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Although the section divisions and headings are not Calvin's, they provide a useful outline for this very long chapter:

Chapter title: In Scripture from the Creation Onward, we are Taught One Essence of God, which Contains Three Persons

First of all, the high level outline:

Terms used in the doctrine of the Trinity by the orthodox fathers, 1-6

The eternal deity of the Son, 7-13

The eternal deity of the Spirit, 14-15

Distinction and unity of the three Persons, 16-20

Refutation of anti-Trinitarian heresies, 21-29

Now, the more detailed outline:

(Terms used in the doctrine of the Trinity by the orthodox fathers, 1-6)

1. God's nature is immeasurable and spiritual
2. The three "Persons" in God
3. The expressions "Trinity" and "Person" aid the interpretation of Scripture and are therefore admissible
4. The church has regarded expressions like "Trinity," "Person," etc., as necessary to unmask false teachers
5. Limits and necessity of theological terms
6. The meaning of the most important conception

(The eternal deity of the Son, 7-13)

7. The deity of the Word
8. The eternity of the Word
9. The deity of Christ in the Old Testament
10. The "Angel of the Eternal God"
11. The divinity of Christ in the New Testament: witness of the apostles
12. The divinity of Christ is demonstrated in his works
13. The divinity of Christ is demonstrated by his miracles

(The eternal deity of the Spirit, 14-15)

14. The divinity of the Spirit is demonstrated in his work
15. Express testimonies for the deity of the Spirit

(Distinction and unity of the three Persons, 16-20)

16. Oneness
17. Threeness
18. Difference of Father, Son and Spirit

19. The relationship of Father, Son and Spirit
20. The Triune God

(Refutation of anti-Trinitarian heresies, 21-29)

21. The ground of all heresy: a warning to all
22. Servetus's contention against the Trinity
23. The Son is God even as the Father
24. The name "God" in Scripture does not refer to the Father alone
25. The divine nature is common to all three Persons
26. The subordination of the incarnate Word to the Father is no counterevidence
27. Our adversaries falsely appeal to Irenaeus
28. The appeal to Tertullian also is of no avail
29. All acknowledged doctors of the church confirm the doctrine of the Trinity

PREPARATORY

1. **IMPORTANT – READ THIS:** Calvin is highly regarded for the God-centredness of his theology and the application of that God-centredness to the Christian life. He is also highly regarded for the way he deals in particular with the Trinity. He did not just restate the views of others but interacted with them and, standing on the shoulders of some who had preceded him, clarified aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity in a new way. None of us can understand exhaustively how God can be both one *and* three so the Trinity is, at the same time, the doctrine at the very heart of the Christian faith and, in a way, its biggest problem as far as our understanding is concerned.

Throughout Church history, two lines of thought with regard to this problem have been carefully held together. A fruitful way of approaching Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity is to recognise his presentation as a concerted effort to fully affirm both of these lines – both the Trinity and Unity of our triune God.

On the one hand there has been *a desire to affirm God's oneness*. Calvin consistently emphasises God's uniqueness and *aseity*. Aseity is the quality whereby a being is self-existent, having its existence from itself (*a se esse*). Calvin was somewhat unique in his explanation of God's aseity, since most of the Christian tradition has taught that the divine essence is eternally imparted to the Son and to the Holy Spirit by the Father in their processions within the Godhead itself. Subordinationists took this to mean that the Son and the Spirit are somehow inferior to the Father, but the church strongly affirmed the unity of the Son and the Spirit with the Father. Calvin was only different in the way he explained things. Since God never came to be, he simply *is*. All three persons of the Trinity, therefore, as the one God, are divine *a se esse* – of themselves. Considered separately, each person of the Godhead certainly possesses personal characteristics by which he is distinguished from the other two. But the divine essence is something they possess commonly. It is not distinguished between or among them, otherwise there would be three Gods.

On the other hand, there has been *a desire to affirm God's threeness*. Because God is unique and only he can make himself known truly to us, Calvin stresses the necessity of recognising that

we know very little about the Godhead when we try to consider the divine *essence* in and of itself. We know God only as he has given himself to be known in the Son who reveals the Father by his Spirit. Our experience of the one God is not directly with the divine essence but with persons of the Trinity. The persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are not identical. The Father is not the Son, nor is he the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Father, nor is he the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father, nor is he the Son.

Calvin repeatedly describes that between the persons of the Trinity there is *order*. The Father has a priority and even a headship over the Son (1 Corinthians 11:3c) because the Son is “begotten” from the Father; the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son because he proceeds from both. When we think of God as three persons, there is a dependence of the Son and the Spirit on the Father, but this has nothing to do with distinguishing them according to their shared divine essence. It has to do with the qualities whereby they are distinguished from one another. The Son is the Son due to his relationship to the Father, from whom the Son’s sonship is derived. The Holy Spirit possesses his personal identity in relation to the Father and the Son, from whom he proceeds.

When reading this chapter focus on what Calvin has to say about three key concepts:

- a. Oneness
- b. Threeness
- c. Procession

(I am grateful to Dr Brannon Ellis, author of, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism and the Aseity of the Son*, for editing the paragraphs above.)

2. Research ‘Hypostasis’ and as many of the early Christological heresies as you can. Here’s a very helpful site: <http://www.gospeloutreach.net/3heresies.html>. If you like charts, try this one: http://saintwiki.com/index.php?title=Topic:Early_Church_Fathers/Fathers_and_Councils_of_the_Church/Chart_of_Historical_Christological_Heresies.
3. Familiarise yourself with the meaning of ‘Aseity’ and the way it is used with reference to God.

1-6 Terms used in the doctrine of the Trinity by the orthodox fathers;

1. Calvin opens this section by referring to two “titles” of God. We would nowadays usually refer to the things he mentions as attributes. What are they? (120, 23f)
 - a. God’s infinity
 - b. God’s spiritual nature

Does Scripture speak liberally of God’s essence (*ie* of God as he is in himself, not as he is in relation to us)? (121, 5)

- a. *God to keep us sober speaks sparingly of his essence*

What is the effect (on us) of these two attributes? (121, 6f)

- a. *...by these two titles...he both banishes stupid imaginings and restrains the boldness of the human mind.*

How does God’s infinity banish our, *stupid imaginings*? (121, 7ff)

- a. *Surely, his infinity ought to make us afraid to try to measure him by our own senses.*

How does God's spiritual nature, *restrain the boldness of the human mind*? (121, 9f)

- a. *...his spiritual nature forbids our imagining anything earthly or carnal of him.*

121, 10ff: Calvin refers to the Bible's statements that, on the one hand, heaven is God's dwelling place and that, on the other, he fills the earth itself. Why, according to Calvin, does the Bible tell us both of these things (*For the same reason...*)? (121, 6f)

- a. *...to banish (our) stupid imaginings and restrain the boldness of the human mind.*

In what way would our imaginations and our minds let us down if we were not told that heaven is God's dwelling-place and that he fills the earth? (121, 13ff)

- a. *...he sees that our slow minds sink down upon the earth, and rightly, in order to shake off our sluggishness and inertia he raises us above the world.*

Calvin now turns to two errors that, although ancient, can take a contemporary form also. What are they? (121, 15 & 20)

- a. *...the error of the Manichees (Manichaeism)*
- b. *The Anthropomorphites*

Staying with Manichaeism, what was its essential error? (121, 16f)

- a. *...by postulating two principles (they) made the devil almost equal to God.*

When a religion or philosophy does this, what word do we normally use to describe it? (121, footnote 3)

- a. Dualism

What objectives lay behind this heresy? (121, 17f)

- a. *...this was to wreck God's unity...*
- b. *...and to restrict his infinity*

Turning now to Anthropomorphism, the word itself is derived from two Greek words: 'morphé', which means 'form', and, 'anthropos', which means, 'man'. So Anthropomorphites believe that God has the form of a man. The word anthropomorphism has a legitimate use but only if it is understood to mean that by giving himself bodily parts such as eyes, ears and an arm God is accommodating himself to our understanding, not describing himself literally.

