

**AUTHOR:**

D. Britz

**AFFILIATION:**

Department of Church History and Polity, University of Pretoria

**CORRESPONDENCE TO:**

Prof Dolf Britz

**EMAIL:**

britz.dolf@gmail.com

**POSTAL ADDRESS:**

PO Box 12654, BRANDHOF, 9324

**DATES:**

Published: 15 Dec. 2017

**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Britz, D., 2017. A life cultivated by righteousness: Calvin's exposition of the eighth Commandment in teaching children. KOERS — Bulletin for Christian Scholarship, 82(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.82.2.2347>

**COPYRIGHT:**

© 2017. The Author(s).  
Published under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

# A life cultivated by righteousness: Calvin's exposition of the eighth Commandment in teaching children

## Abstract

*This article profiles Calvin's elucidation of the eighth Commandment ('You shall not steal') in his catechetical works, thus linked to a setting determined by instruction and tuition of children. The 1537/8, the 1542/5 Catechisms as well as *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne* (1538-41) and *La maniere d'interroguer les enfans* (1551) are considered and related to his great pedagogical works the *Institutes*. In teaching children, Calvin keeps the theological framework, in which he deals with the Law in his *Institutes*, intact. The trajectories that he follows in his explication of the Commandment in the *Institutes*, also surface in his catechetical education. The emphasis shifts from the 'fear and love of God' (1536) to 'God's righteousness' (injustice-justice) (1539) as a determining theological motive in the interpretation of the Commandment, and can also be traced in his catechetical work. Calvin, therefore, explains to children that our lives in Christ, in the righteousness of Christ, are shaped by what is prohibited and demanded by the Commandment. Because: The more clearly God's Law reveals his righteousness, the more it unmasks our ingenuity and condemnation. And this is in his Christ. In Christ God's countenance shines full of grace and kindness even toward poor and unworthy sinners. It is by faith that Christ is embraced and enjoyed only by believers, the children are assured, who receive Him, sent to them, who do not reject Him, given to them, who follow Him, who is calling them.*

**Key concepts:** Calvin, Ten Commandments, Catechetical instruction, Eighth Commandment, Theft, Social justice

## Opsomming

*Hierdie artikel skets die uitleg van die agste gebod in die kategetiese werk van Calvyn, dit wil sê, hoe hy hierdie gebod ('Jy mag nie steel nie') binne 'n konteks waarin kinders onderrig ontvang het, verduidelik het. Vir hierdie doeleinde is die 1537/8, die 1542/5 kategismusse asook *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne* (1538-41) en *La maniere d'interroguer les enfans* (1551) oorweeg en in verband met sy groot pedagogiese werk, die *Institusie*, gebring. In die onderrig aan kinders hou Calvyn hom by die teologiese raamwerk waarin hy die wet in sy *Institusies* behandel. Die trajekte wat hy in sy verduideliking van die agste gebod volg, duik ook op in die kategetiese onderwys. Die klemverskuiwing van die 'vrees en liefde vir God' (1536) na die 'geregtigheid van God' (onreg/reg) (1539) as bepalende teologiese motief by die uitleg van die gebod, kan eweneens in sy kategetiese werk opgespoor word. Calvyn verduidelik dus vir kinders dat ons lewe in Christus, in die geregtigheid van Christus, gestalte kry in wat die gebod verbied en gebied. En die rede? Hoe helderder God se wet sy geregtigheid aan die lig bring, des te helderder ontmasker dit ons ongeregtigheid en verdoemenis. En, dit gebeur in sy Christus. In Christus straal God se aangesig vol genade en ontferming uit tot selfs arme en onwaardige sondaars. Deur geloof word Christus omhels en geniet slegs deur gelowiges, verseker Calvyn die kinders, wat Hom, gestuur na hulle, ontvang, wat Hom, gegee vir hulle, nie verwerp nie, wat Hom, terwyl Hy hulle roep, volg.*

**Sleutelbegrippe:** Calvyn, Tien Gebooie, Kategetiese onderrig, Agste Gebod, Diefstal, Sosiale geregtigheid

## 1. Introduction

Calvin compiled four works to serve a particular catechetical purpose. These were:

- *Instruction et confession de foy don't on use en l'Eglise de Geneve* (1537), translated in Latin as *Catechismus seu christianae religionis institutio ecclesiae genevensis* (1538);
- *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne faicte par maniere de dialogue* (1538-1541);
- *Le Catéchisme de l'Eglise de Genève, c'est a dire le Formulaire d'instruire les enfants en la Chrestiente* (1542), and the Latin translation *Catechismus ecclesiae genevensis, hoc est, formula erudiendi pueris in doctrina Christi* (1545), and
- *La maniere d'interroguer les enfans qu'on veut recevoir a la cene Seigneur Iesus Christ* (1551).

