

Calvin and Canticles

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Abstract

On the one hand, the often held thesis is challenged that Calvin, contrary to his rejection of allegorical exegesis, himself supported an allegorical understanding of the Song of Songs. On the other hand, a proposal is put forward as to how his clear elimination of the “natural” or erotic sense and his distinctive use of the “spiritual” sense can be understood. Reference is made to the two rival traditions in Christian exegesis, and parallels to the concept of intertextuality in present-day literary studies are revealed. It is proposed to interpret Calvin's position as participation in a network of intended intertextuality that fits into the context of the historical orientation of the Antiochene tradition. In this way a spiritual meaning becomes compatible with the intention of the historical author, which however is no less negative towards human sexuality than towards allegorical expositions of the Song of Songs.

Introduction

The title “*Calvin and Canticles*” may sound strange, since Calvin only very seldom took up a position on this book. He neither wrote a commentary on the book nor left homilies on texts from it. He does however make several references to Canticles in the *Institutes*, while the character and the canonicity of the book occupy a central place in Letter 531. In both cases not the text of the biblical book itself, but the views of other commentators play the major role. In the *Institutes* the references to Canticles are deeply involved with the sermons on Songs by Bernard of Clairvaux, while Letter 531 is concerned with the opinions of Sebastian Castellio (1515–1563). The purpose of this article is not to review the influence of Bernard on Calvinⁱ or to describe his dispute with Castellio,ⁱⁱ but more modest. It has two aspects:

- On the one hand, it challenges the often held thesis that Calvin, contrary to his rejection of allegorical exegesis, himself supported an allegorical understanding of the Song of Songs.ⁱⁱⁱ
- On the other hand, I suggest how his clear elimination of the “natural” sense – which in this book means the rejection of any erotic meaning – as well as his patent use of the *sensus plenior* can in fact be understood.

Calvin’s rejection of allegory questioned

Calvin’s aversion to allegory need not be demonstrated yet again. A number of illustrations will suffice.

According to Calvin allegories sometimes seem tempting, but this temptation is to be withstood:

I am aware of the plausible character of allegories, but when we reverently weigh the doctrines of Holy Scripture, those speculations that at first sight have appealed to us, vanish. I myself am not fascinated by such enticements ... We should never seek a subtle explanation from afar ... since the true sense ... is naturally apparent from a passage itself if it is carefully considered.^{iv}

That not only demonstrates his preference for the *sensus literalis*, but also its exclusive validity as resistance to the temptation of allegory.^v Calvin considers every exposition that leads away from the *intentio auctoris* as false:

Since almost the only task of the expositor exists in unwrapping the intention of the author whose explanation he has undertaken, he misses his goal or at least exceeds his limits in as far as he leads his pupils away from the author's intention.^{vi}

Calvin uses the metaphor of a game *in malam partem* to discredit the playful character of reader oriented handling of Holy Scripture as “almost blasphemous”:

It is arrogant and almost blasphemous to turn over the meaning of Scripture without due care, as though this were some game we play.^{vii}

Since this rejects categorically what we today call the reception-oriented approach to the text,^{viii} every form of allegory as the epitome of the creative play/interplay between reader and text is rejected *ipso facto*, so radically in fact that no room for exceptions exists. Even allowing for Calvin's harsh style, he could not have meant that blasphemous games can sometimes be acceptable.

It has nevertheless been questioned whether Calvin could in fact have rejected allegorical exegesis in principle. Hans Frei's idea that Calvin was never attracted to allegory, not even on the submission that the *sensus literalis* was for him a much more flexible concept than is usually thought,^{ix} has been queried by Gary Hansen. According to him, Calvin does not merely allow nonliteral exegesis occasionally; his rules of interpretation in fact *require* such exposition.^x Although Richard Burnett^{xi} does not go as far as that, he does think that Calvin did practise a kind of allegory that cannot be grouped with the “independent” type of allegory. By that he seems to mean a kind of allegorical interpretation that does not exist independently of or in contradiction to Calvin's basic view of Scripture.

This will now serve as the backdrop for Calvin's statements on or use of Canticles. We shall do so by first considering his debate with Sebastian Castellio and then his use of the Canticum sermons by Bernard of Clairvaux.

Calvin's debate with Castellio

In a testimonial by Calvin and the Consistory of Geneva,^{xii} they declare that Castellio had resigned his office of Rector voluntarily and that no inappropriate behaviour could be held against him:

Lest anybody come to a wrong idea of the reasons for Sebastian Castellio's leaving Genève, we all declare that he has voluntarily resigned his position as Rector of the school, and that thus far he had performed his duties in such a way that we held him to be worthy of being one of our preachers. If in the end affairs were not arranged in this way, the reason is neither that some fault was found in Sebastian's conduct, nor because of a heterodox teaching in the main points of our faith, but only because of the reasons mentioned above.