What was the principle error of Anthropomorphism? (121, 10f)

- a. *The Anthropomorphites...imagined a corporeal God*

Why did they do this? (121, 10ff & footnote 4)

- a. *The Anthropomorphites...imagined a corporeal God **from the fact that Scripture often ascribes to him a mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet***
- b. *The Anthropomorphites...taught that since man was made in God's image (Gen 1:26), God has human form*

How are the Anthropomorphites, *easily refuted*? (121, 24f)

- a. We need to recognise that we are not God's equals, not only in power but in ability to think. When he speaks to us therefore he has to, *lisp...as nurses commonly do with infants.*

If we bear our own lack of capacity in mind (Calvin's point in 121, 5ff) and recognise that God accommodates himself to it in order that we might benefit to some extent, how do we interpret the anthropomorphisms that we encounter in Scripture? (121, 25ff)

- a. *...such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity.*

When God does this what is he doing? (121, 28)

- a. Descending...*far beneath his loftiness*

2. (Note from IJ: Having established in the previous paragraphs the principle that we must be prepared to be taught about God from Scripture, not from our own imaginings, Calvin now turns to the steps by which we conclude that God exists in three 'persons' each of whom possesses, fully and without derivation, the one 'essence'. This section concentrates mainly on the legitimacy of distinguishing between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as, persons.)

Why is it necessary to *define* God, in addition to just mentioning him? (122, 4ff)

- b. *Unless we grasp these (ie characteristics of God, in this case Trinitarian characteristics) only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains.*

When we understand God to consist of three persons we may fall into an error, which is – what? (122, 6f)

- a. We may...*imagine that God is threefold (ie that there are three Gods), or think God's simple essence to be torn into three persons.*

What do we need to prevent us falling into this error? (122, 8)

- a. *...a short and easy definition*

(Note from IJ: As far as I can see this definition is not given to us until section 20 where we read, *Therefore, let those who dearly love soberness, and who will be content with the measure of faith, receive in brief form what is useful to know: namely, that, **when we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood a single, simple essence, in which we comprehend three persons, or hypostases.*** The website link at the top of this page will give you information about 'hypostasis'.

The fact that this definition is not given to us immediately our need of it is noted reflects an important fact: The doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly stated in a single place anywhere in the Bible. Things are stated about God and about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that we can only reconcile with each other by formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin cannot therefore simply produce texts that explicitly affirm Trinitarianism and end any argument that way. The various things said about God and about the persons of the Trinity have to be noted one-by-one before Calvin's Trinitarian conclusions can be reached and stated.)

What objection do people make against the word, *person*, when used of members of the Godhead? (122, 11)

- a. It is...*humanly devised*

What Greek word is used in Hebrews 1:3, translated, 'person', or, 'nature' (see footnote 7)? (122, 13)

- a. *...hypostasis.*

For your convenience, here is Hebrews 1:1 -3 (NKJV): ¹*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person (hypostasis), and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

The phrase that we are particularly interested in is: *...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...* The point at issue here is whether, 'person' is the correct word to use and whether it is right for us to think of the Godhead as consisting of three persons.

What is the first point that Calvin makes from Hebrews 1:3? (122, 13f)

- a. *Heb 1:3 doubtless assigns some subsistence to the Father wherein he differs from the Son.*

Some have not wanted to translate, 'hypostasis' as, 'person'. Why is this? (122, 14f)

- a. They, *...consider hypostasis equivalent to essence*

If hypostasis is equivalent to essence, what would this mean for our understanding of Hebrews 1:3 and, by extension, our understanding of Christ? (122, 16f)

- a. It would mean that *...Christ, like wax imprinted with a seal, represented in himself the substance of the Father.*

Why is this understanding, *not only uncouth but also absurd*, in Calvin's view? (122, 18ff)

- a. *...since the essence of God is simple and undivided, and he [ie Jesus] contains all in himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection, the Son will be improperly, even foolishly, called his "stamp."*

(Note from IJ: We need to recognise that what we are dealing with here is not a dispute about words but about definitions, *ie* what the words *mean*. Both sides in this particular argument use the same words but do not mean the same thing by them.

Do not try to read the full doctrine of the Trinity into Calvin's words *so far*. Calvin is building the doctrine step-by-step, as we need to do. But as we have noted, he is building it in a particular, *ie* an equalitarian, way. Calvin is simply stressing, up to this point and on the basis of Hebrews 1:3, that the Father and the Son are distinguished in some way from each other.

How is this distinction to be thought of by us? There is only one divine essence, possessed equally by the Father and the Son [and the Holy Spirit although he is not mentioned until the next paragraph] not divided in such a way that the Father has a part of it and the Son has a part of it. Nonetheless, there is a distinction. Otherwise why would this passage refer in the way it does to the Father and to the Son?

Those with whom Calvin is disagreeing understood this passage to teach that the Son manifested the Father, in a way that undermines the Son's full and underived possession of deity. [Cf the New English Bible translation: *...the Son who is...the stamp of God's very being.*] We must bear the second person of the Trinity's *aseity* in mind, as Calvin does when he writes: *...he [ie, Christ] contains all in himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection...* Aseity is: *The property by which a being exists of and from itself.*

There is a problem with the things Calvin is asserting here: The word translated, 'express image', is, *character* (Χαρακτήρ). Various dictionaries and commentaries all tell us that this word meant, initially, an engraving tool, then it came to refer to a stamp used to make an impression in wax, finally it was used of the impression itself. Hence the NEB translation: That this is its meaning in Hebrews 1:3 is specifically refuted by Calvin on doctrinal rather than linguistic grounds. He does not enter into a discussion of the meaning of the word, *character*.

However, the point that he goes on to note, [*ie* all persons of the Godhead possess the divine essence in its entirety. They do not each have a part of the divine essence and their possession of that essence is not derived from somebody else] is true and apposite. If we do not believe this, Calvin seems to feel, we virtually obliterate the Son as a distinct hypostasis in his own right. He becomes simply another form in which the Father manifested himself. (This is known as *modalism* – the same individual manifesting himself in different modes at different times.) On this basis, Calvin insists that we must understand *hypostasis* in Hebrews 1:3 as a reference to the Father's *person*, not to the Father's divine *essence*.

We will notice in other places that Calvin is prepared at times to give words a meaning in a particular context that is based more on doctrinal considerations than on purely linguistic factors.)

Why does the Greek text of Hebrews 1:3 say that the Father, *has made his hypostasis visible*, in the Son if the Son is fully divine and capable of being distinguished from the Father? (122, 21ff)

- a. *...because the Father...expresses himself wholly in the Son*
- b. *...the very hypostasis that shines forth in the Son is in the Father.*

How many hypostases are there in God? (123, 14)

- a. *...three*

'Person' is a Latin word equivalent to 'hypostasis'. What are the implications for arguing about the use of the word, 'person', to refer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? (123, 15f)

- a. *...to wrangle over this clear matter is undue squeamishness and even obstinacy.*

If we want to stick more closely to the meaning of hypostasis, what word should we use? (123, 17f)

- a. *If anyone longs to translate word for word, let him use "subsistence."*

What does Calvin note with regard to the language used by early church theologians who spoke Greek? (123, 18ff)

- a. *Nor was the word "person" in use only among the Latins, for the Greeks, perhaps to testify their agreement, taught that there are three prosōpa in God. (cf footnote 7)*

3. Why is it legitimate to use words such as, 'Trinity' and 'Persons' that are not found in the actual words of Scripture? (123, 29f)

- b. *Because they ...explain nothing else than what is attested and sealed by Scripture!*

Calvin's opponents feel that departing from the words of Scripture will lead to in an unhelpful outcome, which is – what? (124, 3ff)

- a. *...foreign terms...become seedbeds of dissension and strife. For thus are we wearied with quarrelling over words, thus by bickering do we lose the truth, thus by hateful wrangling do we destroy love.*

Calvin responds to this position by clarifying the precise meaning of – what? (124, 7 & 10f)

- a. *...foreign*

In what two ways might the word, *foreign*, be used? (124, 7f & 10ff)

