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Aspects of Calvin's Eschatology Part I

KENNETH YEATON

The Precursory Vision of God, the Intermediate State

It is generally admitted that there is an interim state of existence between death and the Parousia, which is in some respects different from the state after the resurrection.¹ But when it comes to the nature of this intermediate existence a few questions arise and unfortunately the New Testament does not supply us with a great quantity of evidence about this period of time. But if we believe in both life and after death, the intermediate state, and a future parousia, we must find an adequate way of dealing with the question of what this between state consists.

Some of the opinions on man's state after death but prior to the resurrection have resulted in the beliefs that:

1. The soul is in a state of unconscious repose, soul sleep.
2. The underworld is made up of two compartments, one for the righteous saint such as Lazarus and the other for the wicked such as the rich man.²
3. The intervening state of the believer, while not yet perfect, enters a state of Purgatorium that expiates the believer.³

Karel Hanhart goes so far as to say of the intermediate state: 'the intermediate state is a problem child of theology'. The reason it is such a perplexing question is:

It is called a problem child because it indeed is a child of theology, a product of reflection. Eschatological concepts, such as Parousia, Resurrection, and the Last Judgment are taken directly from the Bible. But this is not so in the case of the intermediate state. This term is coined by the theologians, coined in the categories of time and space. The adjective 'intermediate' refers to a certain length of time. The noun 'state' means a condition of man under certain circumstances. The concept as a whole denoted the period of time between the death of man and the final consummation.⁴

The intermediate state is admittedly not a major aspect of Biblical eschatology. The New Testament only gives us hints about the

conditions of that state and never an anthropological description or theoretical exposition of the intermediate state.⁵ Still, the importance of the intermediate state can be seen when we try and relate it to the return of Christ and the resurrection of mankind. This automatically leads to the question: 'In what place is man during this period of waiting? Will it be a blessed, a cursed or a neutral state?'⁶

John Calvin and the state of the soul after death

Quite often Calvin makes reference to Augustine but when it comes to the state of the dead, who are awaiting the consummate judgment, Calvin is in direct disagreement with Augustine. Augustine understood there to be a place called purgatory for the believer, but Calvin quite firmly states that it is ridiculous to believe in the existence of such a place.⁷ Nor is there a Limbus where dead souls are kept as it were in prison.⁸ True as it is that the soul and the body are separated from the time of physical death until the time of the general resurrection, it is not true that the soul is in some kind of lifeless sleep until the resurrection.⁹ Likewise, there are no Elysian fields or anything of this kind after death.¹⁰

Man's life does not end at death like that experienced by mere beasts who die.¹¹ The believer at death commits his soul to the Father, in trust, to guard until the day of resurrection. This can be called: 'to sleep in Christ' and means that the person's connexion to Christ is retained even in death.¹² Christ rose from the dead to eternal life and each of His followers shall also rise to eternal life.¹³ All other people, the lost, come to death not knowing either where their soul is going or what is going to become of it.¹⁴

Prying out of curiosity into the state of those who have died and are waiting for the return of Christ is not prudent. God has hidden from us what happens (the particulars) to the soul after death, so we are not to be rash to inquire into such things.¹⁵ What we are told is that Christ receives believers into paradise (John 12: 32) where they are comforted. The reprobate though suffer the torments which they have merited. This is the extent of what the Bible tells us of the intermediate state.¹⁶

There is a better exposition of Christ's descent to hell in the Bible than in the Creed.¹⁷ For Christ to have merely endured corporeal death would not have satisfied God's righteous judgment. Christ as God's perfect sacrifice for man's sin had to partake of the full weight of God's divine vengeance. To accomplish this salvation, it was necessary for Christ to engage, at close quarters, the powers of hell and the horrors of eternal death. This means that He 'visited' hell as well as partook of corporeal death.¹⁸ 'Hence there is nothing strange in its being said that he descended to Hell, seeing he endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God'.¹⁹ Thus Christ bore in His soul the torture of condemned and ruined man.

And certainly no abyss can be imagined more dreadful than to feel that you are abandoned and forsaken of God, and not heard when you invoke him, just as if he had conspired your destruction.²⁰

Two reasons may be given for Old Testament saints showing signs of fear at death. The first is that they had but an obscure revelation of the future life which led them to have some doubts about the after life. The second reason is related to their sin(s) which led God to punish them. This in turn led them to feel that physical death was a sign of God's anger.²¹

What was the believer's life like after death prior to the Messiah's coming? We are told heaven is prepared for the day of resurrection. The Son is heir of heaven and as a believer is in Christ, that person may enter heaven. The Old Testament saint's place of rest was the same as ours, heaven.²² Christ then did not release the souls of the patriarchs confined in prison and take them to heaven after His death.²³ There was no such underworld for them for they were with Christ in heaven. But neither the Old Testament fathers nor the New Testament saints are enjoying to the full the great blessedness of heaven which is not to be received until the end of the age and the resurrection.²⁴

Calvin makes no direct statement as to the state to which the non-Yahweh believer, of the Old Testament period, found himself in after death, but he does say what happens to those who die today; they go to a similar condition to that of the lost angels. Lost men as well as apostate angels carry hell about with them, since they are not at peace with God.²⁵ We might be safe in saying that Calvin held this state, being 'chained in darkness' (Jude 6), to be where all dead people go who are not alive spiritually and thus are separated from the one and true living God.²⁶ For if redeemed people from all times have gone to heaven it would seem that it would follow that all lost people have gone to 'hell' after death to await the final resurrection and judgment.