However, two points of difference in opinion between Calvin and Castellio are mentioned in the document: Firstly, Castellio is said to deny the canonicity of Canticles. Secondly, Christ's descent into hell consisted, according to Calvin, in the suffering of infernal punishment for our sins, whereas Castellio regarded it as mental suffering. This is the order in which Calvin lists the differences. But when he develops the themes, he inverts the order: he first declares that, although his own view of the descent is the correct one, no great issue should be made of different expositions.^{xiii} In this way his rhetoric enables him to seem magnanimous but simultaneously to have the last word on the topic of Canticles, to which purpose the chiasmic positioning affords the latter a climactic effect. Calvin describes Castellio's opinion as follows:

He deems it [Canticles] as a malicious and obscene song in which Solomon describes his shameless acts of lovemaking. We have first refuted him so that he may not rashly hold the perpetual consensus of the universal church to be worth nothing.^{xiv}

One should not be bewitched by this arrogance of Castellio because Canticles is to be understood no differently from Psalm 45. Canticles, Calvin claims, only expanded fully and in detail (*fusius et quasi minutatim explicantur*), what is said briefly in the Psalm, as the genre requires (*in genere breviter dicuntur*). His opposition to Castellio's criticism of the book for obscenity is formulated as follows:

If the beauty of Solomon and the adornment of his bride are sung, then that is to correspond to the fact that a danger/a distinction (*discrimen*) lurks in simple figurative speech (*sola dictionis figura*).^{xv}

The use of *discrimen* is interesting. Semantically, two meanings are possible, namely “distinction” or “danger”. The meaning “distinction” here seems unlikely because it is clear in any case that a simple symbolic reference to a groom and bride differs from an extensive poetical description of the couple. However, the noun can also mean “danger”, in which case Calvin is saying that it is dangerous to use figurative speech without further details. A pure figure of speech (*sola dictionis figura*), that is, an allegory standing on its own, is risky and in need of further development. The short figurative presentation in Psalm 45 however does not stand alone in the Old Testament, as it is accompanied by the detailed explication provided by Canticles. So Calvin’s argumentative thrust should be interpreted in terms of what he maintains here

- Psalm 45 mentions the king (Solomon) as a *figura* or symbol of Christ and accordingly the king's bride as a *figura* of the church.
- It is purposely (*ut* + subjunctive) done in such a way that aspects of the beauty of both are mentioned, because that provides the contours for a suitable exegesis.
- This is however still done very briefly (*breviter*).
- Therefore the more detailed (*fusius*) counterpart to the psalm is found in Canticles.

It follows logically that Canticles cannot be an erotic song, but presents a piecemeal and exhaustive (*minutatim*) exposition of the figure contained in Psalm 45.

This demonstrates Calvin’s reserved attitude to figurative exposition, that is, an exposition that does not follow the *sensus literalis* and which he therefore deemed dangerous. But apparently it is unavoidable in certain cases, including Canticles. Here Calvin finds himself in a dilemma. Although he positions himself diametrically against Castellio,^{xvi} he in no way disputes Castellio’s anticorporeal presupposition, but shares it completely: an erotic book cannot be included in the Bible. For Castellio, Canticles must be removed from the canon because it is erotic; for Calvin, it cannot be erotic because it is part of the canon.^{xvii}

That documents the anticorporeal views entertained by both reformers.^{xviii} Both Calvin and Castellio need the *sensus plenior* to maintain the canonicity of Canticles. In his reading Castellio consistently applies the *sensus literalis*. Since on literary grounds he is unable to find any deeper meaning in the poems of this book, he finds himself forced, and willing, to deny the book’s canonicity. Calvin, on the other hand, is unable to accept a “natural”, that is, an erotic meaning in the book and succumbs to the pressure to find a “spiritual” meaning in it *that deviates from the natural meaning*. That may be due to his embarrassment at a sensual reading, but it certainly shows his wish to retain the canon of Holy Scripture as it is. In the present case Calvin's need to discredit Castellio is nevertheless just as clear. At any rate a non-natural exposition of Canticles is so important to him that he is prepared to appeal to the full force of church tradition in its defence.

Of course, the desire to find a spiritual sense in a biblical book does not necessarily mean the acceptance of allegory. That is already suggested by Calvin's consciousness of the danger of “figurative” exposition. We shall return to this once we have considered a second complex of references to Canticles in Calvin’s work.