- a. It might be used of a word *...that cannot be shown to stand written syllable by syllable in Scripture...*
- b. Or, it may be used to describe a term, *...curiously devised and superstitiously defended, which conduces more to contention than to edification, which is made use of either unseasonably or fruitlessly, which by its harshness offends pious ears, which detracts from the simplicity of God's Word...*

If, *foreign*, is used in the second sense, above, what is Calvin's reaction? (124, 15)

- a. *...I wholeheartedly embrace their soberness.*

How does Calvin regard the view that all terms *...that cannot be shown to stand written syllable by syllable in Scripture...* are to be rejected? (124, 9)

- a. *...an unjust law*

With what arguments and observations does he support his position? (124, 19ff)

- a. *...we ought to seek from scripture a sure rule for both thinking and speaking to which both the thoughts of our minds and the words of our mouths should be conformed. But what prevents us from explaining in clearer word those matters in scripture which perplex and hinder our understanding, yet which conscientiously and faithfully serve the truth of scripture itself, and are made use of sparingly and modestly and on due occasion?*
- b. *...the church is utterly compelled to make use of the words "Trinity" and "Persons"*

4. In the previous section Calvin gave us one reason for the use of terms not drawn directly from the Bible – for the clarity of our own thought. He opens this section with another, which is – what? (124, 34ff)

- a. *...the novelty of words of this sort...becomes especially useful when the truth is to be asserted against false accusers...*

What tactic do the impious use when advancing error? (125, 1f)

- a. They cloak, *their errors in layers of verbiage*

Calvin now introduces us to one of the most powerful and influential heresies that the early church fathers had to contend with – Arianism. What does he tell us about Arius and Arianism? (125, 2ff)

- a. *Because he could not oppose manifest oracles, Arius confessed that Christ was God and the Son of God, and...pretended some agreement with other men.*
- b. *...in the meantime he did not cease to prate that Christ was created and had a beginning, as other creatures.*

How did the church fathers, *drag the man's versatile craftiness out of its hiding place?* (125, 8f & footnote 10)

- a. By, declaring Christ the eternal Son of the Father, consubstantial with the Father

Can you think of a modern-day version of Arianism?

- a. Jehovah's Witnesses

Turning now to Sabellius and Sabellianism, what was Sabellius's error? (125, 18ff)

- a. *Sabellius...who counted the names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as almost of no importance, arguing that it was not because of any distinction that they were put forward, but that they were diverse attributes of God...*

How would we normally refer to Sabellianism today?

- a. Modalism (*ie* the one God adopts different *modes* to reveal himself at different stages)

Wherein, in Calvin's view, did Sabellius's error consist? (125, 27ff)

- a. *...he re-echoed another old song, that the Father is the Son, and the Holy Spirit the Father, without rank, without distinction.*

How did the church fathers, fortify themselves against his tortuous cunning? (125, 32ff)

- a. *...with the open and simple truth, they truly affirmed that a trinity of persons subsists in the one God, or, what was the same thing, subsists in the unity of God.*

Arius stressed the distinction of persons but denied their equality. Sabellius taught their equality but denied their distinctiveness.

5. How does Calvin regard terms such as, 'person' and 'Trinity', given their necessity for the refutation of error? (125, 35)
 - a. *...not rashly invented*

How does Calvin introduce the fact that not all Church fathers speak with one voice when it comes to the Trinity? (126, 6ff)

- a. *I note that the ancients, who otherwise speak very reverently concerning these matters, agree neither among themselves nor even at all times individually with themselves.*

In addition to, *the councils*, Calvin mentions three Church fathers in particular. Who are they? (126, 10ff)

- a. Hilary
- b. Augustine
- c. Jerome

Calvin introduces an important word in this controversy in 126, 13 – *homoousios*.

(Note from IJ: *Ousia* is substance. *Homo-* indicates, 'the same', as in, 'homosexual'. *Homoousios* was the word adopted in early Church councils to indicate that the Father and the Son possessed the same essence, or substance. Those who wished to argue about this often wished to use the word *homoiousios*, *homoi-* indicates, 'similar', not, 'the same'.)

In 126, 11 Calvin also refers to another difference that affected the development of theological thought. What difference is that?

- a. *How unlike are the Greeks and the Latins?*

Calvin illustrates this difference between Greeks and Latins by referring to Jerome's (Jerome = a Latin speaker) view that, *it is sacrilege to predicate three substances in God*, whereas Hilary (a Greek speaker) says, *more than a hundred times, that there are three "substances" in God*. Calvin's is stressing that two men who were both Trinitarians understood the term *hypostasis* (which Jerome translated, *substance*) in completely different ways. For Jerome *hypostasis* refers to God's *substance*, which he understood in the same sense as *essence*, whereas for Hilary, *hypostasis* indicates *person*.

How does Calvin regard Jerome's understanding of hypostasis? (126, 19)

- a. *...confused*

Calvin goes further, accusing Jerome of, 'little candour'. On what assertion of Jerome's does Calvin base this accusation? (126, 26f)

- a. *...in all profane schools ousia is nothing else but hypostasis.*

Why, according to Calvin, does Jerome make this assertion? (126, 24f)

- a. *...he hates...the Eastern bishops.*

How does Augustine's attitude differ from Jerome's? (126, 28)

- a. *Augustine is more moderate and courteous...*

In what way is Augustine, *more moderate and courteous*? (126, 29ff)

- a. *...even though he says that the word, hypostasis, in this sense is new to Latin ears, yet he leaves to the Greeks their manner of speaking so much that he gently bears with the Latins who had imitated the Greek phrase.*

What does Hilary accuse heretics (such as Arius and Sabellius) of? (126, 35)

- a. *...a great crime*

Why does he make this accusation? (126, 35ff)

- a. *...by their wickedness he is forced to submit to the peril of human speech what ought to have been locked within the sanctity of men's minds.*

What is Hilary's view of all terms other than, *the natural names - Father, Son and Spirit*? (127, 6ff)

- a. *...whatever is sought besides these is beyond the meaning of language, above the reach of sense, above the capacity of understanding.*

What was Augustine's view of hypostasis? (127, 14ff)

- a. *..."hypostasis" had been forced upon us by necessity, not to express what it is, but only not to be silent on how Father, Son and Spirit are three.*

What conclusions does Calvin draw from the difficulties Christians down the ages have had agreeing on precise terminology that relates even to God himself? (127, 17ff)

- a. *We ought not to behave, 'like censors' insisting that people swear to the precise words conceived by us. Let those persons, 'weigh the necessity that compels us to speak thus, that gradually...they may become accustomed to a useful manner of speaking.' Identify and insist on the essentials: '...when we hear, one, we ought to understand, unity of substance; when we hear, three in one essence,' the persons in this trinity are meant.*

6. Is Calvin happy to speak of persons of the Trinity or does he prefer the use of another term? (128, 15f)

a. *...a "subsistence" in God's essence*

What distinguishes each person of the Trinity from the others? (128, 17)

a. *...an incommunicable quality*

Commenting on, *The Word was with God*, what point does Calvin make? (128, 17ff)

b. *By the term "subsistence" we would understand something different from "essence". For if the Word were simply God, and yet possessed no other characteristic mark, John would wrongly have said that the Word was always with God.*

Immediately after John writes that, *the Word was with God*, he writes, *the Word was God*. How can this also be true? (128, 22f)

c. *...he recalls us to the essence as a unity.*

7-13 The eternal deity of the Son:

As with the Trinity itself, Calvin builds his case for the Son of God's eternity and deity step-by-step. Note the section headings, which, although not part of Calvin's original text, give us a good indication of the development of his argument in 7-13.

Section 7. The Deity of the Word

Section 8. The eternity of the Word

Section 9. The deity of Christ in the Old Testament

Section 10. The "Angel of the Eternal God"

Section 11. The divinity of Christ in the New Testament: witness of the Apostles

Section 12. The divinity of Christ is demonstrated in his works

Section 13. The divinity of Christ is demonstrated by his miracles

Try to bear in mind exactly where Calvin is going and the route he is taking as you read through these sections.