Where is paradise? Our ability to answer this question is not what is of importance. What is important is that we remember that by faith we have become a part of His body. The subsequent outcome of being a part of Christ is that during 'death', the intermediate state, we shall be in a 'blessed and joyful rest, until the perfect glory of the heavenly life is fully manifested by the coming of Christ'.²⁷

Not only does the bible refer to the intermediate state as Paradise, but it also refers to it as Abraham's bosom. Abraham's bosom is used metaphorically to speak of children returning home to their father at the end of a day's work. The believer is a pilgrim in this world, at death he is received into blessed rest from his labours, Abraham's bosom.²⁸ Is Abraham's bosom and paradise the same place or are they different places? Each, Calvin says, has its point of reference in

heaven, so they do refer to the same place.²⁹ For this reason Calvin says that when the believer becomes absent from his body he goes immediately to be in the presence of his God.³⁰ Because this is true we may then say they have been taken to Christ's bosom.³¹ This period of time from death to resurrection for the believer is one of blessed rest and joy, rest from his warfare in this life and joy in waiting for his promised glory with Christ and the final summation of the world as we know it now.³² While the 'place', the state, for people who have not been saved and die is that of the angels in Jude 6,³³ such people are in chains and darkness until the final judgment.³⁴

This would also mean that they are not confined to a given location but are in some sense free to move about at will. If man's fate is the same as that of the apostate angels it would seem that man's punishment would also be of a similar nature. If this is true, man's punishment in the intermediate state would consist of:

1. Not living in God's presence.
2. Being held in 'chains'.
3. A lack of joy and the loss of internal light of God being instead in utter darkness.
4. A loss of dignity.³⁵

W.G.T. Shedd and the state of the soul after death

The Apostle's Creed and the descensus ad infernos

The late interpolation of descensus ad infernos to the Apostle's Creed has no scriptural support.³⁶ But as Biblical exegesis is inevitably influenced by the great ecumenical creeds,³⁷ once the phrase, 'He descended into Hades' was interpolated into the Apostle's Creed, the oldest of the Christian symbols, there arose the necessity of Biblical support.³⁸ Matthew 12:40; Acts 2:27; Romans 10:7; I Peter 3:18-20, 4:6, were the passages that became the buttress of Christ's descent into the underworld.³⁹ The result of such interpretation helped foster the belief that the intermediate state was where the souls of all dead people went.⁴⁰ Out of this understanding of the intermediate state and Christ's descent, three major interpretations of what the creed referred to in saying that Christ descended to Hades evolved:

1. Old Testament saints were delivered from limbo.
2. Christ's judicial preaching to the lost, announcing condemnation to them.
3. Christ's giving the people there a second opportunity to be evangelized.⁴¹

In answering these three interpretations, Shedd says that regardless of which of them was true, if any, the sheer importance of such an event, Christ's descent to hades, would have resulted in it being

clearly recorded by one of the New Testament authors. But nothing is written regarding it by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Not even Paul in I Corinthians 15:3, 4 where he gives a summary of the essence of our faith, Christ's death and resurrection, makes an allusion to such an incident in the life of Christ. What more obvious place than I Corinthians 15:3, 4 for such a 'fact' to be mentioned? Such total silence is fatal to any one of these three interpretations.⁴²

More particularly Shedd says of the first interpretation—Old Testament saints were delivered from limbo—that such an explanation places Christ's exaltation at the time He spoiled Satan in the underworld and carried some of the souls with Himself into glory. This does not agree with the data given in the Bible which always place Christ's exaltation at His resurrection from the dead and not at some earlier time.⁴³ In referring to Ephesians 4:9, Shedd relates it to Christ's incarnate descent to earth rather than to the lower parts, the underworld: 'The incarnate Logos did not descend from heaven to hades, nor ascend from hades to heaven'.⁴⁴

The second and third interpretations refer to Christ's preaching in hades, I Peter 3:18–20 and 4:6, being used as proof-texts for such an idea.⁴⁵ 'The passage', says Shedd, 'in St. Peter seems to relate to the preaching to the Gentile world by virtue of the inspiration that was derived from Christ'.⁴⁶ In the footnote Shedd gives to this statement, he says that Christ did preach to the lost at the time of the flood, 'by the ministry of a prophet, by the sending of Noah'.⁴⁷ Shedd concludes by saying 'Whatever be the interpretation of I Peter 3:18–20 such a remarkable doctrine as the descent to Hades should have more of a foundation than a single disputed text'.⁴⁸

In the preface to the supplementary volume to his Dogmatic Theology, Shedd says his purpose 'is to elaborate more carefully some of the difficult points' by giving extracts from a number of theologians who have written on the different topics.⁴⁹ See pages 471–484 regarding what he says on the descent of Christ to hades. From this the one person to whom Shedd refers who is of importance to this paper is Calvin.