Calvin’s quotations from Bernard’s Canticum sermons

Calvin’s familiarity with the writings by Bernard of Clairvaux, his use of Bernard's ideas and a certain similarity in the thought of both are well known and often discussed.^{xix} We now focus on one aspect, notably the quotations in which Calvin uses Bernard's sermons on Canticles.

I will discuss eight cases in which intertextual relationships become apparent between Bernard’s sermons, the biblical Book of Canticles and Calvin’s own argumentative text. In literary terminology the textual repetition of other texts or excerpts from such texts is called “palintextual intertextuality”. But we shall see that Calvin does not only repeat Bernard's texts; he also comments on them, which simultaneously represents a further kind of intertextuality, the “metatextual” type.

In this paragraph Calvin recapitulates material that he has collected from several sermons by Bernard in paragraph 3 of the present chapter.^{xx} This concludes the whole chapter. Since humans are only justified by grace, confidence in oneself is to be rejected.

The argument is exemplified by means of a comparison from Bernard's Sermon 13. An arrogant person is one who takes credit for a gift of God,

like a wall that boasts of producing the ray of light that it lets through a window.

Bernard actually says in Section 5 of the sermon:

Who would believe a wall if it were to say that it produces the ray of light that falls through the window?

This is not a direct quotation but it does represent the meaning intended by Bernard. The connection with Canticles is indirect already in Bernard's text itself. As the honour of the bride/wife exists only in the fact that she belongs to her husband, so that his honour is her honour (Sermon 13.4, with reference to Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Gen. 39:9), so the honour or glory of Christians is nothing but God's glory. The groom-bride allegory therefore serves to present the relationship of the church to Christ as a matter of grace without human merit. Since this is germane to Calvin's purpose in the *Institutes* III.12 (that there is no justification through the works of humans) he is prepared to accept the results of this allegory in support of his own argument.

Institutio III.12.3

This argument for the *gratuita iustificatio*, as it is called in the superscription, is prepared with an extensive collection of Bernard's words. In paragraph 3 Calvin uses six quotations from the Canticum sermons and one from a Psalm sermon in order to explain a single word of Augustine's in support of this doctrine.

Augustine says that Christ is "the only hope" (*una spes*) of humankind.^{xxi} Calvin makes this into a formulation which he can use in support of his thesis that humans are not entitled to claim any merit. Because *una spes* is exclusive, every form of dependence on own good works must be excluded. To explain this logic to his readers, Calvin now introduces another authority to speak for him. He strings together six quotations from Bernard:^{xxii}

- Firstly, Bernard says that the only **certainty** of weak humans is situated in Christ, which in Calvin's sequence leads to the conclusion that the only merit of humans lies in the **mercy** of God (2x Sermon 61).
- Then Calvin lets Bernard develop the idea that **peace** results when one puts one's **hope** in Christ instead of boasting about one's own merit (for the purpose of which, however, he needs an additional quotation which is not part of the Canticum sermons).
- The quotation string demonstrates at the end that **hope** is only found in God and not in one's own merit because this would amount to **presumption** (2x Sermon 68).

The structure of the series can be sketched as follows:

<u>Quote formula</u>	<u>Sermon</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Juxtaposing</u>
i	Sermon 61	[<i>meritum</i> and <i>securitas</i>]	+ <i>postea ex iis concludit</i> >
ii	Sermon 61	[<i>meritum</i> and <i>miserecordia</i>]	+ <i>item alibi</i> >
iii	Sermon 15 Ps. ^{xxiii}	[<i>meritum</i> and <i>spes</i>]	+ <i>similiter</i> >
iv	Sermon 13	[<i>meritum</i> and <i>pax</i>]	+ <i>apertius</i> >
v	Sermon 68	[<i>meritum</i> and <i>spes</i>]	+ <i>sicuti mox</i> >
vi	Sermon 68	[<i>meritum</i> and <i>praesumptio</i>]	

Calvin closely links two quotations from Sermon 61 and another two from Sermon 68 by using juxtaposing formulae. According to him, the first quotation is brought to a logical conclusion in the second (+ *postea ex iis concludit*), whereas the fifth and the sixth are even more closely linked. The middle quotation – from a much earlier homily (Sermon 13) – is however made to refer back to a quote from a Psalm sermon, once again by means of an identifying formula (*similiter*). In the same way Calvin joins these three pairs to each other (*item alibi* and *apertius*).