7. What way of understanding, 'God's word', would be, *the height of absurdity*? (129, 5f)
- a. *...a merely fleeting and vanishing utterance, which, cast forth into the air, projects itself outside of God.*

How are we to understand God's "Word"? (129, 8ff)

a. *"Word" means the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth.*

How do we know that all true prophecies from God, however ancient, came from Christ? (129, 10ff)

a. *...as Peter testifies, the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as much as the apostles did [1 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Peter 1:21], and all who thereafter ministered the heavenly doctrine.*

The prophets who spoke directly from God (*cf Thus says the Lord...*) were inspired by the Spirit of Christ. What does this teach us about Christ? (129, 17f)

a. *...he was truly God*

How does Moses's account of the creation support this view of Christ? (129, 19ff)

- a. *...setting forth the Word as intermediary*

What is it about the creation of the world that prevents us thinking of the Word as simply that by which God stated, *a certain temporary volition*? (130, 1ff)

- a. *...it would be foolish and silly to fancy a certain temporary volition of God: when God willed to set forth his fixed and eternal plan, and also something more secret.*

What words of Christ himself explain, *more explicitly what Moses had briefly touched upon*? (130, 4f)

- a. *My Father and I have worked even to this day [Jn 5:17]*

What conclusion is legitimate, based on what we have learned so far about the Word in creation? (130, 8ff)

- a. *God has so spoken that the Word might have his share in the work and that in this way the work might be common to both.*

John, *spoke most clearly of all*, about the relationship between God and the Word. What did John say? (130, 11ff)

- a. *...he declared that that Word, God from the beginning with God, was at the same time the cause of all things, together with God the Father [John 1:1-3].*
- b. *...John at once attributes to the Word **a solid and abiding essence**, and ascribes something uniquely his own, and clearly shows how God, by speaking, was the creator of the universe.*

What is the relationship between the "word of God" and, *this substantial Word*? (130, 18f)

- a. *...this substantial Word is properly placed at the highest level, as the wellspring of all oracles.*

Who is, *this substantial Word*? (130, 19ff)

- a. *Unchangeable, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself.*

8. Having established the deity or the divinity of the Word, Calvin now turns to one of the attributes of deity, *ie* eternity.

If eternity is an attribute of deity and the Word's deity has already been established, why is it necessary to give attention to the Word's eternity? (130, 22f)

- a. *Here some dogs bark out, who, while they dare not openly deprive him of his divinity, secretly filch away his eternity.*

What do these, dogs, say? (130, 24f & 37ff)

- a. *...they say the Word for the first time began to be when God opened his holy mouth in the creation of the universe.*
- b. *... they aver that Moses, by narrating that God then (ie at creation) spoke for the first time, hints that there had been in him no Word before*

What problem with that does Calvin identify? (130, 25f, 29ff & 131, 2f)

- a. *...they are too reckless in inventing a sort of innovation **in God's substance**.*

- b. *...piety recognises or allows no name which intimates that anything new has happened to God in himself.*
- c. *...because something begins to be manifested at a certain time, we ought not therefore to gather that it never existed before*

On what scripture does Calvin base his view that God's essence (his substance) does not change? (130, 32ff)

- a. *James 1:17: "every perfect gift comes from above, and descends from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of change"*

On what Scriptural basis does Calvin conclude that, *the Word had existed long before God said, "Let there be light" [Gen 1:3] and the power of the Word emerged and stood forth?* (131, 8ff)

- a. *Nor does he delimit a certain space of time when he says, "Father, glorify thy Son with the glory which I had with thee before the foundations of the universe were laid" [John 17:5].*
- b. *Nor did John overlook this: because **before he passes on to the creation of the universe** [John 1:3,] he says that "in the beginning the Word was with God [John 1:1].*

Taken together, what do these statements prove with regard to the Word? (131, 15f)

- a. *By this, his eternity, his true essence, and his divinity are proved.*

9. Psalm 45 is a Messianic Psalm. In v6 the Messiah is addressed thus: *O God (Elohim)*. This form of address obviously implies that the Messiah is God. How did (do?) the Jews avoid this implication? (131, 22f)

- a. *...the Jews...made the name Elohim fit also the angels and the highest powers*

Calvin produces three arguments against the Jewish interpretation. What are they? (131, 25ff)

- a. *...nowhere in Scripture do we find a like passage, which raises up an eternal throne for a creature*
- b. *...nor, indeed, is he called simply "God," but also the eternal ruler.*
- c. *Furthermore, this title is bestowed on no one without an addition, as when Moses is said to become "as God to Pharaoh" [Ex 7:1].*

What does the Jewish interpretation of Elohim in this passage amount to? (131, 32)

- a. *...divine*

What is Calvin's assessment of that interpretation? (131, 33f)

- a. *...such an interpretation here is hard and forced, and really does not make sense.*

Pursuing his theme – the deity of Christ in the Old Testament – Calvin turns next to – whom? (131, 36)

- a. *Isaiah*

What is Calvin's comment on Isaiah 9:6? (131, 35ff)

- a. *Christ is brought forward by Isaiah both as God and as adorned with the highest power, which is the characteristic mark of the one God.*

How do Jewish interpreters avoid this conclusion? (132, 1ff)

- a. *The Jews...thus invert the reading, "This is the name by which the Mighty God, Father of the coming age, shall call him," etc., leaving to the Son only the title "Prince of Peace."*

What is Calvin's response to this assertion? (132, 4ff)

- a. *But to what purpose would so many titles be heaped up in this place to God the Father, since the intention of the prophet is to adorn Christ with clear marks to build up our faith in him?*

Moving on from Isaiah, to whom does Calvin turn next, and to which passage in particular? (132, 10)

- a. *Jeremiah.*
- b. *Jeremiah 23:5-6; cf 33:15-16*

What phrase in particular in this passage does Calvin appeal to in order to establish the divinity of the Son? (132, 12)

- a. *Jehovah our Righteousness*

What makes this particular phrase so significant? (132, 13ff)

- a. *...since the Jews further teach that other names of God are nothing but titles, but that this one alone [Jehovah], which they speak of as ineffable, is **a substantive** to express his essence, we infer that the only Son is the eternal God who elsewhere declares that he will not give his glory to another [Isa. 42:8].*

The Jews have a counter-argument, which is – what? (132, 19ff)

- a. *Moses imposed this name (Jehovah) upon the altar erected by him, and Ezekiel did so upon the new city of Jerusalem.*

Calvin dismisses this argument fairly easily by pointing out – what? (132, 22ff)

- a. *...the altar was built as a reminder that God was "the exaltation of Moses"... "He built an altar and called its name 'Jehovah my exaltation' " [Ex 17:15]*
- b. *...Jerusalem was not marked with God's name simply to testify to God's presence? For so does the prophet speak: "The name of the city from that day shall be 'Jehovah is there' [Ezek 48:35]*

What other passage does Calvin describe as arousing, *more debate*? (132, 31)

- a. *Jer 33:16, which says: This is the name by which they will call it, 'Jehovah our righteousness*

Calvin's view of the meaning of this passage is – what? (132, 32ff)

- b. *...this testimony is so very far from obscuring the truth that we are defending as rather to lend support to it...he declares that the church of God will be so clearly aware of (Christ's divinity) that it is able to glory in the very name.*

On what does Calvin base this interpretation? (132, 34ff)

- c. *The context, in which a restored Jerusalem represents a saved church. These verses come towards the end of a passage that begins at 32:26, all of this passage is relevant. The immediately preceding verses are (NKJV): ¹⁴"Behold, the days are coming", says the LORD, "that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel, and to the house of Judah:*

¹⁵*"In those days and at that time*

*I will cause to grow up to David
A Branch of righteousness;
He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

Calvin comments: *...before he had witnessed that Christ was the true Jehovah, from whom righteousness comes, now he declares that the church of God will be so clearly aware of (Christ's divinity) that it is able to glory in the very name. Therefore in the former passage the source and cause of righteousness is set forth; in the latter the effect is added.*

10. Continuing his argument with those who do not accept that there are Old Testament passages that prove the deity of Christ, Calvin now turns to – what? (132, 40f)

a. *...Jehovah is so frequently set forth in the person of an angel.*

To whom did this angel appear? (132, 41)

a. *...the holy patriarchs*

What claim did the angel make? (132, 42f)

a. *...claiming for himself the name of the Eternal God [Judg 6:11, 12, 20,21,22; 7:5,9].*