Shedd makes no direct comment on Calvin but shows Calvin believed that the descent was speaking of more than Christ going to the grave.⁵⁰ But it does not speak of the Old Testament saints being delivered from a prison by Christ, the faithful of both testaments having gone to paradise.⁵¹ Rather, Calvin understands the death of Christ as only part of the descent to hell. One must understand that 'descent' speaks of the suffering of that death which the righteous wrath of God inflicted on transgressors. Christ was our substitute, as such, He must be treated as a criminal, Himself, and bear all the punishment which would have been inflicted on the lost person. The important exception being that the pains of death were not able to hold Christ.⁵²

Tophet

Calvin: the Eschatological condition of the Lost

Tophet has been prepared from of old and is not merely a temporary calamity but is a place of perpetual destruction.⁵³ By the time of the New Testament, Gehenna had become the term in common usage for Jews when referring to the state of eternal death. Christ used the name Gehenna to refer to the final abode of the lost.⁵⁴

It will not be until the last coming of Christ and His enthronement to judge, that the reprobate are sent to hell.⁵⁵ They will share in the same perdition that has been prepared for Satan, their representative head.⁵⁶ At the same time Calvin sees the sufferings of this life for the reprobate as 'nothing else to them but the very entry of hell'.⁵⁷

When discussing Tophet's 'geographical' location, Calvin understands it to have no one given locality. It is not some prison where people are kept to be tormented according to their sins. Hell is neither to be found within the earth nor is it to be found anywhere else; rather it is to be found within each given individual who is without peace with God.⁵⁸ Tophet is meant to denote the reprobate's miserable condition and the excruciating torments suffered.⁵⁹

What are the punitive aspects to such a perdition? Most likely the first aspects of hell to come to mind would be fire, worm and brimstone. How are we to understand these descriptions of punishment? Calvin points out that the Bible uses metaphorical language, it speaks of the church as the house of God,⁶⁰ and it also speaks of our having been buried with Christ.⁶¹ The Bible also uses figurative language of Tophet.⁶² Language itself cannot describe Tophet's judgments, but God must use metaphorical language in an attempt to tell us what it will be like.⁶⁵ Fire, worm and brimstone, as torments, are to be seen as used in a metaphorical sense of the reprobate's end condition and not in some grotesque literal sense.⁶⁴ By this Calvin does not downgrade the dreadfulfulness of hell but rather says that such words are used to impress all our senses with dread of such a doom.⁶⁵

Let us lay aside the speculations, by which foolish men weary themselves to no purpose, and satisfy ourselves with believing, that these forms of speech denote, in a manner suited to our feeble capacity, a dreadful torment, which no man can now comprehend, and no language can express.⁶⁶

The basic constitution of being lost, in the eternal state, is that the non-believing person 'suffers' in at least six different ways:

1. God is adverse to him.
2. He has lost his honour and is in disgrace.
3. He is alienated from God.

4. He suffers the second death.
5. He has a bad conscience.
6. He lacks any fellowship with God.

1. The lost will feel that God is adverse to him, and rightly so, as his sins have violated God's majesty.⁶⁷ This will lead him to the impression that all of God's creation, heaven, earth and all existence, animate and inanimate, are inflamed against him with dire indignation, armed for his destruction.⁶⁸

2. Man holds his own honour to be of great importance, yet in this life the lost have held God's honour in reproach and contempt. In the life to come the lost will find out what such disgrace is like having become the object of abhorrence by God's angels and His world.⁶⁹

3. The lost in the eternal state are not joined to God in whom happiness consists, and are most miserable being alienated, shut out, from Him.⁷⁰ This alienation is euphemistically called darkness in the Bible. The lost are called darkness being followers of Satan, the prince of darkness, for where God's grace is not found there is darkness.⁷¹ Accordingly, before regeneration man's whole nature can be called darkness.⁷² Also darkness is equated with not being part of the kingdom. The Bible in using this word, darkness, does so to point 'out that dreadful anguish, which can neither be expressed nor conceived in this life'.⁷³

4. The second death follows as a direct result of alienation from God as discussed above.⁷⁴ Man is spiritually dead as the consequence of Adam and his sin.⁷⁵ The corollary of this spiritual death will be an undying death of everlasting ruin in the eternal state, the second death.⁷⁶

5. Of all that is associated with hell and punishment, Calvin considers the last two aspects, a bad conscience and no fellowship with God, to be the most terrible, and of these the worst is a bad conscience.

The plain meaning, therefore is that the wicked shall have a bad conscience as an executioner, to torment them without end, and that torment awaits them greater than all other torments; . . .⁷⁷

There will be no rest for these people, their consciences will cause them to be in a state of mental agitation about themselves and their state before God.⁷⁸ This use of conscience as a punishment is not restricted to the future life, God uses it even now as a means of torment. After all, God is not the source of either terror or alarm, these originate from a conscience terrified by transgressions which seize the sinner with a fear of God.⁷⁹

We are all full of sin and iniquity; so much so that no other party is

needed to accuse us but our own conscience, no other judge to condemn us. It follows then that the wrath of God is kindled against us, and there is no one able to escape eternal death. If we are not indolent and stupid, this awful thought must be a kind of perpetual hell to vex and torment us. For the judgement of God cannot occur to our recollection without our seeing that our condemnation follows as a consequence. We are then already in the abyss of death, unless our loving God draws us out.⁸⁰

6. The lack of any fellowship with God is the last fearful consequence of the final state of the lost.⁸¹ The thought of being both perpetually and totally estranged from God is a calamity of fearful proportions that cannot be easily overlooked. This exile must be one of the most fearful outcomes of the after life.⁸²

Metaphorical use of such words as hell, fire and worm are used by God to enable us to understand what otherwise is obscure. Language by itself could not describe the last state of the lost. The word 'Tophet' then for Calvin is the metaphorical expression of 'nothing else than God's highest curse'.⁸³

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To be concluded.