Whereas Bernard:

- in Sermon 61 transfers the certainty of the wife under the protection of her husband to the protection of the church by the Lord;
- in Sermon 68 identifies *expressis verbis* the “bridegroom” of Canticles 1–2 with “God” and the “bride” with “us”, claiming with reference to the dialogue of the lovers that God lovingly approaches (*intendere*) the church as a groom approaches his bride; and
- in Sermon 13 expounds the erotic motif of Canticles (with reference to Joseph and Potiphar’s wife) as meaning that the honour of the bride only resides in the honour of her husband,^{xxiv}

in Calvin’s usage of the material:

- any mystical development of the allegory is curtailed;
- this is done in such a way that Bernard’s intention is simultaneously expanded into the Reformation’s doctrine of justification by grace (*gratuita iustificatio*); and
- likewise, the association with Bernard’s motif of hope from the Psalm homily construes an expansion of the hope motif in the fundamental quotation from Augustine, since in the context of the *Institutes* the “only hope” of humankind must mean the exclusion of presumption and can therefore be presented as an articulation of the doctrine of *sola gratia*.

Calvin therefore uses a self-contained complex of motifs from Bernard’s groom-bride allegory in order to support Augustine with Bernard’s authority and, in turn, his own view with Augustine’s. The cumulative intertextual relationships created in this way are not unlike the florilegia of Qumran and the early church, where quotations are combined so that an intertextual network is brought about. The intertextual encounter of the quotations sets up a simultaneous reciprocal *restriction* and *expansion*.

Institutio III.15.2

A similar argument is deployed in Chapter 15 of the *Institutes*. Once more Augustine opens it:

- human merit should “be silent” in the face of God’s mercy;^{xxv}
- as a result of God’s mercy, holy people do not claim to deserve anything;^{xxvi}
- whatever good humans may do comes not from themselves but from God.^{xxvii}

A quote from Chrysostom,^{xxviii} according to whom all good works by humans are merely payments of debt, is followed by another composite quotation from Sermon 68.6 on the topic of the merit of the church, which should be recognised and glorified as the merit of Christ only. Calvin points out that he had already quoted from this sermon “earlier” (i.e. in Inst. III.12.3). At that time Calvin was somewhat irritated by the positive meaning given to the word *meritum* by Bernard, but excused him for it;^{xxix} however in III.15.2 he endeavours to show that the word is qualified so profusely by Bernard, Chrysostom and Augustine that it cannot be used in a defence of justification by works.

The combination of Bernard with Chrysostom and Augustine demonstrates how far Calvin was prepared to go with appeals to Christian tradition. In almost all of these cases, biblical texts from the Psalms, Genesis and the Prophets play a role alongside Canticles. They are either quotations within quotations or are expounded, but the biblical contexts play no role for Calvin. Since according to Bernard (68.1) the love of Christ for the church is the all-surpassing love of the bridegroom for his bride, he must conclude that the bride deserves no merit. This is the point where he coincides with Chrysostom and Augustine. The groom-bride mysticism with the consequence drawn from it by Bernard’s allegory (no merit to the credit of the bride) becomes the overarching umbrella for the cumulative argument with which Calvin instrumentalises both the great preacher and the Song of Songs in the service of his doctrine of *gratuita iustificatio*. The allegory from Canticles acquires this crucial function without ever being expounded by Calvin himself.

Institutio II.16.1

In Chapter 16 from Book 2 of the *Institutes* the topic is Christ as *redemptor*. From the very beginning Bernard’s allegory of Canticles is consulted. In this case we have, as far as I can see, the most extensive use of specific motifs from the biblical text of Canticles 1–2.

Calvin paraphrases a passage in Sermon 15.6 by Bernard as follows:

Bernard’s observation deserves being remembered, notably that the name of Jesus is not only the light, but also food; it is the oil without which all food for the soul is powerless; it is the salt without which that served to us has no taste; it is honey in the mouth, a beautiful sound in the ear, it is exultation and simultaneously medicine; and all our speaking is foolishness unless this name is sounded in it!^{xxx}

Bernard’s text itself is as follows:

The name of Jesus is not only the *light*, but also *food*. Do you not feel strengthened whenever you meditate on it? Which name can so enrich the mind that thinks about it? What else can so refresh your fatigued spiritual powers, strengthen virtue, enliven good and upright habits, *foster* pure affections? All spiritual food is dry if this oil is not mixed with it; it is tasteless unless seasoned with this salt. Anything you write is without savour for me unless it speaks of the name of Jesus. You can say or argue what you please, it will not be to my taste if you exclude the name of Jesus. “Jesus” is honey to the mouth, music to the ear, a song in the heart. [The name] is, again, *medicine*.^{xxxi}

The whole sermon is devoted to the name of Jesus. As such it clearly refers to Canticles 1:2:

Oil poured out is your name.

