Boulger, The Calvinist Temper in English Poetry
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C. H. van Schooneveld

Indiana University
James D. Boulger

The Calvinist Temper in English Poetry

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For my wife Jean, and our children
Preface

The Calvinist Temper in English Poetry

The idea of this book is to present a set of literary critiques on a body of material which has never before been considered as a unity. A few writers are drawn from the 16th century (most notably Spenser), some from the 17th (Marvell, Taylor, Milton), more from the 18th and 19th. No important distinction is made among English and American writers, for reasons that will be shown within. What the writers are claimed to have in common, of course, is a supposedly similar Calvinistic religious background. In some instances (Smart or Coleridge), this fact of Calvinism will have to be proven. For most of the others, with the possible exception of Cowper, the fact is known, but the relevance has been ignored in the past. Even with Cowper there has been remarkably little written on the Calvinist influence on his poetry, as opposed to his life, on which perhaps we have too much. In all the cases the success or failure of the theory hinges on the success of the explanations.

A larger issue, the existence of the Calvinist literary tradition on theoretical grounds (think how strange this sounds!) will not be insisted on, except by implications. We are working on the principle of a zeitgeist influencing the sensibility of writers, however, and on the assumption that if the zeitgeist has universal and unchangeable notes, these will create permanent marks on the sensibility of all under the influence of that zeitgeist, even allowing generously for the uniqueness of the temperaments and personalities of poets, for the strictly literary influences of a given age, and for numerous other philosophical and social influences upon the writers. The minimum that must be shown is that the Calvinist influence is the dominant one on a given writer, or at least upon certain poems by that writer, and that this influence appears in similar or identical fashion upon writers of different ages and countries where the Calvinist religious view is found. Less than
this there is no case at all. Thus the writers in this study have been carefully chosen with this limiting point in mind. These are writers in whom we can allow for wide and extreme influence outside of Calvinism, but in whom the Calvinist influence not only dominates, but also colors, the others and ultimately integrates the writer's total imaginative apprehension of the world.

The first section of the book is given over to theology and to history, which may dismay the literary student. He is to be reassured that this grounding in fact and history is necessary, not an indulgence of the author. Books which search out origins in this way are often accused of being non-literary. Such accusations stem from a very superficial view of literary criticism which does not care to seek out the roots of an author's imaginative world, and, in an instance such as this one, from a hidden dislike of the religious sphere itself, as opposed to sources of inspiration in, say, the political, social, or biographical. This bias disfigures the academic mind and should long since have yielded to impartiality. My reasons for going into these forbidding areas are more scholarly than polemical, however. The assertion of my argument is so unusual that for the careful reader, and certainly for the theologian, whom I hope to number in the audience, it must be proven. Then again, the history and theology which bind this argument together are somewhat obscure, except to the theologian, so some of what is given is on the grounds of preliminary information. But there are also certain links, some historical, some theological, which the author has had to work out for himself in order to establish the metaphysics of Calvinism and show the unity of sensibility of the Calvinist vision. Some of these links or insights may be useful to the theologian per se, or, if they are questioned, the author is anxious to have them set down in clear form, so that the criticism can be meaningful. The historian or theologian of Calvinism, to give an important instance which will be all-pervasive in the following pages, has been too quick to concede that Calvinism lacks an aesthetic, or, if he has claimed an aesthetic, the case has been made on weak or feeble grounds. Puritans smashed windows and broke statues, but this fact is not very important if we know and can make use of the fact that the Calvinist sensibility is mainly a matter of ear and intellect. I hope that the theologian will be pleased with what he reads, and that it may revise his opinion of Calvinistic aesthetics for the better. To the literary reader, for whom the book is primarily intended, I hope Part One has some meaning and interest, and I advise in advance that the arguments and explications of the later parts are only valid and
perhaps intelligible on the basis of Part One. The method here is zig-zag and by cross-currents, from ideas and traditions to sensibility and poetry, but then back from poetry to the ideas and traditions. This is allowable in an intellectual continuum, the existence of which we prove as we move along. For the theologically-minded we might also say that a poem may well show or be the intellectual link between two facets of doctrine or dogma formerly thought to be discontinuous, inconsistent, or simply puzzling. It is a two-way street. If this seems to be promising too much, I hasten to add that I mean only that the theoretical and practical parts are logically and internally connected, and not merely chapter variations on a given theme.

I am indebted to an enormous range of authors — historians, theologians, and critics — for whose help in specific areas of analysis, many debts are happily mentioned in the text and notes within. For personal insights and aid I am happy to mention professors John Smith, Kathleen Coburn, Walter Ong, S.J., Basil Wiley, and Frederick A. Pottle. There is a negative aspect to this study, directed towards certain types of rationalist theorists of literature and critics of religious poetry, an aspect that will arise when necessary for clarification of specific points, since the main purpose is not to clear up older confusions but rather to make a positive contribution to an obscure and troubled area. In the closing stages of writing, John New's Anglican and Puritan and Norman Pettit's The Heart Prepared were especially valuable. Though written with different purposes in mind, those books and this one are mutually supportive except in a few matters, and will lay the groundwork, it is hoped, for a new and more informed view of the subject than has in the past prevailed.

Summer grants from the Brown University stipend fund, an English department Bronson research fellowship, and a grant from the American Philosophical Society have materially aided this work. The work was begun in 1961–62 under a Morse research fellowship from Yale University to Cambridge University in England. I wish to thank the staffs of St. Catharine's, Emmanual, and the University Library at Cambridge for help on many occasions with Puritan source materials.

I would also like to thank Michelle Massé, Stephen Murray, Patricia Steenland, and James Catano for their help in preparing this manuscript.

James D. Boulger
Because of his illness and subsequent death in July, 1979, Professor Boulger was unable to revise or correct the typescript and galleys for this book. Editorial changes have been limited to points of consistency or usage.

Michelle A. Massé
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Introduction

The Calvinist Temper

The view of poetry, of the place of historical background in criticism, and of the relationship of theology to literature will become clear in the course and method of this study. An introduction is not a replacement for the specific tasks that lie ahead, but as an outline of purpose it does have some use in giving an overview of the theme of the book. It will deal generally with the group of topics studied at length in the book and give the reasoned principles which are the guidelines making the book a possible venture. First there is the nature of poetry and the place of religious poetry in this context, then the place of history and of literary history in the study of such poetry, and finally the specific literary methods that are appropriate for a study of a special kind of religious poetry within the defined historical and literary framework.

We may take it as axiomatic that all good poetry arises from some successful combination of themes and means of presentation. This prosaic statement is not meant to remove the mystery and power from the many literary terms of our day which are more exciting and more specific than simply "means of presentation." It is merely a starting point for a working definition. Even less does it intend to separate theme or idea from literary means. Yet inevitably it is the case that critics are not able to talk very clearly about individual works without at least a theoretical division of terms, and it is this acceptable tradition that is followed in the comments on theme and presentation here with a particular eye to the problems of religious poetry.

The theme or idea in religious poetry is some body of theological material, or attitude towards such material, or an attitude towards other ideas and themes influenced profoundly by a theological and religious view. In the most basic sense, then, if there is a problem with theme in religious poetry it is the old issue of poetry as philosophy or
Introduction

as didactic material in a specific form. The presiding view of twentieth century criticism holds that merely philosophical or merely didactic poetry is almost always not very good poetry, even if the philosophy is very appealing (or “true” for some readers), or the moralism very sound, that is, re-inforcing the reader's own experience with life and reality. Most literary critics still hold that “beauty” and “pleasure,” (the aesthetic dimension considered from the most abstract and intellectual to the most basic and physical) are the grounds for calling poetry an art, an art not identical with philosophy, theology or other abstract disciplines which pursue truth for its own sake. Another commonplace we must accept, which makes difficulties for this study, is that much religious poetry, including a certain amount of what is to be called “Calvinist” or “Puritan” in these pages, shares the failings of types of philosophical poetry known as ideological and types of moral poetry called didactic. The worst poetry is both ideological and didactic with little interest in redeeming aesthetic means. This situation raises a problem for this study for which the literary solution seems at first at variance with the historical response. The historical view would seem to require an abundance of evidence, even and perhaps from “typical” or “bad” poetry to prove that persistent themes and ideas in a “Calvinist Temper” in poetry do in fact exist; a literary study, on the other hand, seems to require literary merit as expressed in many kinds of specific ways as the justification for consideration of any poetry in primarily literary terms. The answer to the possible dilemma lies in the extensive use of historical theology, devotional prose works, and the scholarly works which have discussed enough of the mediocre or plainly bad Calvinist poetry, such as Wigglesworth’s *Day of Doom*, for fairly accurate determination of Calvinist-Puritan ideas and patterns. The devotional prose writings are sometimes interesting, and their weight, added to study of the original theology and the accounts of the mediocre poetry by literary predecessors, leaves no doubt as to the existence of a close connection in themes and ideas between the great mixed mass of the tradition in general, and the best of the poetry which alone will be the object of close study in the book. Thus the usual viewpoint of most literary studies prevails in the main body of the book, wherein poetry of merit is discussed within the angle of vision of the “Calvinist Temper.” In the opening section, attention is given to questions of history, religious ideology and literary history, to ensure a coherent approach to the entire topic.
The opening sections involving history and theology, and the historical transitions, must justify their presence. Once the discussion of the individual literary figures begins, most readers will be on the familiar ground of literary criticism, with a special angle. For these readings the justification must be in the quality. One qualification in this study is that the readings have little validity or interest in themselves unless the connection between abstract themes in Calvinist-Puritanism and the poets and poems are clearly made. To ensure these necessary points, the first section is devoted to the theology and history of Puritanism and analysis of Calvinist-Puritan patterns in prose. Introductory transitions between centuries or periods, or in a few cases between poets, in other words "literary history," also occur as the means to establish the continuity between the tradition as defined and the individual major poet, and to take into account the mutations in ideas and themes resulting from the passage of time and conflict with outside forces. For the history of English Calvinism, theology and analysis of the prose, the author has for the most part done his own work, though gladly relying on the good work of others where it existed; the transitions and connections of literary history with the individual poets were more readily found in reliable available studies, and are always cited fully with gratitude. To those who would argue that primary history, theology, and sound literary history have no importance for serious literary criticism, I have no response, and no intention of setting about justifying these disciplines. For the success of using these different disciplines in one study, the answer must be in the book itself. Some preliminary comment should be given, however, for the choice of Calvinist-Puritanism as the source for themes and ideas in the poetry studied, and so in fact a little excursus into literary history, and about the literary methods to be used in the main body of the book.