The leading questions, directed at these sources, are: How did Calvin explain the eighth Commandment (*You shall not steal*) to children sharing in the catechetical teaching of the church? What were the underpinning theological purpose and rationale deployed in his explication? Is his catechetical teaching on the Commandment (and the Law) embedded in his 'theology of the Law' a decisive component of his theological work in general? Or, do differentiated lines of thinking surface in the catechetical publications? The purpose of the research is thus to profile Calvin's explanation of the Commandment when dealing with children in a setting determined by instruction and tuition.

A chronological approach (according to the date of publication) provided the best method to outline Calvin's *catechetical* interpretation of the Commandment. Calvin's explication of the eighth Commandment in his great pedagogical work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, however, was also considered and included in the investigation. This not only served to delineate Calvin's catechetical explanation within the whole of his theology, but also offered a platform from which to reflect on the underpinning theological trajectories in his catechetical works, which shaped his teaching of the Commandment.

The survey, therefore, commences with an exposition of the eighth Commandment in the 1536 *Christianae Religionis Institutio*, printed in Basel.

## 2. 1536: *Christianae Religionis Institutio*

*Summa feresacrae doctrinae* (OS I, 37.7), Calvin articulated the very first sentence of his 1536 *Christianae Religionis Institutio*, consists of the following two parts: 'knowledge of God and of ourselves' (*cognitione Dei ac nostri*, OS I, 37.8). This statement concerning the *sacrae doctrinae* is thus immediately made fundamental to his theological teaching. The purpose is functional and dynamic: it shares knowledge, creates insight and is embraced.

According to Calvin, the knowledge, comprehension and embracing of the *sacrae doctrinae* makes us 'ready to get an understanding of what we must learn from the Law, namely that God is indeed Creator, our Lord and Father; for this reason glory, honor and love is due to Him by us. And, since none of us fulfills his part, we all are worthy of his curse, his judgment - in short, eternal death. Therefore, we must seek another way for our salvation than through the righteousness of our works, that is, (through) forgiveness of our sins.<sup>1</sup> This then, constitutes the theological framework and demarcation of the 'written Law of

<sup>1</sup> *Nunc intelligere promptum est, quid ex lege discendum sit: nempe Deum creatorem esse, dominum ac patrem nostrum; hac ratione deberi illi a nobis gloriam, honorem, amorem; iam cum nemo ex nobis partibus suis defungatur, omnes nos malediction, iudicio, morte demum aeterna dignos esse; quaerendam igitur aliam salutis viam, quam per operam nostrorum iustitiam. Ea est peccatorum remissio* (OS I, 39.40-40.2-7).

God' given to us by God (*Deum legem nobis scriptam posuit ... OS I, 39.18*). The teaching of the Law is the preaching of Christ. What God demands, is given by Him in Christ. Therefore, the Law must be taught.

How did Calvin, in terms of this framework, explain the eighth Commandment in the *Christianae Religionis Institutio*?

In his elucidation of the Commandment ('You shall not steal', OS I, 51.6-20), Calvin entrenches his argument in required, and thus due, fear of and love to God. It has an instantaneous effect. The Commandment has accordingly the following meaning: 'Since God should be feared and loved by us' (OS I, 51.8-9), he writes, the meaning (*sententia*) of the commandment has the following consequences: We may not

- intercept (*intercipio*) or rob anyone in terms of fraud (OS I, 51.9-10); or
- by force of hand seize (*rapio*) something emanating from him that belongs to him (OS I, 51.10); or
- deceive (*circumscribe*, or impose on) the uninformed (or ignorant) in our business and contracts by (1) selling (at a) higher or (2) cheaper (price) than what is fair to people who are unfamiliar with the prices of the items (OS I, 51.10-13); or
- by any other form of guile or fraud lay (*injicio*) our skilled hands on the possessions of others (OS I, 51.13-14).

If indeed we fear and love God, he continues, then we should rather

- devote all effort (*incumbo*), to friends and enemies, in so far as it is permitted, by word and deed, to endorse the preservation of their property (OS I, 51.15-17); and
- rather concede of our own, than to take from others (OS. I, 51.17-18).

Thirdly, Calvin observes, when they are overwhelmed by financial problems, we need to share in their distress and relieve their misery from our abundance (Isa. 58; Rom. 12:20; 2 Cor. 8:20; Eph. 4: 28) (OS I.18-20).