In the Vulgate:

oleum effusum nomen tuum.

Here Bernard obviously uses the Old Testament name (~X) as expression of the character. In the biblical verse itself the essence of the man is characterised as precious oil (!mX). Oil is valuable because it can be used for all the necessary purposes of daily life: as lamp-oil, nourishment, cleansing and cosmetic agent and medicine. The concept is in fact used in this way by Bernard, in all cases to be understood to apply to the name of Jesus, the bridegroom: enlightenment of humankind (as already in the Fourth Gospel), Christ as the bread of life, the source of chaste thoughts and feelings, and as the great healer. When the woman therefore states the all-inclusiveness of her husband’s meaning for her,

then that must mean that the church states how encompassing the meaning of her beloved Christ is for her.

All of this suits the thrust of Calvin's argument. He devotes chapter 16.2 of the *Institutes* to precisely this topic, notably that Christ has fulfilled all that is necessary for the *redemptio* of humankind. As oil in ancient Israel, as the bridegroom in the complete role of caretaker of his bride, as the Shem Theology in the Psalter, as the mystical allegory of Bernard, so Calvin pictures Christ and his work in the *Institutes*:

- of all-encompassing meaning,
- he is Lord of the church over whom his name has been called out,
- so that the church has no grounds for presumption.

All three aspects are developed in the quoted Canticum sermons by Bernard. Calvin's theology of *solus Christus* can thus be underpinned in all respects by Bernard's allegorical exegesis. Why should he then not use it? Calvin makes no use of the double parallelism (Christ–church, head–body, man–wife) from the Epistle to the Ephesians,^{xxxii} which in turn fits in with the whole construction he builds up. In Ephesians the context is that of rules for a household, where the head–body metaphor clarifies the relationship between Christ and the church as an example of what marital love of a man for his wife should look like. Calvin is however not interested in prescriptions for Christian family life, but in the major contours of the reformed doctrine of justification. Since Bernard's allegory of Canticles is well suited towards this end, Calvin has nothing against using it. One could say that the *sensus plenior* of Canticles serves as an *illuminatio* of a doctrine on which he has already decided and that he regards as established even without the intertextual use of Canticles. Nevertheless, the rhetorical *function* of the intertextual network construed by Calvin remains that of an appeal to Scripture. He quotes not the biblical texts themselves, but a whole series of motifs that he applies quite feasibly in his paraphrase of Bernard (e.g. the Shem theology and all historically known uses of oil). Therefore Canticles is the hypertext^{xxxiii} and Bernard's Sermon 15 on Canticles is the metatext^{xxxiv} of Calvin's argumentative text.

This again poses the question to which I have already suggested an answer: does the above mean that Calvin's comments and paraphrases of Bernard and the other *doctores* of the church make him an allegorist himself and therefore untrue to his rejection of allegory? Put differently: does the creation of intertextual relationships between texts that also include allegorical texts *ipso facto* mean that the whole construction becomes allegorical? In my opinion the answer is negative – which will now be substantiated.

The technical closeness of allegory and typology

The intertextual network that Calvin construed for Canticles has several sides, ranging from palintextuality^{xxxv} (since extensive texts are repeated) to metatextuality^{xxxvi} (because texts are commented upon) and also a case of hypertextuality^{xxxvii} (because, in the last case discussed, elements of the imitation of a Bernard text become visible). But all of this in turn is a cog in a still bigger construction, namely the argument for justification through Christ alone, without human merit. In this context Calvin unflinchingly relates all motifs he can use, from Bernard's Canticles exposition to Jesus Christ as a historical individual. Now this is an essential characteristic of typological *vis-à-vis* allegorical exegesis. Although it is true that allegorists like Bernard also related their exposition to Christ as a historical being, a further aspect of typological exegesis should also be borne in mind: the *intentio auctoris*. We have seen above how highly Calvin regarded this characteristic of typological exegesis.^{xxxviii} Not merely the text-immanent potential (i.e. not only that which can be *done* with a text in its reception), but also the intention of the author determines what the *sensus literalis* of a text is. If Calvin was convinced that an Old Testament book was intended as a collection of metaphors for the love of God for his people, then this text was to be so understood in its own right, and that was to be regarded as the *sensus literalis*, the clear intention of the historical author (in the present case: Solomon – cf. the Castellio testimonial). Since for Calvin the whole historical Old Testament refers to Christ in its *sensus literalis*, this part of it must literally point to the Christ who was to come later.^{xxxix}