Literary history in standard accounts does not now recognize a "Calvinist Temper in English Poetry." It recognizes only chronological ages, often attached to a great figure like Shakespeare or Johnson. It does recognize most of the poets studied in this book as at least partially under Calvinist influence, and all in some senses as religious poets. To establish some sense of continuity among these poets requires many kinds of evidence and judicious use of reliable literary historians whose intentions were far other than what is attempted here. This is not a new departure in modern literary study, where there have been various attempts at looking upon literary
tradition in cross-section, with the best highly provocative and at least partially successful. By realizing the tradition of the "poem of meditation" (Martz), "the visionary company" (Bloom), "the great tradition" (Leavis) we do not thereby invalidate the "Augustan Age," "Age of Johnson," "Age of Wordsworth" and the like. We do, however, see literary history in richer terms. One of these newer views of tradition, the poetry of meditation developed by Martz, will be cited further within as a very important influence on this study. The intellectual histories of scholars such as Miller, Fairchild and many others also have many uses which are cited in the proper places.

This introduction concludes with a brief and rather abstract look at the various specifically literary methods that come into play in showing that there is a "Calvinist Temper" in English poetry, and that the poets studied in this context do belong together if seen in this particular light. For the problem of a Calvinist temper related to the poets chosen for the study, both historical and literary analysis and techniques are required. The theology must be studied, and at the same time the themes of theology analyzed in a reasonable body of Puritan prose and poetry, the propriety for inclusion of each poet presented, and a literary analysis of at least some major works of each poet offered, this last and most important being concerned both with thematic and "aesthetic" materials and in their intertwining to make good poems.

Biographical materials will be of very limited importance in the study. For most of the poets the relationship between the Puritan themes and at least some important poems is evident in the texts of the poems, without need of biographical appeal. Only where it is supposed or known that Calvinist influence upon the poet would now be disputed by serious readers of that poet, even with the evidence of the poetry at hand, will biography become a minor issue, as in Coleridge and Wordsworth. Occasionally biographical matters about the better known Calvinists such as Cowper and Byron will help illuminate meaning in a poem, a process this writer has always regarded as a proper critical maneuver if wisely used. I doubt that many readers will find much to object to in the spare usage of biography envisioned within. More likely to raise problems is the matter of paraphrase of texts, which often is boring and always open to the charge of "reductionism." Many books otherwise valuable in various ways have been hurt by it. To show an intelligent reader how to get from one to ten is the obstacle it creates, but sometimes this is
necessary to point out what may or ought to be the obvious, to ensure the presence and consistency of a major pattern. "Theme" books cannot avoid some of it if the theme is to be explained and proven to be the important link the author claims to have found among the poets. I know no way around this problem except to keep paraphrase at a minimum, presenting as much detail as necessary in the early sections and poets, and relying on allusion wherever possible thereafter. Paraphrase may be a valuable substratum and not a "heresy" if it prepares soundly for more direct, aesthetic discussion of the best poems. For religious poetry these discussions in essence become an interpretation of symbols, metaphors, and other poetic devices as vehicles for the religious "allegory" described in the total structure of the book, that is, Calvinist-Puritan religious symbol and allegory. Allegory is considered here in the sense described by recent students of the subject, mentioned in detail in proper place within. In this sense it is not sharply separated from "symbolism" in many instances, not a mechanical four-tiered structure, and definitely not mere didacticism. With the success or failure of the readings given to the symbols and metaphors as a developing Calvinist-Puritan religious pattern of "allegory" this book stands or falls, since here is its central purpose as literary study. Some attention will also be paid in the contexts of specific poems to many of the devices and terms normally associated with literary criticism — verbal texture, ironies, dramatic techniques, prosody, and so forth. They are present as variables in the poets studied, some obviously associated with all good poetry, others with the special interests of an age, and a few the favorite techniques of a given writer. Clear examples of the later are the irony of Marvell and the strange prosody of Smart. A look at such devices is of course necessary in the consideration of the unity of any individual poem, the one aspect of modern literary criticism accepted by all.

If it seems strange to stress the necessity to cite chapter and verse in the development of the argument of a book of this sort, one must remember that this work is not "myth criticism," or the newer practice of using the ideas of Freud or Jung to allow any kind of divination to be accepted as serious literary study and criticism. "New Criticism" forced people to look at texts, and was therefore therapeutic at a certain time in the past. We now have more to learn from careful scrutiny of poets in their historical and cultural contexts than from abstract critical methods and theories. Literary history has been for too long neglected in our attempt to understand literature.
To ignore the perplexing requirements of seeing a poet in his true historical and cultural context is to allow criticism to become a form of fantasy, a fiction in itself perhaps as interesting as the literature it purports to criticize, but not of much service in understanding literary texts or history.
PART ONE

_The Patterns of Calvinism: The Sixteenth Century_
I. The Background

Calvinism: General Characteristics and Operating Force

The Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin, his other writings, and the writings of other early theologians of the Swiss and French schools are of necessary yet remote interest in the study to follow. To be sure, the important doctrines unfolded in the Institutes are the guidelines for all the later thinking of the English school of Calvinists, and therefore the precise theological nature of these doctrines must be understood by the student of English Calvinism and Puritanism. But the differences are as crucial as the similarities. Pure Genevese Calvinism was an abstract system, in practice a system of rigorous religious ritual that Calvin intended. Although the early French and Swiss Calvinists were more relaxed and open to aesthetic impulse than popular history has allowed, there was little place in the original abstract Calvinist scheme, partly because it was pursued so abstractly, for the aesthetic and imaginative as such. There was the theory, there was the practice, without an imaginative bond to give a living sense of the system. Les Hugenots was written out of the impulse of the classical tradition and of religious persecution in France; but nothing like the English literary outpouring of the years 1570–1660 can be matched in the other Calvinist countries, including the neighbor to the north, Scotland, where the system became more fully entrenched than in England. In England, especially during the great Cambridge days of the last decade of the 16th and first decade of the 17th centuries, the theory and practice of Calvinism became an integrated and whole way of life, fully imaginative, what some of the commentators call the “inner drama of the spirit.”¹ This drama was total, encompassing the world and all areas of experience, and that is why it was open to imaginative interpretation as was later the Calvinism of New England. Very few historical or critical commentators have been able to approach this drama, bringing the perspectives
and categories of Calvinism proper, without drying it up, or missing the intensive imaginative life into which Calvinism was transferred in its English phase. Haller, on the English side, and Miller, on the American, have managed to do this to some extent, to convey some sense of aesthetic and emotional appeal in the system, but their interest was mainly historical and not in the aesthetic as such. Nevertheless their work is closer to the spirit of living Calvinism and Puritanism in England and America than any that has yet been done, and therefore their work is the cornerstone of mine, which attempts to probe further into the aesthetic and imaginative side of Puritanism for its own sake.

Calvin's intellectual and methodical presentation of the truths of the Christian religion is the ultimate source of any later phase, religious, political, aesthetic, economic, of Calvinist manifestation. This is necessary to state in a study whose purpose is not to dwell long on the logical arrangement and intricacies of Calvin's system for its own sake. There are countless studies of this subject, many of which can be recommended to the reader for illumination of one point or another in the system. In this section the doctrines of Calvin which were later important for the aesthetic side of Calvinism will be emphasized. In the following section some emphasis will be given to the system itself. These include the nature, power and sovereignty of God; the conception of original sin and of man's depravity; the process of salvation or "secret operation of the spirit," the passing from damnation, to election to justification to sanctification to glorification, which later became central to the English Puritan drama; and election itself in relation to double predestination, about which perhaps, taken alone, too much has been written apart from the total process. The doctrines not particularly of importance for aesthetics would include Calvin's Christology, his doctrine of the Church and church discipline, the nature of the two sacraments and authority of the Bible. There is some negative importance here, however. The de-emphasis of Christology and of the Eucharist in Calvinism (compared with Roman Catholic or Anglican or even Lutheran practice) leaves lacunae in the imaginative world of the scheme of redemption in Calvinism which must be filled by other sources. One of these sources is prayer, made powerful in Calvinism by the support of the emphasis upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the only major aspects of Calvin's system which are unimportant for our purposes, either positively or negatively, are the sections on doctrine and discipline of the Church
and authority of Scriptures about which Calvin and all his followers in all countries wrote endlessly. Here we enter the political and economic aspects of Calvinism, on which so much has been written, and which this writer happily leaves to others.