NOTES

1 C. Hodge, *Systematic*, 3:724.

2 *Ibid.*, 3:733-744.

3 *Ibid.*, 3:749-770.

4 K. Hanhart, *Intermediate*, p.1.

5 Berkouwer, *Return*, p.51.

6 K. Hanhart, *Intermediate*, p.2.

7 Com. on Matthew 5:25; cf. Luke 22:43; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.102, 103, 105. Quistorp gives two reasons why Calvin doctrinally rejected purgatory: 1) 'It does not spring from the Word of God, Holy Scripture', p.102. 2) 'It negates the all-sufficient unique atoning work of Christ and thus divorces faith in the forgiveness of sins from its true basis in the perfect penal suffering of the Saviour'. p.103, cf. 102-107. Along with repudiating purgatory, Calvin also sees prayers made for dead believers, in such a state, purgatory, as unbiblical, p.105.

8 Inst. 2, 16, 9; see L. Boettner, *Immortality* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), pp.102-104, for a reference to Limbus Patrum and Limbus infantum.

9 Com. on I Corinthians 15:18; Calvin, *Tracts*, pp.450-468. In the Psychopannychia Calvin gives five arguments for soul sleep and their answers; Berkouwer, *Return*, pp.49, 60. Berkouwer says that: 'Calvin disputed the doctrine of soul sleep on the basis of the definite, unbreakable continuity that he detected in the spiritual presentation of God's work, which he will complete on the Day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6; cf. Prov. 4:18), p.49. Besides that the speculative concept of soul sleep cannot find a base in what the Bible says about 'falling asleep'. Thus such a theoretical understanding of the state of the departed cannot obliterate the New Testament message of the believer being with Christ after death, p.60, cf. pp.59-61.

- 10 Com. on I Corinthians 15:19.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Matthew 22:23; cf. Inst. 3, 25, 6.
- 12 Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.106–107. Death is the decisive gate through which all men pass either to eternal blessedness or eternal damnation. There is no changing of verdict, death has, as it were, sealed one's fate. The resurrection is still to come but now is the rest for the pious; K. Hanhart, *Intermediate*, p.140.
- 13 Com. on I Thessalonians 4:14; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.106–107.
- 14 Com. on John 19:30; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.106–107.
- 15 Berkouwer, *Return*, pp.49, 53. Such curiosity only leads to disputes and mental torments as to those who have gone ahead of us. The parable of Lazarus is adequate to assure us of their state, p.49; and such speculations of their state shows our lack of perception of what being with Christ is, p.53; cf. K. Hanhart, *Intermediate*, p.132.
- 16 Inst. 3, 25, 6; cf. Calvin, *Tracts*, pp.446–447, 449–450.
- 17 Inst. 2, 16, 10. The phrase descent to hell as found in the Apostle's Creed is a late addition says Calvin, but this should not lead us to omit it. 'But it is of little consequence by whom and at what time it was introduced. The chief thing to be attended to in the Creed is, that it furnishes us with a full and in every way complete summary of faith, containing nothing but what has been derived from the infallible Word of God', p.441. The reasons Calvin gives for believing that the content of the article is not the same as that of the article about his burial are: 1) Why repeat a clear and unambiguous term, with an obscure phrase, Christ was buried, if they are both speaking of the same thing? 2) The Apostle's Creed is a statement of the principle articles of the faith in summary using the most succinct wording. It is highly improbable then that a superfluous late addition would be added, pp.441–442. How are we to interpret this phrase? First, we must see that it is not speaking of Christ announcing to the patriarchs that He has accomplished redemption and thus can bring them out of the prison where they have been confined, instead its interpretation is that of Christ suffering the divine vengeance, the powers of hell, the horrors of eternal death. Christ suffered as our representative feeling the separation, from God, that comes to the sinner at death, pp.443–444. Christ's death and encounter with 'hell' gained the victory, heaven is now open to man and death has lost its fear, p.444.
- 18 Inst. 2, 16, 10; Calvin, *Tracts*, pp.480–481; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.76–77. 'By this Calvin means not merely the death on the cross in itself, but the descent into hell, which is essentially bound up with it and which in the first instance he understands in a spiritual sense, although he accepts also the theory of the descent into the kingdom of the dead and makes use of it at appropriate points. Christ has suffered death for us not only physically but also spiritually. "In truth He must have felt the whole weight and severity of the divine judgment in order to avert God's wrath and to make satisfaction to His just judgment"; G.E. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, trans. C. Lambregtse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p.176. Calvin considers the descent in connexion with the suffering of Christ in body and soul, Christ bore the torments of a lost sinner. It was not just death but the terrible consequence of being forsaken on the cross as a sinner by God that Christ had to suffer, cf. pp.177–180.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.443.
- 20 Inst. 2, 16, 11, p.444.
- 21 Com. on II Corinthians 5:8.
- 22 Com. on John 14:2.
- 23 Inst. 2, 16, 9.
- 24 Com. on John 14:2; cf. Calvin, *Tracts*, p.468; F. Wendel, *Calvin*, trans. P. Mairet (London: Fontana, 1965), p.287. With death the saint enters immediately into God's kingdom, which has begun but is to be perfected. While they have come into the kingdom they must wait for the consummation for the full enjoyment of the perfected kingdom and its glory; Berkouwer, *Return*, p.49. Thus for Calvin