What counter-argument does Calvin imagine his opponents coming up with? (133, 2f)

a. *...this is said in regard to the role that he plays*

What does Calvin find in Judges 13 that enables him to deal with this view? (133, 3ff)

a. *...the difficulty (for Calvin's opponents) is by no means thus resolved. For as a servant he would not permit a sacrifice to be offered to himself and thus deprive God of his honour*

How do we know that Calvin's understanding of the passage is the one intended? (133, 8ff)

a. *...Manoah and his wife infer from this sign that they have seen not only an angel but God himself. Hence..."We shall ...die because we have seen God" [Judg 13:22]*

(Note from IJ: **Michael Servetus** (first mentioned in *The Institutes* here, is a character to whom Calvin frequently refers and whose teaching Calvin passionately disliked. He was a Spanish physician, who is credited with the discovery of the circulation of blood, long before William Harvey. Servetus's view was that the Trinity was a doctrine not found in scripture but adopted by early Christians from non-Christian religions around them. Its adoption was motivated by Christianity's aspiration to rise to a dominant position in society, thus acquiring and maintaining control over the masses. His explanation of Biblical passages that referred to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was modalist. *"Like the Word is the God's essence to the text that it manifests to the world, the Spirit is the essence of God when he communicates to the world. The Spirit blossomed with the Word, God expired when he talked. Spirit and Word had the same substance, but different modus."* One assumes from the opposition he aroused that Servetus's radical social ideas, which were intertwined with his rejection of Christian orthodoxy, were at least feared and possibly gained some influence. Servetus was burned in effigy in France and in person in Geneva in 1553.)

Whom have Christians (*the orthodox doctors of the church*) understood, 'the angel of the Lord' to be? (133, 20)

a. *God's Word*

Why did the Word appear to the Patriarchs and the Israelites as an angel? (133, 20ff)

- a. *...God's Word, who already at that time, as a sort of foretaste, began to fulfil the office of Mediator. For even though he was not yet clothed with flesh, he came down, so to speak, as an intermediary, in order to approach believers more intimately.*

11. In this section, Calvin offers, *a brief selection*, of New Testament passages that quote and apply Old Testament references to God, the Lord, Jehovah etc to Christ.

As far as I can see, Calvin employs only one line of argument in this section, although he introduces it with the phrase, *First of all*. What is that line of argument? (134, 23ff)

- a. *...what had been foretold concerning the eternal God had already been revealed in Christ or was someday to be manifested in him.*

12. What does Calvin present in this section as a support of Christ's deity? (135, 42f)

- a. *...the works that are ascribed to him in the Scriptures*

Why should Christ's works be a particularly powerful testimony to his deity? (136, 2ff)

- a. *...when he said that he had been working hitherto from the beginning with the Father, the Jews, utterly stupid to all his other sayings, still sensed that he made use of divine power...the Jews sought to kill him, because...making himself equal with God.*

What two, 'incommunicable' divine prerogatives did Christ exercise? (136, 9ff)

- a. *...to govern the universe with providence and power, and to regulate all things by the command of his own power [Heb 1:3], deeds that the apostle ascribes to Christ, is the function of the Creator alone.*

In addition to his universally governing authority, Calvin mentions two other things that Christ did exercising prerogatives of God alone. What are they? (136, 18ff & 24ff)

- a. *...when the Jews thought that wrong was done to God in that Christ was remitting sins, Christ not only asserted in words, but also proved by miracle, that this power belonged to him [Matt 9:6].*
- b. *Does not the searching and penetrating of the silent thoughts of hearts belong to God alone? Yet Christ also had this power [Matt 9:4; cf John 2:25].*

What conclusion does Calvin legitimately draw with regard to Christ? (136, 26)

- a. *From this we infer his divinity.*

13. What does Calvin present in this section as a support of Christ's deity? (135, 27)

- a. *...miracles.*

In what way do the miracles performed by Christ differ from those performed in his name by others? (136, 30f)

- a. *...they distributed the gifts of God by their ministry, but he showed forth his own power.*

What does Calvin point to in particular that distinguishes the miracles of Christ from all others, even those that were performed in his name? (136, 29ff)

- a. *...in this respect there is the greatest of differences: they distributed the gifts of God by their ministry, but he showed forth his own power.*

The second paragraph in this section (137, 3ff) is really a conclusion to the whole of sections 7-13. The two paragraphs starting at 137, 3 should probably form a separate section of their own.

What are the first three things that can only come to us from God that are mentioned in this paragraph? (137, 3f)

- a. ...*salvation*
- b. ...*righteousness*
- c. ...*life*

What does Calvin note about Christ's relationship to salvation itself that is significant for proving his divinity? (137, 6f)

- a. ...*Christ is not said to have received salvation, but to be salvation itself.*

To what subject that shows Christ is Jehovah does Calvin turn in line 23?

- a. ...*the prayer that depends upon faith*

137, 35 introduces another argument, drawn from Paul's conduct when among the Corinthians. What is that? (137, 37ff)

- a. ...*he introduced no other doctrine among the Corinthians than knowledge of him, and that he has preached nothing but this [1 Cor 2:2].*

How does the apostle's practice at Corinth (and elsewhere of course) affirm that Jesus is Jehovah? (137, 40ff)

- a. *What wondrous and great thing is this, I ask, that the name of the Son alone is announced to us, when God bade us glory in the knowledge of him alone? [Jer 9:24]*

A further line of evidence is introduced in 138, 1ff. What is it?

- a. ...*the salutations prefixed to the letters of Paul pray for the same benefits from the Son as from the Father*

What does this prove? (138, 4ff)

- a. *By this we are taught not only that by the Son's intercession do those things which the Heavenly Father bestows come to us but that by mutual participation in power the Son himself is the author of them.*

14-15 The eternal deity of the Spirit;

14. Having established the deity of the eternal Word, Calvin sets out in this section to present scriptural proofs of the deity of the Holy Spirit.

In this section, Calvin presents, as evidence of the Holy Spirit's deity a list of activities in which he plays a leading, essential role. What are they? (138, 13ff, 20ff, 23ff, 33; 139, 3ff, 8f, 9f, 10ff)

- a. His relationship to Creation at outset – *Indeed that testimony of Moses in the history of the Creation is very clear, that "the Spirit of God was spread over the deeps" [Gen 1:2], or formless matter; for it shows not only that the beauty of the universe (which we now perceive) owes its strength and preservation to the power of the Spirit but that before this adornment was added, even then the Spirit was occupied with tending that confused mass.*
- b. Inspiration of the prophets – *in sending the prophets he shares the highest power with the Holy Spirit.*

- c. His ongoing relationship to everything – *the best confirmation for us, as I have said, will be from familiar use. For what Scripture attributes to him and we ourselves learn by the sure experience of godliness is far removed from the creatures...Because he is circumscribed by no limits, he is excepted from the category of creatures; but in transfusing into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement, he is indeed plainly divine.*
- d. *...regeneration into incorruptible life*
- e. *...functions that especially belong to divinity:*
 - a. *“For the Spirit searches...even the depths of God” [1 Cor 2:10], who has no counsellor among the creatures [Rom 11:34]*
 - b. *...he bestows wisdom and the faculty of speaking [1 Cor 12:10], although the Lord declares to Moses that it is his work alone [Ex 4:11].*
- f. *Through him we come into communion with God, so that we in a way feel his life-giving power toward us.*
- g. *Our justification is his work...*
- h. *...from him is power, sanctification [cf 1Cor 6:11], truth, grace, and every good thing that can be conceived, since there is but one Spirit from who, flows every sort of gift [1Cor 12:11].*

Why are Paul's words, “*Although there are divers gifts*” [1Cor 12:4] and *manifold and varied distribution* [cf Heb 2:4], “*but the same Spirit*” [1 Cor 12:4], especially worth noting? (139,15f)

- a. *...because this makes him (ie the Holy Spirit) not only the beginning or source, but also the author.*