Some writers have stated that Calvin's one purpose in writing the *Institutes* was to expound and defend the nature and sovereignty of God, his "honneur and segneurship," reflecting some peculiarly French notion of honor. Like most sweeping statements or half-truths of a cute sort, this statement has some value, although the French honor part cannot be taken seriously. Calvin, like Aquinas before him, began his treatise with a long section on the power, nature and sovereignty of God, perhaps in contrast to the Lutheran emphasis on the doctrine of justification by faith, which in emphasis at least is man-centered. The Anabaptists, heretics and the practices of the Roman clergy of the day are also always in Calvin's mind when he writes on the primacy and power of God. It is important, then, to recognize that Calvin never intended any doctrine or part of his system to be emphasized or even considered apart from the opening thesis of the *Institutes* on the power, nature and sovereignty of God. If the importance of this doctrine is remembered and kept in mind, one cannot go wrong in making a general assessment about the meaning of Calvinism or about its impact on the religious life of England in later times. Naturally, as history and the inevitable human situation tell us, the system was broken up, distorted, given emphases not intended by Calvin in his own day and later by Calvinist and enemy theologians alike. The distortions and their impact are as important for the history of Calvinism and for the religious sensibility which it generated as the pure system itself, the reality. Perhaps this brief analysis of the dynamics of the system, its strengths, its weaknesses, and its loopholes for outward movement, will explain what I mean.

Since Calvin's system is a system, the most complete and logical since Aquinas', one doctrine should follow logically upon the other. The power and sovereignty of God leads to the weakness and smallness of man, then to the severe doctrine of original sin, and so on. At this point I am not concerned with all the logical connections, which I think are clear enough in Calvin himself. I am concerned to point out that a purely logical analysis of the sort usually undertaken by theologians will miss the emphases, not intended by the logic of Calvin's argument, which are also all important in assessing the meaning of Calvinism. Calvin's section on Christology, for instance, is
impeccable taken separately, and denies none of the traditional status
given to Christ as God or man in Catholic Christianity. Yet the
unusual emphasis upon the power of God in Calvin does in effect
limit the previous emphasis upon the person of Christ in traditional
Catholicism. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God creates a vertical
relationship of man to God almost to the neglect of the Mediator.
This leads in turn to the weakness in the sacramental system in
practical Calvinism, since the rituals of the Eucharist are related
directly to Christology. Calvin made a good deal of the doctrine of the
spiritual presence in the Eucharist, and although it is obvious that
there is a psychological de-emphasis in moving from transubstantiation
to the idea of spiritual presence only, there is no logical reason in the
Institutes for complete de-emphasis of rituals attached to the Eucha-
ristic sacrament. In practice, as a matter of fact, there is a certain
amount of Eucharistic worship in the Calvinist tradition, the poetic
meditations of Edward Taylor and Richard Baxter being outstanding
instances. But the logical and practical de-emphasis of the Eucharist
and Christ in favor of the idea of the sovereignty and power of God
leads other Calvinists to a direct and dialectical relationship between
man and God, with prayer, not a sacrament, as the mediator. This
may be called the Hebraic side of Calvinism, for the focus is upon the
Old Testament, and in its institutional manifestation is recognized as
the importance of the word and the preacher in the Protestant
tradition.

The items of the Calvinist tradition as presented in the Institutes
which fit logically together and carry traditionally an equal amount of
emphasis in the writings of the English Puritans are the sovereignty of
God, the depravity of man and hence the power of original sin, the
process of salvation in the series — sinfulness, election, justification,
sanctification, glorification — prayer (in its limited function), and mild
devotion to the Eucharist as the spiritual presence of Christ. These
work together to give a world view which is at once religious,
wholesome, sane, and a high form of Christian contemplation. The
items in Calvin’s system important for the Church and for the social
functions of religion, the authority of the Bible and of the Church, are
logically connected to the above by Calvin but are not important for
religious sensibility and the inner life as such, and hence have no
bearing upon literature. The doctrine of authority of Scripture as
related to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the inner life of the
Spirit stands apart in a peculiar way as the weakest link in Calvin’s
logical chain, leading later to some great disasters in Calvinism. Calvin undeniably did emphasize the Holy Spirit in the Institutes, but not in a way that would decrease the sovereignty of God or the prominence of Christ as mediator. But this was a decided re-emphasis in relation to Catholic tradition which led in the following century to the complete breakdown of the idea of authority in the Scriptures, to the left-wing Puritan and Quaker doctrines of the inner light and raising of the Holy Spirit to an eminence above the other persons of the Trinity. In this sport of Calvinist tradition the entire drama of sin, election, justification etc. is completely eroded. Spiritual hubris does away with authority and even sin, giving first Quakerism and then the pantheism and general notion of spirit in the world that opens up the Romantic movement. In this work we are in the main not dealing with the aberrations of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but it is well to point out that the germ for all this is in Calvin himself, as followed by those who grasp the emphasis of a doctrine apart from its logical position in the system. This collateral line, as it were, will be useful for us in pointing out something else, not widely recognized, that within the framework of what is undeniably the Calvinist center it was still possible to create distortions in the system and the sensibility by overemphasis on any one of the several central doctrines of the system: power of God, original sin, election, predestination, proper place of the Spirit. Indeed, our work would be rather dry and fruitless if these overemphases, isolations and distortions had not occurred, for the central system in its pure form gives us essentially one drama, one artistic vehicle, and that is of ineluctable triumph. This drama and its explanation will be a main interest here, but we shall note also the byways and desponds of those who heightened God at the expense of man, or original sin at the expense of election, or the happy few who seemed able to begin the process of salvation at justification and proceed quickly and surely to glorification. In short, we are dealing with a highly complex central system, having a number of almost necessary subordinate or auxiliary systems branching from it, and several genuine heresies lurking within it as seeds of its possible destruction. In the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries we get the central system in its healthiest form; in Cowper, Coleridge and Dickinson there are some of the most interesting byways; the Spiritist heretics such as Fox and the Quakers prepare the ground for the sensibility of at least one great Romantic, Wordsworth, and possibly for others.
In order to understand the aesthetic impact of the central system of Calvinism upon the English Puritans and later Calvinists, a brief analysis of the central doctrines in the *Institutes* follows, more specific than the general and historical description given thus far. As with what has been given in the general historical area, the guiding principle of selection will be those doctrines later to have greatest impact for sensibility and aesthetics, not an attempt to describe the system in its entirety of relationships.
II. Background

The Institutes and Calvin's System:
Brief Analysis of Central Points

It is necessary to subject only the main doctrines of the system important for aesthetics to analysis for our purposes. This is an aesthetic study within a given historical framework, not a full theological discussion of Calvin's system, or of the historical and social effects of that system, or the kind of modern re-interpretation that might serve the needs of reformed churches today. The reader of this study may have interest in all these matters, for which a bibliographical note mentioning books of special merit is appended. The basic analysis in this section, then, will be of those doctrines in the Institutes with important implication for aesthetics later unfolded in the Puritan tradition. Another mode of analysis, emphasizing the obscurities and matters of logical debate in Calvin's system, particularly about election and predestination, need not be the focus of this study. In the light of the later history of Calvinism, particularly among the English Puritans, this analysis will follow up the general statements in the previous section and emphasize the doctrines and lines of thought in Calvin's system which later had the greatest impact upon the aesthetics of imaginative writers under the influence of Calvin. In the instances of Calvin's views of election, predestination, effectual calling and justification, the aesthetic consequences for literature were as enormous as the moral and theological consequences in other areas of life. But this was not always the case. His doctrine of prayer (Inst. III, 20) was vital to poets of the Calvinist meditative tradition in the 17th and 18th centuries, yet not distinctive or decisive in the history of theological controversy. Conversely, the entire fourth book of the Institutes, on the Church and civil government, which had the greatest social and political consequences of any of Calvin's writings, and generated the greatest number of written responses and controversies throughout the period of historical Calvinism, that is,
from Calvin's age to the early 19th century, had little direct effect on imaginative life and writing within the Calvinist-Puritan tradition, if we take into account the minor exception that the influence his views on the doctrine and discipline of the sacraments and on the value of music in the service had upon the writing and singing of hymns, a special minor branch of poetry to be considered later with Watts.

Several important, and in a sense obvious, but for that reason often neglected, aspects of the relationship between Calvin's writings and "Calvinism" and especially "Puritanism" should also be brought to light before looking briefly at the central tenets of the Institutes. In reading Calvin's theology, it becomes clear throughout that he intended his writings to be taken as one whole, especially the final and perfected volume of the Institutes. He did not expect his doctrines to be questioned or re-interpreted, as they were inevitably in the later history of Calvinism, and certainly not found puzzling or objects of learned speculation in theological seminaries. Calvin reasons meticulously through each doctrine by his own logic to his own conclusion, citing precedents, scriptural texts and adversaries. When he has finished a topic, the doctrine is settled, to become a member in the chain of reasoning which is his system. He did not expect doctrines, such as predestination or election, to be held up separately as belief or to be discussed in a vacuum. This is especially so because the system was intended as a network of beliefs held by a community of believers, the Christian community of faith. Justification might be a major stumbling block without election, and election certainly was that without predestination and justification, but within the community of belief these snares that might lead to shipwreck (one of his few literary metaphors) led rather to assurance. It became historically the case of course for many of Calvin's doctrines to be taken up in isolation by various groups, for them to be the subject of savage inspection by religious controversialists in many ages, and for some members of the Calvinist-Puritan community in England, and New England particularly, to lose the sense of Christian community and church discipline that Calvin always stressed in his writing about doctrines. Abstract theologians, poets and other imaginative writers especially were likely to view Calvin's doctrines in isolation from an active community of church worship. These practices gave rise to the many peculiarities and even monstrosities that have passed by the name of Calvinism in theology, history and literature. Calvin, essentially a pious and practicing preacher, would no doubt have
deplored most of this progeny, but we need not look upon the situation with similar eyes, as long as the distinction between Calvin's writings and its influence is held in view. Some of the historical and literary effects of Calvinism may be more interesting in the history of humanity than the writings of Calvin himself, a point to keep in mind especially in the question of our special subject, the literary sensibility generated in history by Calvin's writings.