the whole intermediate state is focused on the expectation of what is to come, i.e. Christ's coming. His position on the intermediate state may be summed up as being concentrated in blessedness and expectation, cf. pp.49-50; Hoekema, *The Bible*, pp.92, 108. Calvin's teaching of the intermediate state as blessedness and expectation (p.92) fits as a unit of expectation culminating in the resurrection, p.108; cf. Boettner, *Immortality*, pp.95-96. The intermediate state is blessed but imperfect without the body and rewards, both of which are given at the resurrection, so the intermediate state is only a foretaste of what is to come.

25 Com. on I John 1:9; cf. Jude 6; II Peter 2:4.

26 F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p.287. The lost in the intermediate state are in the same condition as those fallen angels spoken of by Jude.

27 Com. on Luke 22:43; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.81ff. Calvin's concept of the intermediate state is the 'fundamental problem of his eschatology' according to Quistorp, p.95. The problem relates to how Calvin regards the condition of the believer in this state. Quistorp says that for Calvin 'the state of redeemed souls is considered by Calvin to involve a two-fold and plainly contradictory aspect', p.81. These diverse contradictions are: 1) The rest of the soul (cf. pp.82-87). 2) The waiting of the soul (cf. pp.87-92).

The rest of the soul means that the soul has attained peace in death having gone to be with God in Abraham's bosom, p.82. During this period man's soul is progressively being renewed through Christ, p.83. In particular the rest of the soul in the intermediate state is that of a conscience that is at peace with God, in contrast to those alienated from God who have no such peace, p.84. 'The souls of the redeemed, therefore, essentially enter into eternal blessedness when they die', p.86. The believer after all is with Christ in immortality, pp.86-87.

But when Calvin comes to speak of the waiting of the soul he qualifies the blessedness the soul has in the intervening state when he says that the blessing the redeemed enjoy there, is provisional in nature. It is only at the resurrection that the soul of the pious comes into its true and complete enjoyment of heavenly communion with Christ, p.87, cf. pp.87-92.

Quistorp says that Calvin attempts to harmonize this contrast of unsurpassed joy, the limited horizon, of the state of the soul after death, and yet at the same time saying that this joy is a future expectation is to say:

... by saying that the felicity of the soul after death consists precisely in this expectation which is no longer based on faith but on sight. Souls await indeed what they have not yet, but they are nevertheless happy because they both realise their adoption in God and see their future reward, resting in assured hope of the blessed resurrection. 'Thus already they enjoy the vision of God and of Christ, though not yet perfectly'. The last judgment increases their happiness in degrees only and hence can have for Calvin only the significance of completing the process. p.88.

But this dualism as to when the heavenly bliss commences appears to Quistorp as a sign of weakness in Calvin's idea of the immortality of the soul after death, pp.94-95. Calvin's double perspective leads to a weak stress on the reunion of the body and soul at the resurrection, p.95. The biblical view is one of seeing the believer continually resting in Christ and thus Christ effects our continuity between the new life we have entered into in this life and its consummation in heaven, p.96. Calvin's double view of the intermediate state, that the believer has come into his hope but this hope is not really complete but is yet to come (pp.81-82, cf. pp.95, 102), seems to indicate some possibility of a break in the immortality of the believer's soul, pp.95-96, cf. pp.97-102. Immortality is a thing we have now, not something we receive at a later date, pp.95-96. But Calvin's view seems to indicate rather that it comes after death but later he tells us that it only comes at the general resurrection, p.95, cf. p.89.

Holwerda, *Exploring*, p.114ff. Holwerda says Calvin's view of the immortality of the soul was essentially a philosophical doctrine, a platonic doctrine that was

modified by the doctrine of creation. The immortality of the soul is not found in and of itself. Immortality is a gift from God, p.114 (cf. Hoekema, *The Bible*, p.88). Immortality of the soul for Calvin was an important doctrine. A doctrine which he saw to be rooted in redemption, p.115. By the working of the Holy Spirit the believer has been given new birth, the consequent effect is the soul's transformation into the image of Christ, p.115. This transformation begins in this life with the believer in meditation on his coming future life bearing his cross and denying self, pp.116–118. Death is when the soul enters the peace of the kingdom, 'eternity after death' is what Calvin calls the life after death, the intermediate state, p.119. 'Nonetheless, for Calvin this future immortal, or heavenly life may never be divorced from the final eschatological reality of the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead', p.120. Holwerda finishes by saying of Quistorp and what he has to say of Calvin:

Even though H. Quistorp believes that Calvin's perspective on the position of the soul after death in its relationship to the final resurrection lands Calvin in a contradiction, he nevertheless stresses that for Calvin the soul 'does not perish nor sleep in death but insofar as it is born again in Christ already enjoys heavenly peace in the expectation of the resurrection of the body, which will bring in consummate blessedness', p.120.