What do we learn from 1Cor 12:11 about the above view and about the Holy Spirit? (139, 17ff)

- a. *Paul, more clearly expresses, in 1Cor 12:11*
- b. *...if the Spirit were not an entity subsisting in God, choice and will would by no means be conceded to him.*

What two conclusions does Calvin draw from the fact that choice and will are given to the Spirit in scripture? (139, 21ff)

- a. *Paul, therefore, very clearly attributes to the Spirit divine power, and...*
- b. *...He resides hypostatically in God.*

15. In this section, Calvin cites explicit Biblical testimonies to the deity of the Holy Spirit. What are they? (139, 25ff)

- a. *Paul concludes that we are the temple of God from the fact that his Spirit dwells in us [1 Cor 3:16f; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16].*
- b. *...the apostle himself sometimes writes that “we are God's temple” [1 Cor 3:16f; 2 Cor 6:16], at other times, in the same sense, “the temple of the Holy Spirit” [1 Cor 6:19].*
- c. *Peter, rebuking Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit, says that he has lied not to men but to God [Acts 5:3f].*
- d. *...where Isaiah introduces the Lord of Hosts speaking, Paul teaches that it is the Holy Spirit [Is 6:9; Acts 28:25f]*
- e. *...where the prophets usually say that the words they utter are those of the Lord of Hosts, Christ and the apostles refer them to the Holy Spirit [cf 2 Pet 1:21].*
- f. *...where God complains that he was provoked to anger by the stubbornness of the people, Isaiah writes that “his Holy Spirit was grieved” [Is 63:10].*

- g. *...if blasphemy against the Spirit is remitted neither in this age nor in the age to come, although **he who has blasphemed against the Son may obtain pardon** [Matt 12:31; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10], by this his divine majesty, **to injure or diminish which is an inexcusable crime**, is openly declared.*

16-20 Distinction and unity of the three persons:

Having dealt with the Word and the Spirit independently, Calvin now turns to the oneness and the threeness of the Trinity. He starts with God's oneness.

16. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity something that we appreciate more fully with the aid of the New Testament? (140, 23ff & 32ff)

- a. *...because God more clearly disclosed himself in the coming of Christ, thus he also became known more familiarly in three persons.*
- b. *...there is no doubt that Christ willed by this solemn pronouncement (ie the pronouncement that converts to Christianity were to be baptised into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit) to testify that the perfect light of faith was manifested...*

In Eph 4:5, Paul stresses the oneness of God, faith and baptism. What is his point? (140, 26ff)

- a. *Paul so connects these three...as to reason from one to the other: namely, because faith is one, that he may thereby show God to be one; because baptism is one, that he may thence show faith also to be one.*

Paul's assertion of God's oneness has a particular implication for those who have received Christian baptism. What is that implication? (140, 30ff)

- a. *...if through baptism we are initiated into the faith and religion of one God, we must consider him whose name we are baptised to be the true God.*

Into whose name are we baptised? (140, 35f)

- a. *...into the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

On whose authority are Christians baptised into the name of each person of the Trinity? (140, 33)

- a. Christ's

Why did Christ give to the Church this formula? (140, 33ff)

- a. *Christ willed by this solemn pronouncement to testify that the perfect light of faith was manifested when he said, "Baptise them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" [Matt 28:19].*

Taking the teaching of Ephesians 5:4 and Matt 28:19 together, what does it mean to be baptised into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? (140, 36ff)

- a. *...this means precisely to be baptised into the name of the one God who has shown himself with complete clarity in the Father, the Son and the Spirit.*

What conclusion should we draw by taking Ephesians 5:4 and Matt 28:19 together? (140, 39f)

- a. *...it is quite clear that in God's essence reside three persons in whom one God is known.*

Moving to the second paragraph in this section, what is the purpose of faith? (141, 1ff)

- a. Negatively: *...faith ought not to gaze hither and thither, nor to discourse of various matters...*
- b. Positively: *...to look upon the one God, to unite with him, to cleave to him.*

What would be the consequence if there was more than one faith that was true and capable of saving? (141, 4f)

- a. *...if there are various kinds of faith, there must also be many gods.*

What does the fact that there is only one legitimate baptism confirm to us? (141, 6)

- a. *...the unity of God*

Because the fact that there is one God is a fundamental revealed truth, *it also follows that we are not permitted to be baptised except into the one God... What, then, did Christ mean when he commanded that Baptism should be in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit..?* (141, 11ff)

- a. *...we ought, with one faith to believe in the Father, the Son and the Spirit*

What is the implication of the baptismal formula ('I baptise you in the name of the Father, in the name of the Son and in the name of the Holy Spirit') for our understanding of who the Son and the Holy Spirit are? (141, 13f)

- a. *What else is this than to testify clearly that Father, Son and Spirit are one God?*
- b. *...since that there is one God, **not more**, is regarded as a settled principle, we conclude that Word and Spirit are nothing else than the very essence of God.*

In what way did the Arians (and Jehovah's Witnesses, their modern successors) deviate from this truth? (141, 17ff)

- a. *...in confessing the divinity of the Son, they took away the substance of God from him.*

How do we know that the Macedonians were wrong to assert that 'Spirit', referred to, *only those gifts of grace poured out upon men?* (141, 21ff)

- b. *...as wisdom, understanding, prudence, fortitude, and fear of the Lord proceed from him, so is he the **one** Spirit of wisdom, prudence, fortitude, and godliness [cf. Is 11:2].*
- c. *...he is not divided according to the distribution of gifts...he remains "one and the same" {1 Cor 12:11}.*

17. Having established that in the Bible God reveals himself to us to be one, Calvin turns now to the threeness that characterises God – and *always* has done.

What should warn us to tread very carefully when formulating our thoughts and words about God's threeness? (141, 28f)

- a. *...the greatness of the mystery*

...the words "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" imply – what? (142, 2f)

- a. *...a distinction, not a division.*

How is this distinction evidenced in scripture? (142, 5ff)

- a. *...the Word would not have been with God unless he were another than the Father*

- b. *...nor would he have had his glory with the Father were he not distinct from the Father*
- c. *...he distinguishes the Father from himself when he says that there is another who bears witness to him*
- d. *...the Father created all things through the Word...This he could not have done without being somehow distinct from the word*
- e. *...it was not the Father who descended upon the earth, but he who went forth from the Father*
- f. *...the Father did not die, nor did he arise again, but rather he who had been sent by the Father.*
- g. *...he was in the bosom of the Father before, and held his own glory in the presence of the Father [John 17:5].*
- h. *Christ implies the distinction of the Holy Spirit from the Father when he says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father*
- i. *He implies the distinction of the Holy Spirit from himself as often as he calls the Spirit "another" as when he announces that he will send another Comforter [John 14:6], and often elsewhere.*

18. Why does Calvin not produce one or more illustrations to help us understand the Trinity, as his predecessors (notably Augustine) had done? (142, 31ff)

- a. *Men of old...confessed that the analogies they advanced were quite inadequate. This it is that I shrink from all rashness here: lest if anything should be inopportunistly expressed, it may give occasion either of calumny to the malicious, or of delusion to the ignorant.*

Even though there is nothing that we understand that we can use to illustrate the Trinity, *it is not fitting to suppress the distinction that we observe to be expressed in Scripture.* What are the characteristics of the distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as expressed in Scripture? (142, 38ff)

- a. *...to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things;*
- b. *...to the Son, wisdom, counsel and the ordered disposition of all things;*
- c. *...to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.*

From what can we deduce that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each eternal hypostases in the one Godhead? (143, 5f)

- a. *God could never exist apart from his wisdom and power, and we must not seek in eternity a before or an after.*

Why is it neither meaningless nor superfluous when the Father is thought of as first, then from him the Son, and finally from both the Spirit? (143, 9ff)

- a. *...the mind of each human being is naturally inclined to contemplate God first, then the wisdom coming forth from him, and lastly the power whereby he executes the decrees of his plan.*

What statements does this lead to as far as the content of scripture is concerned? (143, 12ff)

- a. *For this reason, the Son is said to come forth from the Father alone the Spirit, from the Father and the Son at the same time.*