For if any one thing is clear from a general reading of Calvin's theological writings, it is his lack of interest in the aesthetic, his distrust of the imagination (shared by most of his scholastic, Catholic adversaries) and his preference for a literalistic, legal reading of the Scriptures over what had become a very relaxed medieval attitude. This point is so overwhelming, and has been so fully accepted in the common notions of "Calvinism" and "Puritanism," that it is made only in passing. Calvin, like his favorite theologian Augustine before him, approved explicitly only of music, and that as edification for church service and worship. But the point must be accepted only to be refuted in a more meaningful sense. As Calvin's doctrines were capable of being pulled away from the system to form strange new configurations in Puritanism and in the lives of individuals, so also an aesthetic sensibility grew up about his essentially theological and literalistic picture of the world. This, we acknowledge by hindsight, was inevitable, as we know any powerful, original picture of man's place and of man's self, whether theological as in Calvin, or scientific as in Newton, will affect profoundly the imaginative picture of men who accept such theories as belief. Every "world picture" is a possible aesthetic; every original theologian, philosopher or scientist a man of imagination in this special sense. Since the middle of the 18th century there have been attempts at purely aesthetic views of the world, of imagination as the highest potency or maker, and the rejection of science and especially theology as the giver of the basic picture. Though Calvin would have rejected the notion that he was presenting an imaginative picture (potentially, at least), and not literal theological truth (while conversely the special science of aesthetics and literary criticism in the modern period has held both theology and literalism in contempt), we must not blind ourselves to the truth of the fact that what Calvin presented as a reasoned chain of arguments from Scriptures and as literal truth was actually a highly imaginative and special world picture, as many others before and later. When, in Puritan England and New England, whole societies took up this
picture, or parts of it, as truth and as the guide to their lives, it was inevitable that special imaginative colorings would be given to doctrines such as election, justification and the rest, since every society has its share of people of high imaginative talent of this derivative sort. It is a paradox then that Calvin, who despised imagination, was more imaginative in the fundamental sense than any of the Calvinist poets and writers who accepted his views, but it is a familiar paradox, also true of Augustine, Aquinas, Kant and Newton. Even the most powerful writers, who twisted and sometimes transformed the system of Calvinism to their own ends – Milton, Byron, Coleridge – maintained a fundamental debt to their source.

In examining the major doctrines with the aesthetic possibility in mind we can be brief, since the actual unfolding into the aesthetic realm in every case happened at a later stage of the historical development of the Calvinist-Puritan sensibility, and we intend in the later discussions of periods and individual writers to point out all these flourishings of the Calvinist literary temperament. Therefore hints of what is to come and the possible attitudes towards the doctrines, some of which Calvin did see and rejected, others which he did not see at all, will be the aim of this little excursus through the major positions in the *Institutes*.

The most significant doctrines in Calvin’s *Institutes* fall into three classes, for convenience presented here in increasing order of importance. In the first group we can place doctrines that were crucial for Reformation Protestantism yet not in the judgment of history for the intellectual and aesthetic life of subsequent centuries. Calvin’s doctrines of church discipline, worship and civil order, or Book IV of the *Institutes*, fall here. In the second are grouped doctrines whose weight has been greatest in the intellectual and moral realms, and also important for the aesthetics of Calvinism: God’s power, governance and providence; testimony and secret operation of the Spirit; Christ as Redeemer and his fulfillment of the justice of the Law. Most significant are the doctrines which have both influenced profoundly the direction of Protestantism and the intellectual, moral and aesthetic lives of generations of men, to wit, original sin and freedom of the will, justification by faith, election and predestination, effectual calling and vocation. As stated earlier, a special category must be established for those doctrines and attitudes of Calvin which were significant for aesthetics alone in the 16th–17th century historical period: his view of prayer, special respect for music, dislike of allegorical reading of
Scripture, and approval of aural communication of the Word and hence of the aural in general over the visual and other sensuous or imaginative means of presenting the relationship of God to man. Except for the chapter given to prayer (II, 20) the other points are merely mentioned in passing by Calvin. Summing up, the first class of doctrines has no literary importance. On the other hand the "special category," while directly aesthetic and important for establishing the acceptance of some literary and other aesthetic forms in Calvinist societies, takes up aesthetic matters in passing and is not dogma and doctrine. Our brief survey of the aesthetic implications in the doctrines of Calvin can be restricted, then, to the important doctrines in classes two and three. We are to note several matters in this survey, namely, the prominence of each doctrine in the total system, its uniqueness in Calvinism, the degree to which it was possible for this doctrine to be wrenched from the system and viewed or taken in isolation, and finally, with hindsight of course, how far a doctrine might take hold of and influence imaginative men.

Calvin's awesome view of God's power, governance and providence as theology is a straightforward doctrine, the most prominent and the cornerstone of his system (I, 5, 13, 16). As his commentators say, he was concerned chiefly to maintain the dignity and sovereignty of God. Yet it was this doctrine, which surely no other Christian group could seriously question, that led to logical consequences from which many other theologians did shrink or which they found unacceptable — election, reprobation, predestination, calling, and so on. Since as a platitude all could find God's power acceptable, this central viewpoint of Calvin was not discussed separately, wrenched out of context. It could and did lead to pious moralizings in divinity, dull moralizings in poetry, proper ejaculations in prayer, and to a somber and serious hymnology. The same generalities hold for Calvin's most important explicit Christian doctrine, Christ as Redeemer and his fulfillment of the justice of the Law (II, 12–17). As the first was his major deduction from the Old Testament, the second was from the New. Again it was a position acceptable and indeed required of all Christians at the time of the Reformation, and in itself led to pious moralizings, dull moralizings, proper ejaculations and a somber hymnology. Calvin's "use" of it, in soteriology, as his "use" of the majesty of God in election, is another matter.

The third doctrine in this group presents a special problem and is indeed the most puzzling doctrine in Calvin and the entire Protestant
tradition. Unlike the doctrines mentioned previously, this one was not shared with Catholicism. The idea of the testimony and secret operation of the Spirit, which appears throughout the *Institutes*, is never satisfactorily defined, and was destined to be torn away from Calvinism and Puritanism, to become the decisive doctrine of the sects to the left, Anabaptists, Quakers, and Levellers. It fell into disrepute for this reason among later Calvinists and Puritans, who yet could never fully reject it. Spirit is indeed an obscure and vexing issue within Calvin's system and Protestantism. The doctrine of the Spirit was needed as an alternative to the Catholic belief in Church authority in the question of the surety of the Scriptures. The authenticity of the Scriptures, the appeal to the individual conscience, and the need for generally acceptable readings of Scripture often led in contradictory directions. Why are Calvin's views more valid than those of Jack the Journeyman, if there is no church or historical authority to appeal to? The answer was the "testimony and secret operation of the Spirit," but even Calvin's usual logic, rigor and scrupulous precision of definition did not rescue this doctrine from obscurity, a failure later to have a profound impact upon the history of Puritanism and the sects to the left of it.

The more peculiar doctrines of Calvinist-Puritanism, such as election, and justification by faith, might be abhorred or disputed by adversaries, but were at least available in logical form for inspection and argument. Controversies about these doctrines also arose within the Calvinist-Puritan tradition, but these revolved around a commonly accepted position. With the doctrines of the Spirit it was otherwise. The Journeymen Jacks of the 17th century were unsatisfied with Calvin's testimony, preferring their own. This important doctrine, which was essential to the Protestant view of interpretation of Scripture, remained vague and therefore subject to vast difference of interpretation within Protestantism and to ridicule from without, by "Papists" and humanist writers, especially the dramatists. It was an all-pervasive belief that could not be explained logically. As such it is subject to no precise definition or explanation helpful for Puritan aesthetics. It may sometimes be the source or undercurrent of confidence in a writer, but where it appears directly as defining principle, we are moving from Calvinist-Puritanism to the "left" spiritual tradition.

This doctrine of the testimony and secret operation of the Spirit is vexing for other reasons. It stands as the counterpart of the Catholic
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doctrine of authority and historicity as the guarantor of the validity of Scripture and the possibility of coherence in its interpretation (I, 7). The term "proportion of faith" is used to state this specific purpose. Yet since Spirit is such a vague and indefinable term, we cannot be sure that the guarantee means anything more than that for Calvin the Roman Church, existing historically somehow in error, was capable of miraculous renewal by reformers endowed with the correct testimony and operation of the Spirit. This idea of Spirit also plays a role at crucial points in the unfolding of other, more characteristic Calvinist doctrines, such as freedom of the will, justification by faith and effectual calling. These were the supreme doctrines in their effect upon the emotional and imaginative lives of Calvinists, and thus this idea of the Spirit is an important factor, if not the direct and shaping force, of aesthetic and imaginative responses to these doctrines among Calvinist poets and writers. But the line must be drawn faithfully to the facts of the history of the sects. At the point where doctrines of the Spirit become the central operating principle, and the formal shaping principle of religious writings, we pass from Calvinist-Puritanism to Quakerism and other sects to the left of Puritanism. It is admittedly a hard line to draw and discipline to keep in either theological or literary analysis of Calvinist-Puritanism, because the doctrine of the Spirit was indeed very important to Calvin and his English followers, and seems at times to have served as a final obscure explanation when no other explanation was available. This point is more difficult to grasp at first in Calvin than in later writers, since his firm legal and logical surface hides it more effectively than do the more emotional writings of the English Puritan successors. But nevertheless, there it hides, a non-logical appeal to the existence and power of the Spirit.