Hoekema, *The Bible*, p.92ff. Hoekema says of Calvin: 'In his Psychopannychia, an answer to the Anabaptists of his day who taught that souls simply sleep between death and resurrection, Calvin taught that for believers the intermediate state is one of both blessedness and expectation, the blessedness is therefore provisional and incomplete', p.92, cf. p.108. Hoekema further says that Calvin held an interpretation of II Cor. 5:6–8 which plainly shows Calvin did not hold an 'either-or' understanding of the blessed condition after death but instead held a position that claimed it was both.

Calvin's interpretation, in other words, combines 2) and 3) above. 'Intermediate state' and 'resurrection body' are here understood not as an either-or but as a both-and, p.106, cf. pp.104–108.

For Calvin then both phases, the intermediate state and the resurrection, are for the believing soul, an experience of unity not an either-or situation, p.106, cf. p.108. Such an understanding of the intermediate state and resurrection would mean that for the believer at death:

... we enter into a glorious heavenly existence which is not temporary like our present existence but permanent and eternal. Though the first phase of this existence will be incomplete, awaiting the resurrection of the body at the Parousia, this entire mode of being, from the moment of death to the resurrection and then throughout eternity, will be glorious, far to be preferred to our present existence, p.106.

Hoekema's opinion of Calvin is that he presents a clear realization that the intermediate state is the commencement of the eternal state, and that Calvin does not equivocate about this view.

Berkouwer, *Return*, p.46ff. 'Only when justice is done to the scriptural message of communion with Christ, even through death, can the dangers that the doctrine of the intermediate state undoubtedly presents be avoided. One thing is certain: we must do away with a dualistic distinction between the two expectations, because it is precisely this dualism that had led to individualism and religious egocentrism. But it must also be understood that this phenomenon is not the necessary result of the doctrine of the intermediate state, but a result of the misunderstanding of this confession. Important, then, is the attempt to discover the harmony between these two aspects. Throughout history this attempt has centred round the notion of a precursory aspect of the salvation in the intermediate state', p.46. Not only is there a precursory aspect of our communion with Christ, salvation, in this life (Rom. 8:23) but there is also, apparently, a kind of precursory expectation related to the intermediate state, 'as in life, so in death

there is tension between the "already" and the "not yet". But there is a difference in the precursory foretaste of this life and that of the intermediate state, the difference is that in relation to the intermediate state. We speak of obtaining this communion with Christ, absent from the body present with the Lord, "In what sense, then, can one speak of 'precursoriness' in the intermediate state?" p.47. Calvin's answer, says Berkouwer, was to focus on the expectation of Christ's return. It is true that Calvin spoke of the blessedness, the joy, the peace of conscience and the release from the struggles with sin during the intermediate state; yet Calvin speaks of the postponement of the attainment of the crown, rewards, until the parousia, p.49.

Thus for Calvin the whole intermediate state is focused on the expectation of what is to come, Christ's coming. His position on the intermediate state may be summed up as being concentrated in blessedness and expectation. There is no irreconcilable tension or dualism in Calvin's presentation. He speaks of blessedness, salvation, and peace, but only in dependence upon the final resurrection of the dead, in anticipation of 'the happiest thing of all' (Inst. 3,9,5). Ultimately, the intermediate state anticipates the day when all believers will be called to possess the kingdom. At that stage the fulfilment will be ushered in. Calvin's stress on the bliss and salvation does not contradict his description of what was lacking. He prefers to connect these two themes of salvation and expectation. After death one sees the goal one expects, though this has not yet been achieved.

Calvin does not then place intermediate state bliss and resurrection expectation as paradoxical truths but as almost identical truths. To say then that Calvin relativizes or even denies communion with God, salvation, at death, the intermediate state, is to miss the point. 'For Calvin the bliss is made visible in the expectation of the return of Christ', p.50, cf. pp.50-59, 61-63.

28 Com. Luke 16:22; cf. Inst. 3, 25, 6; Calvin's *Tracts*, p.432.

29 Com. on Luke 16:22; II Corinthians 12:4.

30 Com. on II Corinthians 5:8; Hoekema, *The Bible*, p.106, cf. pp.104-108. Hoekema argues that this being in the presence of God, 'with Christ' in the intermediate state is seen by Calvin to mean that, 'immediately after death: When the earthly tent in which we now live is destroyed or dissolved (the aorist tense of *katalytē* suggests the moment when death occurs), we have not at some future time but immediately, a building from God. That is, as soon as we who are in Christ die, we enter into a glorious heavenly existence which is not temporary like our present existence but permanent and eternal. Though the first phase of this existence will be incomplete, awaiting the resurrection of the body at the Parousia, this entire mode of being, from the moment of death to the resurrection and then through eternity, will be glorious, far to be preferred to our present existence'.

31 Com. on Luke 16:22.

32 Inst. 3, 25, 6; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.90. Blessed as this time is for the soul of the believer, there is only perfection of body and soul at the resurrection for him at Christ's visible appearance at the end of 'time'.

33 Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.92-93. The provisional damnation of the reprobate is like that of Jude 6, pp.92-93. Thus the souls of the damned do not 'sleep' either but are rather 'agitated with terrible fear of the judgment which awaits them', pp.92-93. They neglected the offer of reconciliation and only at death do they realise that they are alienated from God being spiritually dead. They are left with terrified consciences, neither peace nor 'sleep' for how could anyone sleep, with such mental agitation. The reprobate who are tormented in the intermediate state, like the fallen angels, shall not find an end to their torments but shall find themselves entering eternal punishment at the last judgment, p.93.