That means that the concept of a *sensus literalis* does not have to contradict that of a *sensus plenior*, and that this is not an either-or alternative. Therefore it is not possible to infer from the presence of a spiritual meaning in a given exposition of the Old Testament that the expositor accepts allegory. A short look at the long rivalry between the classic allegorical and typological currents in Christian exegesis will confirm that as almost self-evident.^{xl}

The Alexandrian allegorists agreed that certain types in the Old Testament point to persons, events and doctrines in the New Testament.^{xii} Likewise it can easily be shown that one of Calvin's authorities cited above, Chrysostom, believed that his consciously historical exegesis of the Old Testament pointed towards Christ and his words.^{xiii} Consider the pronouncements by Chrysostom on the topic of "merit", so central in Bernard's Canticum sermons and therefore used by Calvin. In the sermons on Isaiah 6 Chrysostom argues as follows: Uzziah sat on the throne; but after listing his good works, 2 Chronicles 26:16 states that he became arrogant and was therefore humbled; according to Chrysostom that must mean that arrogance becomes a special danger when one has done good, and that in turn is borne out by Jesus's word in Luke 17:10 that, once one has done a good deed, one is to acknowledge that one is an undeserving slave. In two following sermons Chrysostom warns against arrogance on the basis of the same text:^{xiii} Because King Uzziah had sinned, he was actually only a slave, since John 8:34 says that every sinner is a slave. Chrysostom arrives at the same result as Bernard and Calvin, and his exegetical techniques are the same: the atomising of texts, of single words and concepts, the creation of intertextual networks within the Old Testament and between the two Testaments, and understanding all texts as Christian statements. But the view of Scripture is different: Chrysostom endeavours to connect the *theoria* or *forma*, that is, the Christian truth, with the *materia* in which this truth manifested itself historically;^{xiv} Bernard does not attempt that and is only interested in the symbols within the text as he has it. Both refer to the spiritual sense of the text time and again: Bernard and the Alexandrian allegorists in such a way that the biblical *symbols* reveal those spiritual truths that lie *behind* the text, while Chrysostom, like all Antiochenes, had to show how the biblical *events* reveal the spiritual truths that lie *in* the facts.^{xiv}

Neither the exegetical techniques nor the question whether there is such a thing as the *sensus plenior* in the Old Testament at all are at stake; the issue is the question whether this spiritual sense is derived from the historical meaning as intended by the author. That is why Bernard and Calvin could both arrive at the same overall meaning of Canticles without using the same view of Scripture as substructure for the *sensus plenior*. So David Pluckett is right in judging that Calvin himself regarded his spiritual exposition of Old Testament texts as related to yet different from allegory.^{xvi} Even so Pluckett is not to be followed in regarding this as a *via media*. This is not a matter of mediation or a compromise between allegory and the *sensus literalis*. Calvin never abandoned his rejection of allegory, but nonetheless his handling of Scripture in actual practice is not fundamentally different from allegory. This remains the case even if he does not allegorise all the motifs of Canticles, for Calvin *is* prepared to relate detailed aspects of the text to the meaning of Christ for the church, for instance the name of the bridegroom or the oil metaphor from Canticles 1. Hence he could use the Book of Canticles as a whole to refer to Christ and use it as a building block in the overall construction of his doctrine of justification and in his dispute with Castellio. What Calvin does in his statements on Canticles appears like allegory, but is built on a different basis, one notably closer to the Antiochene view of Scripture.

Conclusion

In the argument developed above we have observed how one text can be referred to in another and how a third can in turn refer to this reference. We also observed how this network includes still wider ranging associations with biblical texts and with other Christian references to yet further Bible texts. This is obviously an intertextual edifice with clear features also found in contemporary literary discourse on intertextuality. I therefore propose that we in conclusion consider the issues raised by Calvin's assertions on Canticles in the light of this discourse.

Not merely two main definitions of intertextuality, but actually two main types exist. Firstly, there is the grand concept that all texts and parts of texts refer to other texts and even consist of echoes from others.^{xvii} According to the main exponent of this approach, Julia Kristeva,^{xviii} all texts consist of so many mosaics of citations from others because they absorb and transform these others.^{xix} Here the *intentio auctoris* plays no role, so that which matters is what the reading subject can create from the text. As opposed to this, there is the narrower conception of intertextuality according to which the focus is on specific and conscious forms of reference, so that the *intentio auctoris* is very much in the centre of things: which intentions do the authors have to whom reference is made and what are the intentions of those authors who have recourse to such pre-texts?