In a way fatally vague for the connection between religion and literature, this doctrine of the Spirit was destined to survive the transition from religious to secular society. A later subject of this book, an example or two will suffice here. Diffused almost beyond recognition, the "spirit" appears as the source of vitality in Smart, that which gives to his Anglicanism a vitality lacking in his time and to his religious life the integrity lacking at large. It appears again later in Wordsworth as the "spirit of the woods" in "Nutting," the sealed spirit of the Lucy Poems, and as the obscure "emotion" or imagination of much great Romantic poetry. Seeking for the spirit in self and nature the Romantics were carrying on the twin Puritan
beliefs of "secret operation of the Spirit" and of effectual calling through evidences of election, sought and found however in the personal emotional life and in the life of nature rather than through Calvinist-Puritan religious and theological categories.

We turn now to the doctrines of Calvin which have traditionally been viewed as having given Calvinism its uniqueness as a theological system and view of the world. These are also the ones having the strongest impact upon the emotional and imaginative lives of the English Puritans and other followers of Calvin. Though all are interrelated, it is possible to group them in logical clusters that are emotionally and imaginatively, as well as intellectually, akin. The idea of original sin and freedom of the will form one; justification by faith, the major doctrine that includes in its orbit the question of the moral law, good works, and the place of prayer, forms another; predestination is the third major doctrine from which flows Calvin's implications on election, reprobation, effectual calling and vocation. Though the traditional view that these doctrines give Calvinism its unique stamp has much justification, it can be accepted only with qualifications. That they had the strongest impact upon the Calvinist-Puritan sensibility can be accepted without question.

What is unique to Calvin is not these doctrines, but the pursuit of logical implications in the doctrines into difficult areas, and the connections of implications between the doctrines. His views of original sin, freedom of the will, predestination and election are those of Augustine and the conservative tradition in the early church. But because he pursued these views to logical limits (and apart from Church authority and sanction), it was necessary to invent radical means to preserve the traditional Christian view of salvation, and so he construed the "secret operation of the Spirit," effectual calling and vocation as balance or remedy for the stark effects of the grimmer doctrines. It was true that Calvin's Protestantism was destined to throw the individual desperately back upon himself, though Calvin and his immediate followers, with their powerful sense of church community, were not able to foresee this. Calvin's doctrine of justification by faith essentially follows Luther's reading of St. Paul, pursued to extreme consequences. Nothing good is left to be said for the Catholic ideas of penance, confession, good works, posing for Calvin the very difficult problem of how to cope with the fact of sin in the justified. Calvin did not shrink from the belief that the justified are still sinners, and, in exchange for penance, confession, and good
works, invents new notions of prayer, a new sense of strength in the Holy Spirit (the secret operation of the Spirit again in still another manifestation) and the firm operation of the sense of election in the justified. The rejection of good works as efficacious, of the non-elect and non-justified as capable of salvation, and of the possibility that God might not be limited to the one clear method of salvation as interpreted by Luther and Calvin from the Scriptures, all seem arbitrary and even capricious to the modern mind. Though that may be the case, the “system” made profound impact upon those who believed in it over a long period of time, and our purpose is to investigate the emotional and aesthetic implications of that belief.

On original sin, Calvin concludes,

Original Sin, therefore, appears to be an hereditary pravity and corruption of our nature, diffused through all the parts of the soul, rendering us obnoxious to the Divine wrath, and producing in us those works which the Scripture calls ‘works of the flesh.’ (II, 1–8)

He continues that man is “so totally overwhelmed” that “no part is free from sin,” and that “whatever proceeds from him is accounted sin.” The fallen intellect is allowed some natural potency for worldly endeavours, but is totally devoid of supernatural attainment and potency. The will is so bound by the slavery of sin that it cannot devote itself to anything good, but rather sins voluntarily, not with reluctance or constraint. In its unredeemed state it must sin, but it sins voluntarily. Propensity of the will to any good thing can be found only in the elect. Put another way, whatever good lies in the human will, is the work of pure grace. The prospect for natural man is grim indeed, though of course for the elect there would be another prospect and process. The sanctified will, by the benefit of election and justification by faith in Christ, receives enough grace to do good in the state of regeneration and to persevere through sanctification to glory. The non-elect, including Christians not “called,” those not called effectively, the heathen of all ages, and all infidels, sceptics and atheists, remain in the natural state of original sin which leads them inexorably to deserved damnation.

In pursuing the implications of original sin, and also of predestination and election to the logical conclusion of excluding the heathen and infidels, even the good among them, as well as the sceptics, atheists and Christians not properly called, Calvin parts company with the only early Christian theologian for whom he had consistent
respect, Augustine. Throughout the *Institutes* Calvin attacks Roman Catholic positions and those of other reformers. On most of the theological points which separated Calvin from his adversaries to the right and left, it is fair to say that the verdict of history places Augustine on his side. But even Augustine, who accepted most of the grim consequences of original sin and predestination, glossed over by most medieval theory and practice, insisted in such extreme matters as the implications of original sin and predestination, that the justice of God must be stressed over pure power and majesty, his arbitrary will. From Calvin's standpoint it is not unjust for God to condemn the good pagans of antiquity, since any salvation by election is God's gift. Augustine and the early church, closer of course to the pagan world, stressed God's justice in placing the *Imago Dei* in all men as grounds for possible redemption, and insisted that baptism of desire did save the good pagans. The act was of the individual as well as of God. The saving of the good Jews was another matter. On this Augustine and Calvin agree that this had been part of God's plan according to his secret will. Calvin's logic is narrower than Augustine's and his view more historically Christian in a biblical sense. The Jews are the people of the book, albeit the "Old Covenant." In the question of universal salvation as a possibility, Calvin's is decidedly a potentially darker view than even the most pessimistic form of Catholicism, and for this reason would later be called the most irrational form of Christianity by enlightened religious and non-religious minds alike. But it must be stressed again that within the scheme of salvation devised by Calvin, the darker possibilities on the whole were to and did give way to the more optimistic, giving the Puritan emphasis upon "calling," the doctrine of the Spirit, and so forth. On the other side of the ledger Augustine's grim views of original sin and predestination, although sweetened by the *Imago Dei* and baptism of desire in the cases of just pagans, led to the complex series of spiritual exercises known as monasticism, an attempt to conform man to the *Imago Dei* within, of which he was unworthy. There is no point in stone-casting here. As we will see in our study of the poets and great pose writers, Calvinism functioning successfully is generally optimistic in the 16th and 17th centuries. It grew darker in the 18th and early 19th centuries, when sceptical attitudes intruded upon the religious view of the world. It is pessimistic in Cowper, Coleridge and Hawthorne, even bleaker in Byron, Dickinson and Melville, and has been called a source of the demonic in certain 20th century writers, such as O'Connor and
Faulkner. Needless to say, Calvin and his 16th and 17th century followers would not have understood the later historical twists of their doctrines in the least.

This is a way of emphasizing again the crucial distinction between Calvin's view of his system and other ways of viewing it, with the above doctrine as the prime case in point, although a similar observation might be made concerning predestination, election or justification. Calvin's doctrines, taken in isolation or given different interpretations, are susceptible of the direst consequences for the emotional, moral and aesthetic life of man. Only in a chain of reasoning which places the individual in a positive position regarding election, grace, operation of the spirit, calling, justification and glorification, are these doctrines capable of positive interpretation, leading to a state of assurance and salvation. The fact that Calvin and numerous others after him were able to assume this positive position has led to some glibness and even to flippancy in discussions of the Calvinist process of salvation. The position is asserted that with a little prodding all good Calvinists managed to find effectual calling and moved successfully along the path to glory. While there is plenty of evidence that this happened to most zealous Puritans, it is an over-simplification of Calvinist thought and the facts of history. There are three objections to the simplistic view of Calvinism, herewith presented with the evidence for a more varied "Calvinist tradition" than seems to be allowed by the Institutes taken as theological logic.

In the first, it will be pointed out fully in the pages which follow that the process of "glorification" was not taken glibly by the most serious Calvinists, the preachers, poets, and intellectuals, even if the process was followed through successfully. Real agonies occurred in contemplating the "sin-state" (original sin), the need for grace and the Spirit, the all important questions of election, calling, justification and vocation, and in carrying out, if successfully called, the process of sanctification in prayer, acknowledgment of sin in the justified, and perseverance against temptations and despair. The evidence is in the works of Calvinist writers, which some students of religious literature have not taken trouble to read. The second objection is that the process was not inevitable. An individual could be blocked at some stage of development in the pattern, and some were so blocked at each stage. This phenomenon gave rise to intellectual, moral and aesthetic patterns in writers that Calvin himself had not contemplated. It would be unfair to state that these blocked patterns are more
interesting than the accepted one, but they are at least as interesting. Again, the evidence is in writing to be assessed later. The third objection is not directed at students of 17th century religion and literature alone or even mainly, for the mistaken assumption applies to a larger group of critics and readers. This is the point that Calvinism can be found in diffused form, that is, mixed with other intellectual traditions, from the late 17th through early 19th centuries, and that one or more of these central doctrines of Calvin had decisive influence on persons, mainly poets and writers, who would not have been able to accept Calvin fully or literally. And further, that this decisive influence can be distinguished from the merely vague sense of Calvinist influence which is felt in many writers after the mid-19th century.

