowerment, and concrete applications or directions for our lives, but no new revelations! A key passage here is found in his commentary on John 14:26:

God teaches in two ways. He sounds in our ears by the mouths of men and he addresses us inwardly by his Spirit. Sometimes he does this simultaneously, sometimes at different times, as it seems appropriate to him⁵⁷.

All this seeming subjectivity notwithstanding, Calvin's fundamental principle concerning the relation of Word and Spirit stands firm, viz., «the Spirit wills to be coupled (*coniunctus*) with God's Word by an indissoluble bond (*individuo nexu*) ... We are to expect nothing more from his (Christ's) Spirit than that he will illumine our minds to perceive the truth of his teaching»⁵⁸.

IV. Conclusion

One may interpret the above material in various ways, but there is no denying that it represents a significant motif in Calvin's theology of the Spirit. This is by no means a peripheral or passing interest of Calvin's. These phrases are found more frequently in some writings than others, but they are almost universal in the Calvinian corpus. If there is any development at all, it might be in a more frequent usage of this terminology in his later writings⁵⁹. Moreover, one might also investigate the role of the Spirit in governing and guiding the church, although such references are less frequent⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines, pp. 224-5. A few lines later Calvin adds: «Let us hold, I say, to the pure and plain Word of God, where He has clearly revealed his will to us. And let us pray that by his Holy Spirit He will want to implant it in our hearts, which is his true office», 225.

⁵⁷ CO 47, 334.

⁵⁸ Institutes IV.8.13. Cf. I.9.3: «For by a kind of mutual bond (*mutuo nexu*) the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word.»

⁵⁹ There are very few references of this type in the first edition of the Institutes (1536) and in his first Catechism (1537/8), but they are not totally lacking even here. It may be significant that there are relatively few references to the governing and guiding of the Spirit in Calvin's first commentary, viz., Romans, but that commentary underwent several revisions, so Calvin could have added such passages later.

⁶⁰ See Institutes IV.19.6; IV.8.11; and «Reply to Sadolet», in Calvin: Theological Treatises, 229. On the role of the Spirit in church councils, see IV.9.11.

If, then, this is such an important theme – or, at least, subtheme – in Calvin's doctrine of the Spirit, how can we account for this strange lacuna? For approximately 60 years Calvin scholars have been describing Calvin as «the theologian of the Holy Spirit», and yet, with one exception (*Werner Krusche*) this theme as been either overlooked or avoided. Granted, it is nowhere developed as a separate locus, but the same could be said of the incidental and almost isolated reference to the mystical union of the believer with Christ; and yet that topic has been picked up and developed in most recent standard Calvin studies and in a sizable monograph by *W. Kolfhaus*⁶¹.

In earlier studies this omission could be attributed to the lack of interest in the Holy Spirit, although the Puritans and *Abraham Kuiper* wrote voluminously on that theme⁶². With the outburst of Calvin studies inspired by Barth and Brunner, particularly the former, since the 1930s, one might have anticipated some interest in this theme, but the Christocentric emphasis of dialectical or Neo-Reformation theology may account for an undue caution in regard to the work of the Holy Spirit.

One of the main reasons for the lack of interest in or aversion to this theme – or a reluctance to acknowledge its significance – is the fear of mysticism⁶³, or, in our own time, Neo-Pentecostalism. In view of excesses in both these traditions and of the theology of Schleiermacher which influences so much contemporary theology, such concerns are justified, but they do not account for the strange silence concerning a legitimate biblical motif which Calvin dared to deal with in a concrete and creative fashion⁶⁴. We who admire the Genevan reformer should do no less.

Prof. Dr. I. John Hesselink, Western Theological Seminary, 86 East Twelfth Street, Holland, MI 49423, USA

⁶¹ Kolfhaus, Christuskommunion.

⁶² *Abraham Kuiper*, *Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Grand Rapids 1946, (first appeared in 1900).

⁶³ See, for example, Kolfhaus, *Christuskommunion* 125ff, and van der Linde, *Leer* 118-132: «De Heilige Geest en de wedergeboorte».

⁶⁴ As *Alexandre Ganoczy* points out in his magisterial work, *Ecclesia Ministrans, Die-nende Kirche und kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin*, Freiburg 1968, 70: «In describing this spiritual operation in the lives of the justified, Calvin uses exclusively biblical terms: regeneration, sanctification, new creation, restoration, the re-formation (*Neugestaltung*) of the image of God ...» – and, one might add, the leading or guidance of the Spirit.