To me these two approaches seem to run parallel to the two ancient exegetical traditions of Christianity:

Allegory
 Represented by: Bernard
 Provenance: Alexandria
 Based upon: Plato
 Text character: Expression of a network of ideas *behind* the text
 Sensus plenior: Yes, independent of the *intentio auctoris*

Typology
 Represented by: Calvin
 Provenance: Antioch
 Based upon: Aristotle
 Text character: Expression of intended historical meanings *in* the text
 Sensus plenior: Yes, but only in terms of *intentio auctoris*

This seems to confirm my interpretation of Calvin's views on Canticles.

There is nothing new under the sun. Historical exegesis still speaks of a deeper sense and today's fashionable "literary" exegesis no longer finds it politically correct to condemn an allegorical dimension in dealing with the text from the outset. We are still as willing as ever to use all available expositions and expository styles to combat and to dispel each other. But nevertheless the Lord himself still sustains his people.

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Endnotes

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- 1 Cf. Anthony N S Lane, John Calvin. Student of the Church Fathers, Edinburgh 1999 (T & T Clark), 87–114, according to whom, in view of the fact that the quotations after 1543 are only vague, the influence of Bernard on Calvin was not deep; cf. Dennis E Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the mysticism of St Bernard*, Louisville 1994 (John Knox Press), 57–58, who stresses the connection with the motif of “merit”.
- 2 Hans R Guggisberg, Sebastian Castellio 1515-1563. Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz im konfessionellen Zeitalter, Göttingen 1997 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht); Willem van't Spijker, Calvin: Biographie and Theologie (Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte, ed. B. Moeller), Göttingen 2001, 167–168; cf. Stefan Zweig, *Castellio gegen Calvin oder: ein Gewissen gegen die Gewalt*, Wien 1936 (Reichner), ch. 3.
- 3 E.g. Heinz-Peter Berg, Bernhard von Clairvaux. Predigten zum Hohen Lied. Handschrift aus der Abtei Altenberg, (<http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:6tpYcz4KEQJ:www.ub.uni-duesseldorf.de/>), 24.11.2008; cf. Darlene K Flaming, Calvin as commentator on the Synoptic Gospels, in: DK McKim (ed.), *Calvin and the Bible*, Cambridge 2006 (CUP), 131–163, here 148. Richard Burnett, John Calvin and the Sensus Literalis, *SJT* 57 (1) (2004), 1–13, thinks that Calvin's *sensus literalis* is flexible enough to be associated with allegory (on the first page of his article and *passim*).
- 4 Commentary on Daniel 10, 6.
- 5 Cf. J A Loader, Allegorie/Allegorese I, in: O Wischmeyer (Hg), *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik. Begriffe – Konzepte – Theorien*, Berlin 2009 (De Gruyter), 4–5; J Ulrich, Allegorie/Allegorese III, *ibid.*, 6.
- 6 *Praefatio*, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.
- 7 *Praefatio*, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.
- 8 Cf M Grohmann, Rezeption I, in: O. Wischmeyer (ed.), *op. cit.*, 490–491.
- 9 Hans W Frei, *The eclipse of biblical narrative*, New Haven, CN 1974 (Yale University Press), 31.
- 10 Gary N Hansen, *John Calvin and the non-literal interpretation of scripture*, Princeton 1998 (Princeton Theological Seminary Diss.), 1.
- 11 Richard Burnett, *op. cit.*, 1–13, here 3–4.
- 12 Text 531, OC XI, 674–676.
- 13 *Tantum id nobis curae esse, ne quod ex variis expositionibus grave malum nasceretur* (OC XI, 675).
- 14 *Existimat enim lascivum et obscenum esse carmen, quo Salomo impudicos suos amores descriperit Principio obtestati eum sumus, ut ne perpetuum universae ecclesiae consensum temere pro nihilo duceret* (*ibid.*).
- 15 *Decantari enim in Psalmo Salomonis pulchritudinem et sponsae ornatum, ita ut res respondeat, discrimen in sola dictionis figura esse.*
- 16 Whether Calvin only stresses the point in order to have something to say against Castellio can be left unconsidered for our purpose.
- 17 The suggestion of an appeal to the authority of the ecclesiastical tradition, perceived to have always remained the same, cannot be overlooked.
- 18 Cf. J A Loader, Das siebente Gebot, das Hohelied und Calvin, *HTS Theological Studies* 58/1 (2002), 62-76, where I link Calvin's exposition of the seventh commandment to the exposition of Canticles.
- 19 Cf. Anthony Lane, *op. cit.* and Dennis Tamburello, *op. cit.* (see above, Footnote 1).
- 20 See below, 4.2, where the five Bernard texts are discussed.
- 21 Augustine, Ad Bonif. Lib. III.c.5.
- 22 Here too the quotations are not always precise, but do faithfully represent the source.
- 23 Sermon 15, “Qui habitat”, on Ps 90.