The Calvinist doctrine of original sin and the fallen intellect and will of man, then, was likely to strike terror into those who could not believe in their own election and the life of grace, and anxiety in those who could. For the former, life would become insufferably bleak and even perhaps unbearable; for the latter it would be fraught with temptations and trials testing whether election, grace and justification were really present, so that the will might perform those actions minimum for salvation. Terror, anxiety, scepticism, despair, assurance and glory were to be permanent features of the Calvinist-Puritan emotional pendulum. It was the peculiar feature of Calvin’s system that it led to extreme states of joy and despair and so forth. The reason lies in the logic of his general argument concerning these major doctrines. What we have seen with original sin and freedom of the will applies also to election/reprobation, predestination, justification and calling. His arguments on all of these matters have a theoretical plausibility if we grant his premises on the power of God and the authority of Scriptures. From that perspective the arguments are legalistic enough, but only from that perspective. From the viewpoint of general law, equity and universal principles, Calvin’s system is not fair or logical, for it denies both the power of the human reason to frame laws sensible for the person, and the power of the human will to determine its actions. The first attitude is embodied in scholasticism (later rationalism), which Calvin regarded as impudent. The second, usually called the question of “good works,” when connected with justification, calling and grace, Calvin always denied on the grounds that thereby man sets up his own accounting system concerning his merit before God. In place of these affirmations of
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reason and will Calvin gives us faith, the secret operation of the Spirit, the search for signs, and the scrutiny of emotions and imagination in intense introspection. In short, a drastic reordering of priorities and a religious revolution which was bound to affect the sensibility and literary temperament of its followers. Radical Calvinism had only limited influence in Protestantism. The engrafted legacies of centuries of rationalism and tribalism were cast from the Judeo-Christian message for a brief period, only to reappear in the 17th century in the newer forms of scientism in the rational sphere and Arminianism in the theological, latter-day versions of the belief in rationalism and good works.

Calvin’s thinking in general on the doctrines of predestination, election, calling and justification may be presented together for our purposes, since the principle involved and the emotional and imaginative effects follow closely the outline above. In each he argues from the power and majesty of God, the justness of his arbitrary power, and from his interpretation of passages in Scripture. His theoretical reasoning is always consistent with the premises, but such is not always the case with the use of Scripture. Of course scripture-juggling was a vice of both Protestant and Catholic divines in the Reformation period; Calvin is not guilty of the usual vices and dishonesties, but he is a victim of an inconsistency that was almost fatal to his system. Arguing as a New Testament evangelical reformer, Calvin should always have viewed the Old Testament from that perspective, that is, from the viewpoint of the atonement achieved and salvation possible in the life and death of Christ. In his arguments for justification by faith, and in his ordinances for the Christian life he achieves this perspective, making light of “good works,” the commands of the Old Law, and other seeming commands of God countermanded by the New (III, 11–18). In his doctrines of predestination, election and effectual calling he departs from this standard, perhaps fatally. Though he acknowledges that such are speculative matters, and as such should be viewed only within the active scheme of Christian salvation, he departs from the spirit of the more evangelical parts of the Institutes to digress upon the mysteries of election, double predestination and reprobation (III, 21–25). It was consistent with his view of the power and majesty of God to do so, but not with the wisdom of a Christian preacher. The effect of his discussions of such abstract and speculative issues was to thrust the attention of the would-be believer, the person interested in his salvation, from the
Christian operational scheme of grace-justification-salvation, to direct contemplation of the mysterious will of an arbitrary God. Within his own scheme, Calvin’s positions can be followed, since those who receive the necessary grace for justifying faith in Christ are the elect, and vice versa. But it is a major difference, having awesome emotional and imaginative, as well as intellectual, consequences whether one contemplates this process as a believing Christian or sees oneself in relation to it as an abstract speculator, Bible in hand without other guide. It is therefore acceptable to say, as scholars do, that some of Calvin’s doctrine is oriented toward the Old Testament God of wrath and arbitrary power, from which arises a religious scheme based upon terror. Without the Jewish idea of the Covenant of the Chosen, such terror must be the lot of the would-be believer contemplating the possibilities of election, reprobation and effectual calling, and searching for “signs” of election in his own life and the world around him. Later a New Covenant would be provided by Puritan divines to relieve this terror, but for the individualist, or unusually sensitive person, a Smart, Cowper, Coleridge, Dickinson, Melville, it was always present. In fact, through these Calvinist doctrines of election, effectual calling and reprobation Calvinism survived the specifically Christian setting of Calvin’s system, an inevitability that would have puzzled the founder.

In his consideration of election, calling and justification, then, John Calvin, though a Christian minister of the gospel, reminds his readers constantly that only the elect will be called and saved, that the elect are such by the mercy of God, since in his justice, by virtue of the fall of man and the effects of original sin, all deserve damnation. Where all deserve damnation it is foolish to talk of good works, merit, natural goodness, human virtue and intellect, and Calvin is consistent in thrusting aside and exposing all arguments and viewpoints based explicitly or implicitly on such views of human nature as the basis of the relationship of man to God. Though he speaks of grace, the operation of the Spirit, or faith in man’s justification by means of the imputed righteousness of Christ, the terminology of his message as Christian preacher, what he really means, if forced to speak abstractly and in strict logic, is that God is arbitrarily merciful to a few sinners who deserve damnation, and allows the rest to receive their just reward. When pressed for a method to discern the presence of this arbitrary mercy, Calvin speaks with Luther of justifying faith by imputed righteousness of Christ, and in his own voice of effectual
calling and signs of election (thus giving Calvinism both a God-centered consciousness and a Christ-centered consciousness, a marked distinction from the Christocentricity of Catholicism, Lutheranism and Anglicanism), but at bottom he must acknowledge that he is dealing with arbitrary mystery. It was this peculiarity of Calvinist-Puritanism, which left its stamp upon generations of men, poets and writers among them, that it dared to face this stark mystery directly, although it also often chose the method of the mediating Christian message and Church to assuage or cover it.

Predestination is the fundamental position at the heart of Calvin's system. By that he intends that God not only knows every man's destiny (which the Catholic tradition and scholasticism accepted), but also wills it, and that this will is just because it is the will of God. Election and reprobation follow from predestination. Calvin states that denials or equivocations on these matters are the contemptible sophistries of the schools. Such thinking had the good intention of saving the idea of the justice of God before the eyes of men, an intention that Calvin thought unnecessary and held in contempt. It is man who must accept God's will, not the other way around. In very abstract terms, Augustine and many medieval traditionalists actually accepted Calvin's view, but in practical terms imposed a softer more humanistic view in order to avoid the practical effects of the harsher one, which often were disastrous. Scope had to be given in any scheme geared for the commonalty of mankind to man's powers of will, and his ability to do good and to receive merit as his reward. Calvin's scheme denies such scope in its doctrines of justification by faith, freedom of the will, election and effectual calling. Though the first, which imputes justification to man by the formal cause of Christ's sacrifice and atonement, derives from Luther, while the others are of Calvin's own devising, a common thread of man's helplessness and worthlessness runs through them. To have the faith necessary for justification, one must have been given grace, for the faith cannot be merited as an act of man. To know that one is called, and is therefore of the elect, one must experience the secret operation of the Spirit, for no mere exercise of intellect or will can bring about assurance of calling or election. Thus in regard to the general doctrines it is the operation of the Spirit, and in regard to the Christian doctrines the free grace of God, about which the Calvinist believer must be attentive. Calvin did not foresee many of the psychological consequences of these positions. Since man is merely
human, his human intellect and will were to become bound up with the operation of the Spirit in "evidences of election," "signs of religious affections," the operations of "grace," and so forth. The proper path outlined by Calvin from despair over sin through assurance to glory might be followed by the Red Cross Knight and Bunyan's Pilgrim. A too easy path to assurance avoiding the terrors of sin, reprobation and unworthiness was to be taken by many of the political and social Puritans in the 17th century. Worse still, except perhaps for literature and the varied sensibility it engenders, many Puritans would later ignore Calvin's warning not to contemplate election and calling apart from the Christian hope in justification by faith, and these were to give us the Calvinist-Puritan tradition of despair, irony and an almost modern view of human helplessness and meaninglessness. One outstanding fact is clear from all this. Whatever Calvin himself would have approved or denied, and in spite of the glib commentary in literary circles that Calvinism was detrimental to complex experience because it launched the believer too easily on the road to assurance and glory, Calvin's system gave rise to a complex and original viewpoint of man towards himself, one that was decisive in its influence upon many areas of life in the western world for several hundred years.

The Calvinist positions were, in fact, so other-worldly in their pure form that corruption was inevitable among the common lot of men, as Augustinianism, monasticism and Jansenism were corrupted in their turn by contact with the world. The basic doctrine of the majesty of God was one that all the religious-minded must accept but few could live with consistently. The saying arose in Germany that all good men should live as Catholics (free will, merit for good life) and die as Lutherans (imputed righteousness, acknowledgement of sinfulness in all and the power of God). In short, having it both ways, or recognizing the just insights in both systems on justification, merit, grace and good works. Coleridge in the early 19th century viewed "high Calvinism" as a sheep in wolf's clothing and extreme "free will" Arminianism as the real hidden wolf. If one seriously considers moving the idea of merit and good works from the counting house and the world to the soul and the conscience, there is much truth in this insight of Coleridge. Calvin's insight about the basic relationship of man to God cannot be regarded lightly by believers of any persuasion, though on the other hand his sweeping rejection of the scope of the human function in the economy of grace is a view that
few can fully hold. Even in accepting his admonition to view election and calling solely within the confines of the Christian faith, many sincere believers were likely to fall into trouble, as the subsequent history of Calvinism proved. Though concentration upon the doctrine of justifying faith was likely to lead to proper assurance and sanctification, the problems inherent in calling and election were likely to lead in more dangerous directions. Calvin was aware of the dangers in calling and election, and warned against many circumstances, particularly the intrusion of human merit and intellectual speculation into the process of determining calling. He asserts that calling should not require unusual or impious speculation, but as usual, his interest is in preserving the glory and power of God at the risk of placing a terrible burden upon man.