What two passages does Calvin refer to as demonstrating that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son? (143, 15ff)

- a. Romans 8 and 1 Peter 1:21

What is it about these passages that Calvin refers to in particular? (143, 15ff)

- a. *...the same Spirit is indifferently called sometimes the Spirit of Christ [v.9], sometimes the Spirit of him "who raised up Christ...from the dead" [v.11]*
- b. *Peter also testifies that it was by the Spirit of Christ that the prophets prophesied [2 Peter 1:21; cf. 1 Peter 1:11], even though Scripture often teaches that it was the Spirit of God the Father.*

19. What does Calvin feel is proved by the fact that both the Father and the Son are spoken of as sharing the same Spirit? (143, 23ff)

- a. *...this distinction is so far from contravening the utterly simple unity of God as to permit us to prove from it that the Son is one God with the Father because he shares with the Father one and the same Spirit; and that the Spirit is not something other than the Father and different from the Son, because he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.*

What distinguishes each hypostasis (each member of the Trinity) from the other two? (143, 30)

- a. *...his own peculiar quality.*

Please state – positively and negatively – what we understand the terms, 'Father,' 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit', to set forth as far as their threeness and oneness is concerned? (143, 36f)

- a. Positively: *...their mutual relationships*
- b. Negatively: *...not the very substance by which they are one*

In what way do, *the opinions of the ancients...seem somewhat to clash?* (143, 40ff)

- a. *Sometimes, indeed, they teach that the Father is the beginning of the Son; sometimes they declare that the Son has both divinity and essence from himself, and thus has one beginning with the Father*

When is it appropriate for us to name Christ, 'God'? (144, 4)

- a. *Christ with respect to himself is called God.*

When we are speaking of Christ with respect to the Father what should we call him? (144, 5)

- a. *Son*

When we use the term, 'God', for the Son (and/or the Spirit) what are we also declaring him to be? (144, 12)

- a. *...of himself*

20. In I.xiii.2 Calvin wrote, *...we must here seek a short and easy definition to free us from all error.* In I.xiii.20 he supplies it. What is it? (144, 23ff)

- a. *...when we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood a single, simple essence, in which we comprehend three persons or hypostases.*

What must we always come back to in our thinking, particularly if we are speaking about one hypostasis only? (145, 2f)

- b. *...it is always necessary to come to the unity of essence*

When we bear the unity of essence in mind, what becomes a detestable sacrilege? (145, 4f)

- c. *...for the Son to be called another God than the Father.*

21-29 Refutation of anti-Trinitarian heresies.

This is a very useful section. Although the people and positions identified by Calvin were his contemporaries and forebears, their views surface in every age and under different names. An awareness of the issues will be helpful to us. Remembering the names is not obligatory!

21. *Satan, in order to tear our faith from its very roots, has always been doing – what?* (145, 34)

- a. *...instigating great battles, partly concerning the divine essence of the Son and Spirit, partly concerning the distinction of the persons.*

What rule keeps us safe when we are thinking about things that we can only know if they are revealed to us? (146, 9f)

- a. *...neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends.*
- b. *...how can the mind by its own leading come to search on God's essence when it cannot even get to its own?*

What problems are we confronted with when trying to answer all the questions that occur to us in connection with the Trinity? (146, 10ff)

- a. *...how can the human mind measure off the measureless essence of God according to its own little measure?*

(Note from IJ – because of what he has just stated Calvin goes on to refer explicitly to the important concept of, 'ruled', speech, *...let them (ie, us) yield themselves to be ruled by the heavenly oracles*. Remember, this does not mean for Calvin that we cannot use words and phrases of our own (I.xiii.3-5) but that the thoughts we convey by them must be the same as the thoughts expressed by God himself in Scripture.)

Given our inability to come to the truth about God if we rely solely on our own thoughts, where do we find the instruction that we need? (146, 18ff)

- a. *...we shall be "leaving it to him" if we conceive him to be as he reveals himself to us, without inquiring about him elsewhere than from his Word.*

22. In this section Calvin catalogues Servetus's errors. How many can you spot? (147, 20ff)

- b. *...he commonly labelled all those whom he called Trinitarians as atheists*
- c. *...God is assumed to be tripartite when three persons are said to reside in his essence*
- d. *...he would hold the persons to be certain external ideas which do not truly subsist in God's essence, but represent God to us in one manifestation or another (modalism)*
- e. *In the beginning there was no distinction in God, because the Word and the Spirit were formerly one and the same: but when Christ came forth as God from God, the Spirit proceeded from him as another God*
- f. *...he says that the eternal Word of God was the Spirit of Christ with God and the refulgence of his idea, and that the Spirit was the shadow of deity, yet afterward he annihilates the deity of both, declaring that as God metes out according to his*

dispensation there is a part of God both in the Son and in the Spirit, just as the same Spirit, being substantially in us and also in wood and stone, is a portion of God.

- g. *...“person” (of the mediator) is nothing else than a visible manifestation of the glory of God*
- h. *...he publicly declares that in the essence of God there are parts and divisions, each portion of which is God: indeed, he particularly states that the spirits of believers are coeternal and consubstantial with God, although he elsewhere assigns a substantial deity not only to the soul of man but to other created things.*

What are the two essential things we need to continually keep in mind in order to prevent ourselves being confused by Satan's emissaries? (147, 12ff)

- a. *...the essence of the one God is simple and undivided, and that it belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; and on the other hand that by a certain characteristic the Father differs from the Son, and the Son from the Spirit*

(Note from IJ - **Valentine Gentile** is in mind in the remainder of I.xiii (secs 24-29): As early as September, 1550, a secret Anabaptist meeting had been held at Venice, attended by 60 deputies, which had rejected the divinity of Christ. Many who shared these views had taken refuge amongst the Swiss, including Giorgio Blandrata, formerly physician to Sigismund I of Poland, Niccolo Gallo, Giovanni Paolo Alciati, Matteo Gribaldi, and Valentine Gentile, all of whom fled to Geneva, and Lelio Sozzini, who went to Basel in 1547 and lived there unsuspected till his death in 1562. Calvin at length grew suspicious, and on May 18, 1558, put forth a confession of faith to be signed by all the members of the Italian congregation as a test of orthodoxy. Gribaldi managed to clear himself; Blandrata and Alciati, finding themselves unable to do so, fled to Poland; Gallo and Gentile signed, but afterwards retracted and were proceeded against for heresy: the last-named was ultimately beheaded at Bern, in 1556, as a perjured heretic. (Source: *Cambridge Modern History, Vol2, as reproduced on the Wikisource website.* Obviously a problem with the dates here, unless 1556 came before 1558! Another website gives the date of his beheading as 1566.))

- 23. Gentile was a *Socinian*. It is important to understand Socinianism because although it no longer goes by that name much of what currently calls itself evangelical is Socinian. Ecclesiastically, Socinianism was represented in a short-lived grouping at the time of the reformation, first of all in Poland and subsequently in Holland. It was suppressed but you find the puritans and others grappling with Socinianism as though they regarded it as a living enemy.

Although certain doctrines, particularly Unitarianism, are associated with Socinianism these are the fruits of its method. They are fundamental to its creed but not to its process of arriving at conclusions, which functions at the level of presuppositions. It interprets scriptural data in the light of *reason*, which is really its touchstone for whether something is regarded as true or not. So, it can – and does – live on under many names.