34 Inst. 3, 25, 6; cf. Luke 16:23.

35 Com. on Jude 6.

36 Shedd, *Theology*, 2:605; cf. Shedd, *Endless*, pp.69-71, note pp.71-73, see

- appendix p.183 footnote 28; see the following for a discussion of this section of the Creed. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, 1950), pp.378–388; H. Wheeler, *The Apostle's Creed* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1912), pp.88–89, 93; P.T. Fuhrmann, *An Introduction to the Great Creeds of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) p.31; A.C. McGiffert, *The Apostle's Creed* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), pp.30–32; D. Lamont, *The Church and the Creeds* (London: James Clarke, 1923), pp.31–33.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 2:603.
- 38 See W.G.T. Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1889), 2:428–435, cf. 2:423–427, for a discussion on the history and importance of the Apostle's Creed.
- 39 Shedd, *Theology*, 2:603–604.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 2:603, cf. 2:605–607.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 2:608.
- 42 Shedd, *Theology*, 2:608–609; cf. Shedd, *Endless*, pp.73–74.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 2:609; Berkouwer, *Return*, pp.176, 179. What is the meaning of this particular phrase in the confession? It is emphasizing the suffering and the humiliation of Christ in His atoning death, p.176. His humiliation was His victory, the turning point that led to His exaltation, p.179.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 2:610, footnote 1; for a discussion on Ephesians 4:9 see H. Bietenhard in DNTT 2:209–210; and Buchsel the TDNT 3:641–642; Calvin, Com. on Ephesians 4:9. Calvin does not regard this verse to be referring to either hell or purgatory but rather he takes it to mean, 'A comparison is drawn, not between one part of the earth and another, but between the whole earth and heaven; as if he had said, that from that lofty habitation Christ descended into our deep gulf'.
- 45 Calvin, Com. on I Peter 3:19. It has been commonly held that this refers to Christ's descent to hell but this is not the proper interpretation of this verse. Calvin says that Peter is here speaking of a general manifestation of Christ's grace that had been made to godly spirits past and present. Inst. 2, 16, 9. 'The purport of the context is, that believers who had died before that time (Christ's death) were partakers of the same grace with ourselves; for he celebrates the power of Christ's death, in that he penetrated even to the dead, pious souls obtaining an immediate view of that visitation for which they have anxiously waited; while, on the other hand, the reprobate were more clearly convinced that they were completely excluded from salvation. Although the passage in Peter is not perfectly definite, we must not interpret it as though he made no distinction between the righteous and the wicked: he only means to intimate, that the death of Christ was made known to both', cf. John 14:2.
- 46 Shedd, *Theology*, 2:609; cf. *Endless*, p.74, noting the footnote pp.74–77; R. Leighton, *Commentary on First Peter* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972; reprint ed., former title *A Practical Commentary on First Peter*, 1853), p.355. '... Jesus Christ did, before his appearing in the flesh, speak by his Spirit in his servants to those of the foregoing ages, yea, the most ancient of them, declaring to them the way of life, though rejected by the unbelief of the most part', cf. pp.354–363.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 2:610 footnote 1, cf. the rest of the footnote.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 2:611 footnote 1.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 3:iv.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 3:482; Berkouwer, *Return*, p.176. Berkouwer of Calvin says that Christ's death would have accomplished nothing if it had only been a physical death. Christ also had to partake of divine wrath, He had to know the terror of eternal death and battle the host of hell. Christ then physically died and in His soul bore the fearsome torments of a lost sinner, cf. pp.176–180.
- 51 Shedd, *Theology*, 3:482–483; Calvin Com. on John 14:2. 'The condition of the fathers (O.T. believers) after death, therefore is not here distinguished from ours; because Christ has prepared both for them and for us a place, into which he will receive us all at the last day'.