This internal call therefore is a pledge of salvation, which cannot possibly deceive. . . . Here two errors are to be avoided. For some suppose man to be a co-operator with God, so that the validity of election depends on his consent; thus according to them the will of man is superior to the counsel of God. . . . Others . . . suspend election on that which is subsequent to it; as though it were doubtful and ineffectual until it is confirmed by faith. That this is its confirmation to us, is very clear; that it is the manifestation of God's secret counsel, before concealed, we have already seen . . . ratified with a seal. For what can be more absurd and inconsistent, when the Scripture teaches that we are illuminated according as God has chosen us, than our eyes being so dazzled with the blaze of this light as to refuse to contemplate election? At the same time I admit that, in order to attain an assurance of our salvation, we ought to begin with the Word. . . . (III, 20)

We see in this passage a movement back and forth between direct contemplation of the mysteries of election and calling, and the safer acceptance of manifestation of calling in justification by faith in Christ. Calvin must give the theoretical power of God its due, yet admonishes as to the dangers of vain and idle speculation apart from faith.

As it is erroneous, therefore, to suspend the efficacy of election upon the faith of the gospel, by which we discover our interest in election; so we shall observe the best order, if, in seeking an assurance of our election, we confine our attention to those subsequent signs which are certain attestations of it. . . . I call it seeking in a wrong way, when miserable man endeavours to force his way into the secret recesses of Divine Wisdom, and to penetrate even to the highest eternity, that he may discover what is determined concerning him at the tribunal of God . . . then he sinks himself in an abyss of total darkness. For it is right that the folly of the human mind should be thus punished with horrible destruction, when it attempts by its own ability to rise to the summit of Divine Wisdom. (III, 20)
Calvin is hereby opening the way for the most interesting ambiguities and an unexpected open-endedness in his system, for though this system prescribes rules and principles in the clearest possible order, it cannot prescribe method, that is, the exact experience of the would-be believer in relation to these rules and principles. It is true that later in the system there is an elaborate doctrine of the Church including method of worship, of reception of the two sacraments, of preaching, hymn singing, and so on. This emphasis on the community of believers in the Church was designed, and quite rightly, to occupy the religious life of believers and to relieve disquiet about speculative areas of their faith. However, as was said above, in the most serious areas of the intellectual and emotional life, the believer, if a person of intelligence and sensibility, was thrown back upon his own resources in seeking answers to the questions of election, calling and justification. The serious Calvinist-Puritan had to become more introspective than had the serious medieval Catholic before him. The latter, who also believed that Christ was the formal cause of justification, might yet believe in faith as an active virtue, in merit and good works, in infused righteousness, and thus could bring to the confessional a reasonable certainty that his debts and credits, if calculated honestly in conscience, were properly attributed to him on the divine scroll. It is true that Pelagianism, Arminianism and Jansenism, variations of the moderate and officially sanctioned scheme of Thomistic scholasticism, led to the consequences of more or less assurance than the scheme of Calvinism. But for the most part the mediating schemes of the Mass, penance, confession and transubstantiation of the Eucharist provided reasonable certainty for the believer who chose to believe. The mediation in Calvinism is by calling, justification and sacraments as “signs” of grace and election, and behind these signs lurked for many the abyss which Calvin at the same time encouraged and deplored.

Calvin’s response to his own dilemma of being God-election-intellect centered on the one hand and Christ-justification-emotion centered on the other is to give warning after warning to the dangers of contemplating predestination abstractly, while stubbornly clinging to belief in the necessity of the doctrine. This warning is always for the believer to turn from the abstract view of God to the Word and the life of the Church, but it is clear from Calvin’s fascination with the subject that sensitive Calvinists were not likely to treat it lightly:
Therefore, if we dread shipwreck, let us anxiously beware of this rock, on which none ever strike without being destroyed. But though the discussion of predestination may be compared to a dangerous ocean, yet, in traversing over it, the navigation is safe and serene, and I will also add pleasant, unless any one freely wishes to expose himself to danger. For as those who, in order to gain an assurance of their election, examine into the eternal counsel of God without the word, plunge themselves into a fatal abyss, so they who investigate it in a regular and orderly manner, as it is contained in the word, derive from such inquiry the benefit of peculiar consolation. . . . Hence we conclude, that they are beyond all danger of falling away, because the intercession of the Son of God for their perseverance in piety has not been rejected. What did Christ intend we should learn from this, but confidence in our perpetual security, since we have once been introduced into the number of his people. (III, 24, 4)

The cleavage here is striking as to the consequences of the alternate paths. On the one hand, shipwreck, anxiety, dangerous ocean, fatal abyss; on the other, ocean, safe, serene, pleasant, assurance, consolation, perpetual security. Because of Calvin's stubbornness and tough-mindedness his followers were deprived of the possibility of stressing only the Christ-centered doctrine of justification, as did the later Methodists and Evangelicals in the 18th and 19th centuries. For although Calvin acknowledged, as any Christian must, the great emotional pull of belief and faith in Christ,

If we seek salvation, life, and the immortality of the heavenly kingdom, recourse must be had to no other; for [Christ] alone is the Fountain of life, the Anchor of salvation, and the Heir of the kingdom of heaven. . . . The persons therefore, whom God hath adopted as his children, he is said to have chosen, not in themselves, but in Christ. . . . But if we are chosen in him, we shall find no assurance of our election in ourselves; nor even in God the Father, considered alone, abstractedly from the Son. Christ, therefore, is the mirror, in which it behoves us to contemplate our election, and here we may do it with safety. (III, 24, 5)

he is always finally forced to admit that man cannot by any emotional means or faith limit the nature of the inscrutable God.

"O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" For, as Augustine justly contends, it is acting a most perverse part, to set up the measure of human justice as the standard by which to measure the justice of God. (III, 24, 22)

Examples of this dilemma in Calvin's thinking could be multiplied by looking further in his chapters on election, calling and justification. In the latter (III, 11–14) where the emphasis is necessarily on the positive side, stressing justification by faith through the imputed righteousness of Christ, his method of argument is the reverse of that
on election and calling. Most of the argument is given to stress on faith over works, the Spirit over the Law, and assurance over despair, and to the questions of immediate concern to the Christian believer. There is, from time to time nevertheless, clear acknowledgement of the theoretical precedence of election over justification:

No man, therefore, is properly founded on Christ, but he who has complete righteousness in him; since the apostle says, that he was sent, not to assist us in the attainment of righteousness, but to be himself our righteousness. That is to say, that we were chosen in him from eternity before the formation of the world, not on account of any merit of ours, but according to the purpose of the Divine will. . . . (III, 15)

How one achieved and maintained assurance, looking forward to calling, justification, sanctification and glorification while feeling at one’s back the anxieties of election, the sin-state of original sin, and reprobation is a nice question, on which the system and history of Calvinism turns. Calvinism, like all great intellectual systems, was Janus-faced in the creation of its own dilemmas. The Calvinist-Puritan thought about and felt these dilemmas in what he considered to be the center of his being, that is, his conscience.
III. The Primacy of Conscience

[Conscience] may bee taken for a kinde of actuall knowledge in the minde of man: but to speake properly, this knowledge must proceede of a power in the soule, the propertie whereof is to take the principles and conclusions of the minde and apply them, and by applying either to accuse or excuse. This is the ground of all, and this I take to be conscience.

Perkins, A Discourse of Conscience
2nd ed. Cambridge, 1608

In turning from consideration of the abstract doctrines of Calvinism as a system and theological force to consideration of the actual practice of the English Puritans, attention must be given to the primacy of the conscience in the Puritan tradition. Without attention to this point any study of the Puritan tradition would easily become a venture in the history of ideas and the fruitless effort that implies. In its range of ideas Puritan Calvinism is indebted to medieval scholasticism, to the other Protestant reformers, to the Renaissance, and later, to certain Enlightenment trends. Once can easily get lost in dealing with a great mass of ideas on the same subject seen from various points of view. Multiplying or refining analogies between the Calvinist doctrine of this and that and the Anglican or Catholic might easily lead us to believe that Puritanism as such did not exist. Certain studies of Renaissance ideas in relation to the Middle Ages have fallen into such embarrassment. On the other hand, one cannot merely rely upon history as the measure of the nature and existence of a tradition, for this easily leads to circular argument. It has also led, in the studies of Miller and Haller, to an exaggeration of Puritan uniqueness by taking up Puritan writers in the abstract and in a vacuum. Of this problem there will be more a little further on.

In order to be able to say that a tradition exists analytically, apart from history or reliance upon the works of other writers, it must
be shown that a body of writing, and a group of men, existed at a
given time and place with a qualifying difference in viewpoint about
an entire set of ideas, even if all the ideas themselves existed in the
same or almost the same form previously. Puritanism is such a set of
ideas or tradition, historically and analytically. Analysis reveals both a
startling similarity between the ideas of the Puritans and those of
medieval scholasticism and other forms of Protestantism, and an
important difference, or qualifying factor. This difference is the
Puritan's proclivity to view conscience as primary in human activity,
and to subsume all other forms of activity into that of the conscience.
Previously existing ideas are thus given a new cast, and many later
ones are successfully assimilated into the "system." This is the
tradition which converted Calvin's abstract system from a purely
logical theory into a living force for three centuries.