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- 24 See above, where a quotation from Sermon 13 in Inst. III.12.8 has already been mentioned.
- 25 Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* XV.
- 26 Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 139.
- 27 Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 88.
- 28 Chrysostom, Sermon 33 on Genesis.
- 29 Inst. III.12.3; cf. Tamburello, op. cit., 56.
- 30 *Et memorata digna est illa Bernardi admonitio, non modo lucem et cibum quoque esse nomen Jesu; oleum etiam esse, sine quo aridus est omnis animae cibus; salem esse, sine cuius conditura insipidum est quicquid proponitur; denique esse mel in ore, in aure melos, in corde iubilum et simul medicinam; et quicquid disputatur insulsum esse, nisi ubi sonat hoc nomen.*
- 31 *Nec tantum lux est nomen Jesu, sed est et cibus. An non toties confortaris, quoties recordaris? Quid aequae mentem cogitantis impinguat? quid ita exercitatos reparat sensus, virtutes roborat, vegetat mores bonos atque honestos, castas fovet affectiones? Aridus est omnis animae cibus, si non oleo isto infunditur; insipidus est, si non hoc sale conditur. Si scribas, non sapit mihi nisi legero ibi Jesum. Si disputes aut conferas, non sapit mihi, nisi sonuerit ibi Jesus. Jesus mel in ore, in aure melos, in corde jubilus. Sed est et medicina.*
- 32 Ephesians 5:21–33.
- 33 The text whose concepts are imitated. To a degree, Calvin also imitates Bernard (see below).
- 34 The text commented upon.
- 35 Cf. Peter Stocker, *Theorie der intertextuellen Lektüre. Modelle und Fallstudien*, Paderborn 1998 (Schöningh), 50–51.
- 36 Cf. Stocker, op. cit., 55.
- 37 Cf. Stocker, op. cit., 60.
- 38 Cf. above, § 2, Footnotes 6 and 7 (Calvin, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans).
- 39 Cf. Burnett, op. cit., 5. The idea of Hans W Frei (Conflicts in interpretation: resolution, armistice, or coexistence? in G Hunsinger & W C Placher (ed.). *Theology & narrative: selected essays*, New York 1993 (OUP), 153–166) about a “breathing space” between Scripture and that which is described may, as Burnett thinks, leave some room for the development of a spiritual sense from the text, but it does not go far enough. The intention seems to be that the reformers’ *sensus literalis* should not be taken too strictly as a concept and somehow can refer to Christ. In my view that could however be worked out more precisely.
- 40 On Christian typology in relation to allegory, cf. J A Loader, Chrysostom, Isaiah and the Antiochene view of Scripture, in: C Landman & D P Whitelaw (eds.), *Windows on origins: essays on the early Church in honour of J A A Stoop*, Pretoria 1985 (Unisa Publishers), 55–67, here 64–66; cf. U Heil, Schriftsinn I, in Wischmeyer (ed.), *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik*, 521–522.
- 41 E.g. Adam and Moses are types of Christ, the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadow Christ’s death on the cross, the deluge refers to baptism etc; cf. J N D Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, London 1977⁵ (A & C Black), 72.
- 42 Chrysostom, Sermon 3 on Jes. 6:1.
- 43 Chrysostom, Sermon 4 on Jes. 6:1.
- 44 U Heil, Schriftsinn I, in: Wischmeyer (ed.), op. cit., 522.
- 45 Quite like the basic rule of Diodorus, the father of the Antiochene tradition, *Praefatio in Psalmis*: “We should be careful not to deprive the *theoria* of its historical basis, since then the result will be allegory and not *theoria*”; cf. U Heil, op. cit.
- 46 David Pluckett, *John Calvin’s exegesis of the Old Testament*, Louisville 1994 (Westminster John Knox), 113–114. He cites Calvin’s commentary on Exodus 2:8 to the effect that all ancient figures are true testimonies and therefore represent Christ, which does not mean however that all small details have to hide mysteries. Cf. also 106f, where he shows how Calvin strictly rejects allegory as “diabolical”. Calvin would absolutely not be prepared to take up a mediating position where such a thing was involved.
- 47 U Broich, op. cit., 175.
- 48 J Kristeva, *Semiotikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris 1969 (Seuil), 146.
- 49 Cf. also Harold B Bloom, *Poetry and repression*, New Haven 1976 (Yale University Press), 3: all poetry is inter-poetry and every reading an inter-reading.
- 50 Even when this, according to Origen, may not contradict the *sensus literalis* (cf. U Heil, op. cit., 521).