- 52 *Ibid.*, 3:483; See Calvin's Inst. 2,16, 8; 2, 16, 9; 2, 16, 10, where he speaks of the means of the descent to hades as it relates to Christ and His death.
- 53 Inst. 3, 25, 12; Isaiah 30:33; C.A.M. Hall, *Spirit's Sword*, p.66. There is no possible deliverance for Satan, his rebellion sealed his fate forever; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.186. 'Calvin teaches that not only the eternal salvation of the elect but also the punishment of the damned serve the greater glory of God. Their final ruin must serve the honour of the Lord who does not with impunity allow His offer of salvation to be despised by the godless. Hence there is a dual resurrection, a dual judgment, and a dual issue. Eternal damnation is related to eternal blessedness as the negative to the positive'; P. van Buren, *Christ*, p.103.
- 54 Com. on Jeremiah 19:1-3; Matthew 5:22; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.190. Christ's statement that Gehenna is eternal, closes the way to the hope of escape and redemption; cf. pp.190-191; D.L. Edwards, *Last Things*, p.54.
- 55 Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.92-93. Until such time as the day of eternal damnation the reprobate are held like the angels of Jude 6 in chains suffering a foretaste of their coming final state.
- 56 Com. on Matthew 25:31, 41; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.189-190. Hell is not to have its independence, it shall be subject to the sovereign God. Satan's kingdom exists only during this present time-span; B.C. Milner, *Calvin's*, p.40. Even Satan's kingdom at this time is not independent of God's overruling power which keeps Satan in check; cf. C.A.M Hall, *Spirit's Sword*, pp.78, 93.
- 57 Com. on Acts 14:22; LCC, *Calvin's Theological Treatises*, p.145; Quistorp, *Calvin's doctrine*, p.106. Beyond death is the consummation, but with death one has entered into either 'eternal blessedness or eternal damnation'.
- 58 Com. on I John 1:9; Fyfe, *Hereafter*, pp.198-199; Geach, *Providence*, p.144; E.R. Moberly, *Suffering*, pp.114-115.
- 59 Com. on Isaiah 30:33.
- 60 Com. on Hebrews 3:3.
- 61 Com. on Romans 6:4.
- 62 F. Wendel, *Calvin*, pp.289-290. 'Calvin', says Wendel, 'hesitates, however, to take these expressions [fire, worm and the like] literally. He wishes above all to see them as evidence of the misery of man separated from God, and of the terror aroused by the indignation of the celestial Judge. The passages that speak of the pains of the reprobates are not so much precise descriptions of anything as warnings addressed by God to his servants in this world "in order to arouse them, under the burden of the cross, to make haste, until he shall be all in all."'
- 63 Inst. 3, 25 11.
- 64 Com. on Isaiah 30:33; Isaiah 66:24; Matthew 3:12; 13:42; II Thessalonians 1:7; Jude 6; Matthew 25:41; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.187-188. Fire is a symbol of the wrath of God, for Calvin, which is meant to imply just how rigorous hell will be. God has used the metaphorical expression of fire, worm, gnashing of teeth to impress on us, who cannot completely understand the coming judgment, the gravity of the situation; F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p.284; J.A. Baird, *Justice*, pp.217-227.
- 65 Com. on Matthew 13:42; 25:41; II Thessalonians 1:7; Jude 6.
- 66 Matthew 3:12.
- 67 Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.187. Hell is man's suffering God's perpetual wrath resulting from God's majesty having been offended. Thus 'the sight of God spells ruin to men when it is not through Christ changed into the vision of His Holy love'.
- 68 Inst. 3, 25, 12; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.189. 'the eternal torment itself is for Calvin essentially spiritual'. The lost suffer with an unhappy conscience, but, says Quistorp, Calvin is not consistent in seeing hell as being spiritual torment. 'For just as the visible creation contributes to the eternal felicity of the blessed, Calvin also thinks that it has a part to play in the eternal damnation of the godless. For this reason the punishment must be bodily also . . . Thus in the eternal consummation

creation is both the instrument of the saving mercy of God and of His vengeful righteousness. In this two fold sense it becomes in its renewal the scene for the manifestation and vindication of the eternal honor of God.'

69 Com. on Isaiah 66:24; Romans 1:24.

70 Com. on Colossians 1:20.

71 Com. on Colossians 1:13.

72 Com. on Ephesians 5:8.

73 Com. on Matthew 8:12; cf. Matthew 4:13.

74 T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's*, p.50. The soul that is dead is that soul which is estranged and turned aside from God; W. Niesel, *Theology*, p.90. Death of body and soul is the punishment for our sins: a death that is neither the cessation of body nor soul for both of these continue to function, but a death that involves exclusion from the kingdom of God and the life of blessedness. Only in communion with God is there to be found true life, 'apart from Christ we are completely dead, because sin reigns in us with its inevitable consequence of death'.

75 Com. on Colossians 2:13; I John 1:1; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.75-76. The source of life is God, to be united to Him is to have spiritual life. Sin is alienation from God, a surrendering to death. The result of sin is estrangement and eternal death from God. 'Thus we die unto God insofar as we are enslaved by desire which lives in us . . . we are a living death, i.e. we die eternally' (pp.75-76). Spiritual death is of the soul, it is alienation from God and the individual consciousness of God's judgment; T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's*, pp.88-89. Man who was created after God's own image, through sin is now spiritually dead. To remain in unbelief is to keep oneself in this state of death that keeps one from 'the kingdom of God and bereft of the image of God's grace. Only the grace of regeneration can restore us to God; cf. pp.100-102.

76 Com. on II Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 10:39; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, pp.187-188. Hell is the absence of life either in God or with God, cf. p.77. The everlasting nature of hell is founded on the everlasting nature of the glory of Christ before whom the lost most suffer as long as Christ lives; cf. p.145. 'Pure annihilation in death would not be a severe enough punishment. They must be condemned by the judge whose vengeance they have conjured up without measure or end'; cf. F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p.288.

77 Isaiah 66:24; cf. Hebrews 10:27; I John 1:9.

78 Inst. 3, 25, 12; Isaiah 66:24; Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.93. With death the lost having not found the way are not able to find peace for their consciences being spiritually dead in sin and consequently estranged from God; cf. p.84; Calvin, *Tracts*, 3:458.

79 Com. on Isaiah 33:14; cf. Romans 2:15; Calvin, *Tracts*, 3:150-151. Calvin did not believe that the fear of hell restrained the lost from sinning.

80 LCC, *Calvin's Theological Treatises*, p.145.

81 Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, p.187. Hell implies removal from God's presence and thus a total lack of any fellowship with Him.

82 Inst. 3, 25, 12.

83 Com. on Isaiah 30:33; Inst. 3, 25, 12; F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p.289.