What, in Calvin's view, lies at the heart of Gentile's position? (149, 7f)

- a. *...the Father is distinguished from the Son and the Spirit by this mark, that he is the only “essence giver”*

Why did Gentile feel this must be so? (149, 9f)

- a. *... Christ is commonly called the Son of God*

What do they infer from this? (149, 10f)

- a. *...no other than the Father is, properly speaking, God*

Why are both the Father and the Son named as God in Scripture, the Father sometimes being spoken of as God *par excellence*? (149, 14f)

- a. *...to promote the simple unity of essence*

How many paired passages does Calvin produce to demonstrate that Christ is truly God? (149, 28ff)

- a. six

What role, carried out by the Son, shows that the Son must have being from himself? (150, 16ff)

- a. *...how will the Creator, who gives being to all, not have being from himself, but borrow his essence from elsewhere?*

What are the implications of Gentile's views for the Holy Spirit's relation to Christ? (150, 29ff)

- a. *...the Spirit is of the Father alone, because if he is a derivation from the primal essence, which is proper only to the Father, he will not rightly be considered the Spirit of the Son.*

How does Paul's testimony disprove this view of Gentile? (150, 32f)

- a. *...he makes the Spirit common to Christ and the Father [Rom 8:9]*

In the remainder of this section Calvin picks up a further inconsistency in Gentile's statements about the Christ being God but being different to the Father as far as the divine essence is concerned. Calvin points out that this must mean either:

- a. That Christ is not really God in the same sense that the Father is God: *Those who locate that mark (the characteristics whereby Christ is distinguished from the Father) in the essence clearly annihilate Christ's deity* (150, 38ff)
- b. The divine essence is divided between them, making Christ a half-God (151, 1f)
- c. Christ is God in a figurative sense only: *If they make rejoinder that the Father in bestowing essence nonetheless remains the sole God, in whom the essence is, Christ then will be a figurative God, a God in appearance and name only, not in reality itself.*

24. We have seen that Gentile and his associates do not really believe in the Trinity although they were prepared to say that they did. Calvin, however, was not unaware of what they really believed. What views does Calvin attribute to his opponents in this section? (151, 13f, 19f, 28f; 152, 38f)

- a. *...any unqualified reference to God in scripture applies to the Father alone.*
- b. *Unless the Father alone were truly God, he would be his own Father*
- c. *...they so brazenly exclude the Son from the honour of God*
- d. *...essence is proper to the Father alone, as if he were the deifier of the Son*

How does Calvin counter the above claims? (151, 14ff)

- a. *In the very passages that they cite on their own side...the name of the Son is in these set beside that of the Father...the name of God is understood in a relative sense, and is **therefore** to be restricted to the person of the Father.*
- b. *Thus their objection "Unless the Father alone were truly God, he would be his own Father," is removed with one word.*

- c. *Nor, indeed, is it absurd for him who not only has begotten his own wisdom from himself but is also the God of the Mediator...to be specially called God on account of degree and rank.*
- d. *Since they so brazenly exclude the Son from the honour of God, I should like to know when he declares that no one is good except the one God [Matt 19:17], whether he deprives himself of goodness.*

In the second paragraph (152, 3ff) Calvin turns to a number of Pauline statements and shows how, in the light of statements previously made in the Old Testament, these statements of Paul only make sense if Christ is fully God.

What characteristics would the eternal Word not possess if we applied the Anabaptists' hermeneutic to 1 Timothy 1:17, Romans 16:27 and Romans 3:4? (152, 3ff)

- a. *Immortality*
- b. *Wisdom*
- c. *Truth.*

What is Calvin's next challenge to Gentile *et al*? (152, 9f)

- a. *...whether they think Christ ought to be worshipped or not*

What follows if his claim that every knee should bow before him describes what will happen? (152, 11ff)

- a. *...he is the God who in the law forbade anyone else than himself to be worshipped [Ex 20:3]*

Turning to Philippians ch 2, why does the exaltation of Christ as described there require him always to have been God? (152, 21ff)

- a. *...unless he had been God manifested in the flesh he could not have been raised to such a height without God himself striving against himself. Ie, setting up a rival to himself.*

How does Paul settle this controversy? (152, 24f)

- a. *By...teaching that he was equal to God before he humbled himself under the form of a servant [Phil 2:6-7].*

Turning to the final statement made by Gentile and his associates that Calvin considers, *ie* that, *...essence is proper to the Father alone*, how does Calvin respond initially to this? (152, 40)

- a. *By spelling out its implications, which are:*
 - a. *...either essence would be manifold...*
 - b. *...or they call Christ "God" in title and imagination only*

Why will Christ be, "God" in title and imagination only? (152, 41ff)

- a. *If they grant that the Son is God, but second to the Father, then **in him will be begotten and formed** the essence that is in the Father unbegotten and unformed.*

What inferences should we draw from God's words: *Let us make man in our own image*? (153, 3ff)

- a. *...how uselessly and absurdly Moses would have introduced this conversation...if not more than one person subsisted in the one God*

How do we know this is the case? (153, 5ff)

- a. *...those whom the Father is addressing were uncreated; but there is nothing uncreated except God himself, and he is one.*

What is the alternative to this interpretation of, *Let us make man in our own image?* (153, 10f)

- a. *God did not speak thus within himself, but addressed other outside artificers.*

Bearing in mind the assertion of Gentile *et al* that Calvin took up at the beginning of this section, *...any unqualified reference to God in Scripture applies to the Father alone*, Calvin now turns to Christ's words in John 4:24, *God is Spirit*. Why is it not appropriate to restrict, *God is Spirit*, in John 4:24 to the Father alone? (153, 13ff)

- a. *"God is Spirit" [John 4:24], would not be appropriately restricted to the Father alone, as if the Word were not himself of a spiritual nature.*

What must this fact mean, as far as Calvin is concerned? (153, 15ff)

- a. *...if the name "Spirit" fits the Son equally with the Father, I conclude that the Son is to be comprehended under the unparticularised name "God."*

I struggled to follow 153, 17ff (*Nevertheless he adds... through to ...to it by degrees*). Here's my best shot:

We usually take the phrase, *true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*, to apply to the way the worshippers engage in worship, as though it could read, *true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth*. The conclusion Calvin draws from these words: *Since Christ exercises the office of Teacher under the Head [the Father], he ascribes to the Father the name of God, not to abolish his own deity, but to raise us up to it by degrees.*, can only be drawn, it seems to me, if the phrase, *worship the Father in spirit and truth*, means that we offer our worship to God who is Spirit, in accordance with his revealed truth. In other words, *in spirit and truth*, applies to the Father, not primarily to us as worshippers (although it has implications for us and for the worship we offer). We will then be worshipping the Son also, because, *the name "Spirit" fits the Son equally with the Father*. (153, 15f)

25. Calvin's opponents' view of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is – what? (153, 24ff)

- a. *...they dream of individuals, each having its own separate part of the essence*

What, *fiction of their own brain*, do Calvin's opponents also ascribe to him? (153, 32ff)

- a. *They also foolishly think they may conclude from our statement that we have set up a quarternity, for they falsely and calumniously ascribe this fiction of their own brain to us, as if we pretended that three persons came forth by derivation from one essence.*

How does Calvin respond to these misrepresentations of his position on the Trinity? (153, 26ff, 36ff; 154, 9f)

- a. *...we teach from the Scriptures that God is one in essence*
- b. *...it is clear from our writings that we do not separate the persons from the essence, but we distinguish among them while they remain within it.*
- c. *...the essence does not enter into the distinction as a part or a member of the Trinity, nevertheless the persons are not without it, or outside it*

What follows (*hence...*) from the fact that God is one in essence? (153, 27f)

- a. *...the essence both of the Son and of the Spirit is unbegotten*

If the persons were separate from a common essence, what would there be? (154, 3f)

a. *...a trinity of gods, not of persons whom the one God contains in himself.*

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The remainder of this Q&A file is incomplete. It comes from my previous attempt.

Why is it essential that the divine essence is not divided? *...in this way there would have been a trinity of gods, not of persons whom the one God contains in himself*

26. 'Christ, if he be properly God, is wrongly called Son.' What is wrong with this statement, attributed by Calvin to Gentile *et al*? *It is legitimate to refer to the second person of the Trinity as, 'Son', when he is being distinguished from the Father and the Spirit and when he is being referred to in his mediatorial role. It is correct, in these contexts, to refer to the Father as, 'God'.*

27-29. In what ways should the things that other Christians think, write and say influence us when we are forming our own views?

FOR REFLECTION

1. Calvin teaches that in the Bible we have statements about God that refer principally to the divine essence, which is enjoyed commonly by all three persons of the Trinity. He also teaches that we have statements about the hypostases that imply distinctive identities and characteristics. The latter statements can also reflect an order between the persons of the Trinity.

How would you apply these concepts to 1 Corinthians 15:24-28?