The primacy of conscience in the Puritan tradition can be demon-
strated in both theoretical and practical ways. The practical, which
will follow shortly, appeals to the experience and writings of the great
Puritan preachers and theologians of the Cambridge period. The
theoretical assumes for the moment that this work is known and has
been analysed for its dominant theme. In the interest of clarity this
dominant theme will be presented here.

The Puritan view of the conscience is best understood in relation to
the medieval scholastic background. The contrast is wide enough to
allow the clarity of difference to appear, yet the scholastic tradition is
wide enough in its scope to provide the proper background of
Puritanism. Briefly, the scholastic tradition had defined rather com-
pletely, for religious and moral purposes, the various uses of intellect,
will, emotions, conscience, and consciousness. Each faculty is given its
sphere, with intellect most important in the gaining of knowledge and
truth, will and conscience in determining actions and the state of sin.
Emotions were indifferent qualities, and lowest on the scale. They
were suspect as the source of concupiscence unless disciplined by the
intellect and the will. The great complications of scholastic faculty
philosophy cannot be gone into here, except to say that they allowed
generously for the complexities of man's mind and nature, yet insisted
ultimately upon the primacy of the will as the arbiter of sin. The
moral system based upon this philosophy and psychology was a
generous and general one, framed for all men and allowing for the
frailty of human nature. Within the scholastic moral system, not
contradicting it but directing the choices of man much more closely
was the counsel of the saints, in the writings of Hilton, a Kempis, the great mystics. In their views the direction of the intellect and the discipline of the emotions by the will and conscience assumed greater importance, leading at times to a good end, saintliness, and at others to a bad one, "angelism." Scholasticism allowed the saints to flourish as long as they did not disturb any cardinal principle, such as original sin or the disposition of the intellect to attain theoretical truth. Such disturbances occurred throughout the Middle Ages, and were usually successfully put down by reason or/and authority.

The English Calvinist-Puritan tradition historically is the child of one of the many medieval revolts against the scholastic doctrine of reasonableness and of coming to terms with the world. Everyone knows that Huss and Wycliffe, the crypto-reformers, contained in their doctrines the seeds of the Puritan and Protestant revolt. Following these men, the 16th and 17th century Puritans referred all ideas and doctrines to the aegis of the conscience, and further insisted that all men must follow the new moral path in order to be saved. Hence the most important terms in Puritanism are the conscience and "the saints." The latter has been much abused in English literature, from the time of Chaucer on.

If the function of conscience as the guide of the moral will was made supreme by the Puritans, it followed that the true and the beautiful were subordinated to the good, and were not to be followed for their own sakes. Yet the true and the beautiful were not ignored, for it was often necessary to ascertain whether something was true or beautiful in relation to the good. Intellect was kept busy here, searching out the true from the false in matters of truth and morality. The purely useful functions of the true, like the theoretical, were seldom given much individual emphasis, since the Bible existed as a guide as to what was true. Even more so was this the case with the beautiful — the aesthetic interest in art, nature and beauty in general. To the extent that the beautiful or the speculative might be moralized, it was received into the Puritan conscience and became its art. Otherwise, as the famous cases of Zwingli on the intellectual level and stained glass on the aesthetic indicate, the instinct of the intellect and the aesthetic could be ruthlessly surpressed. The Puritan imagination, in so far as it existed independently, was a moral imagination.

Will and conscience were the most important functions of the whole man. As regards the former, the major scholastic function of the will as regulator of the actions of man in the direction of the good was
accented completely. A moral life must be a life of practically good actions. But the more important theoretical function of the will in scholasticism, as the arbiter of sin, was turned over by the Puritans to the conscience in general. Sin was no longer technically "in the will," but in the whole being functioning as conscience. The formerly indifferent passions and emotions (indifferent as regards good or evil before an act of will) became also functions of the Puritan conscience. In other words, the emotions and passions must be purified in themselves, just as the intellect must be disciplined to think along religious lines. Consciousness itself, apart from conscience, had no separate existence for the Puritan, since the sense of conscience became in fact the workings of the passions, intellect and will together upon matters of morality and of faith. Here was the real secret of the Puritan revolution, the unique contribution to the history of man's life on earth. The Puritan was no more likely to be interested in an abstract point for itself — the binomial theorem, for instance — than he was in the purely aesthetic beauty of an apple. Yet mathematics and the beauty of an apple were desperately important for him insofar as they were moral questions or touched upon questions of conscience. They were thus subject to the allegorical and moral treatment given to all areas of experience by the Puritans. In the Calvinist-Puritan system old ideas and new experiences found their place under the aegis of the conscience. Only those ideas and experiences extremely repellent to the moral and intellectual life of the Puritan's conscience were rejected completely. If stage-drama and certain liberal scientific ideas were rejected, at the same time music, poetry on serious subjects, and a good deal of psychology and philosophy of the day were easily assimilated to the Puritan view of life.

Conscience, then, was both the theatre and the final arbiter of the Puritan drama. Within this theatre there were many moods and forms, some prescribed, others more spontaneous. The prescribed were the famous and well-known stages in the path of salvation — sin-consciousness, election, justification, sanctification, glorification, about which more soon. These strictly religious moods and stages colored all the other or freer aspects of the Puritan's life, but the others had their own areas of hegemony. Most important were eucharistic worship, prayer, the active vocation in life, and meditation. These often appeared in mixed forms, and thus certain of the arts, especially music, diary-keeping, and the reading and writing of literature found their place in the life of the godly. Here was the
Puritan's excuse for art, a moralizing art to be sure, which could absorb much, but by no means all, of the spheres of common life to the hegemony of morality in conscience. The Calvinist-Puritan supposedly lived "out of" the world, but managed to adopt much of the world to his standards. Indeed, his purpose was to reform the world at large, for which much of the world has not forgiven him his pains.

It follows, then, that certain important ideas of the medieval-scholastic tradition appear in Calvinist-Puritanism in a new form. Puritanism rejected the scholastic codification of a general morality for all men which allowed a good deal for the laxity of human nature and for man's interests other than in the purely moral or religious. On the other side it also rejected the minority view of the Middle Ages, that certain individuals should secede from the world to attain a greater perfection of morality and feeling than the world at large could attain. The Puritan way was new in being a middle way, having elements of the saintly and mystical traditions (the discipline of intellect and emotions) and of the scholastic-worldly (laboring in one's vocation in the world). Its tone and moral standard is much more religious than that of the medieval world at large, and more religious than the norm of the successor religions of the Reformation period (a point not hard to prove, for on it rests the reason for religious wars and emigrations). Yet it is much less purely ascetic and narrow in its religious interests than the high strain of asceticism in medieval Catholicism or its counterparts today. Its devotion is in the world, and the major originality of the Puritans could be said to be the reformation of the conscience along the lines given above to make of it an instrument for the sanctification of every individual in the world. The heights of earlier sainthood, and the depths of the common spirit, are equally avoided. All are called, and theoretically capable of performing their duties on the road to sainthood. We are interested for our purposes here mainly in what the Puritans did with that worldly device, literature, and with what softening effects literature had upon the Puritans.

In presenting the characteristic moods and doctrines of the Calvinist temper in the 17th century out of the writings of preachers and theologians, one great error of many previous studies can perhaps be avoided if we understand the function of conscience in the Puritan's life. Writers have often claimed too much, or too little, for the originality of Puritan thought. This has been the case for two reasons. A really careful sifting of Puritan ideas in relation to medieval
scholasticism has not been made, and what little has been done is not widely known by historians and critics. In the few cases where certain ideas have been viewed in a comparative way, or in relation to a permanent theological problem, Puritan originality has often been quickly diminished by the history of ideas pattern. To give some examples, Haller in *The Rise of Puritanism* writes at times as if no ideas or images of the Calvinist-Puritan tradition had existed before the Puritan movement. Wakefield, in his *Puritan Devotion*, by excessive quotation of Bishop Bayly’s *Practice of Pietie*, a dubious source of Puritan devotion, tends to blur the distinction between the purely Puritan and other strands of 16th century piety. Martz and Ross, in ways practical and theoretical respectively, make excessive claims for the influence of Counter Reformation theory and devotion in 17th century England, to the diminishment of the influence of Puritan originality. One must steer a careful course here, and the way to do so is knowing the value of sources and influences.

Yet the relationship of Calvin to his primary sources, medieval Thomism and Augustinianism, is clearly known, and available to those who take the trouble to seek out the proper sources. Few literary critics have taken this trouble. The situation concerning the sources of the Puritan imagination is more troubled, since the two best writers on the subject, Haller and Miller, tend to assume originality of ideas in what they have found in reading the 17th century material, not originality of purpose. Their expert shaping of this material has created a powerful “myth of Puritan origins” which is the starting point of literary (and indeed other) study of the Puritan situation. This impasse might have been already corrected if scholars in medieval philosophy and thinking had taken an interest in Puritan thought, which they largely have not done. Dom David Knowles, the great expert on medieval philosophy and theology in England, once stated privately that there was no influence of the medieval Catholic period upon the Puritans. These are areas of study, in England and America, in which feeling is still partisan on both sides, and has led unfortunately to lack of knowledge by one side of the other.

Since our concern is not primarily with Puritan origins or with medieval sources as such, there is space for only one important example here of the relationship between Puritanism and the medieval tradition, that between Haller’s *Rise of Puritanism* and a fairly well-known book, Walter Hilton’s *The Scale of Perfection*. Haller was perhaps the first to point out the recurring motif — initia-