When God is feared and loved, the denotative meaning of the Commandment is thus that we should not steal, seize, cheat or hurt fellow human beings in any form of conduct with regards to their property. Contrarily, we should preserve their property, whether friend or enemy – as far as permitted – and rather concede of our own. When they are overwhelmed with financial problems, we should step in and adequately relieve them in terms of our abundance. Therefore, when and where God is feared and loved - the underpinning theological structure – is read in relation to the introductory remarks concerning knowledge of God and ourselves, the meaning of the Commandment is illuminated in the dynamic and consequential coherence of abstinence (prohibition) and inclination, preference, support, benevolence (demand), coinciding with a life-style permuted by the very fear and love of God in Christ.

Does Calvin deliberately reflect on the realities concerning property and business of everyday life of the Christian society of his time? He makes a sharp analysis of how the eighth Commandment is transgressed, and then outlines the inevitable effects on shaping true Christian life if God were indeed to have been feared and loved. Would this trajectory be maintained in the catechetical works he compiled in subsequent years? Or, did he change his angle of approach when children were taught? The next paragraph is devoted to an investigation of Calvin's exposition of the Commandment in the *Instruction et Confession de Foy* that was specifically designed to educate children in the Christian faith.

### 3. 1537: *Instruction et Confession de Foy/Catechismus, sive christiana religionis institution (1538)*

As a core document to enhance the reformation of the city, Farel and Calvin compiled the *Articles concernant l'organisation de l'Eglise et du culte à Genève, proposes au conseil par les ministres* (see De Greef 2006:154 ff.). The Council accepted these in January 1537. The third article provided for the religious education of the children, to be tutored by parents and guided by the pastors (Zillenbillir 2002:XI). To meet this purpose, Calvin designed and published the *Instruction et Confession de Foy* in Geneva early in 1537, while a Latin translation, *Catechismus seu christiana religionis institution ecclesiae genevensis*, was printed in 1538 in Basle (Zillenberger 2002:XII). The *Instruction* is 'bedoeld als een korte, eenvoudige samenvatting van het geloof, geschikt voor het geven van onderwijs aan de kinderen...' (De Greef 2006:168). In scholarship,<sup>2</sup> carefully summarised by Zillenbillir (Zillenbillir 2002: XII-XVII), the significance of the *Instruction/Catechismus* is linked to the development of Calvin's theological thought and seen as the first steps towards reviewing the *Institutes*.

In his explanation of the eighth Commandment, Calvin remains with the trajectories of his 1536 elucidation. The emphasis is again on property and the prohibition of violent alienation thereof. He writes that the Commandment in general prohibits any action that, by way of unexpected ambush, waylay the property of the other (*Que nous ne surprénions les biens l'un de l'autre*, COR III/II, 25.2-3. Latin: *insidiar* 'to lie in ambush', COR III/II, 24.2). 'For the Lord wills that all plunder (*toutes rapines*) be far removed from his people, by which the weak are burdened and oppressed (*par lesquelles les imbecilles sont grevez et oppressez*, COR III/II, 25.4-5), and all deceits, by which the innocence of the simple is deceived' (COR III/II, 25.5-6. Latin: *circumveniatur circumvenio enclosed, encircles* COR III/II 24.4).

The reference and mentioning of the burdened and oppressed represent a new accent, though, which was missing in the 1536 *Institutes*. Calvin touches on inequalities and injustices committed in the social and political life of his day. The concluding statement underlines that, if we wish to abstain from theft, we should 'abstain no less from all cunning and craftiness, than from violent plunder' (*que de ravissemens violans*, COR III/II, 25.8).<sup>3</sup>

His theological exposition of the Law reflects the same design as the 1536 *Institutio* as well. 'In the Law of God we are given the most perfect rule of righteousness' (COR III/II, 11.24-25. Latin COR III/II, 10.20-21: *In lege Dei perfectissima totius istitiae regula traditur...*), he emphasized. Total obedience to the Divine will in terms of the Law alone would thus suffice for salvation. However, Calvin asserts that the children are proved to be transgressors (*transgresseurs*, COR III/II, 29.11-12) of God's Law. The more clearly God's Law discloses his righteousness, the more it unmask on the other hand our ingenuity (COR III/II, 29.11-14) and condemnation (COR III/II, 29.19).

There is no reason to fall into despair (en *desespoir*, COR III/II, 29.21), since the Lord consoles us with the faithfulness of his power en mercy. And this is in his Christ. In Christ his countenance shines full of grace and kindness even toward poor and unworthy sinners (COR III/II, 31.9-10). It is by faith that Christ is embraced and enjoyed only by believers, the children are reassured, who receive Him, sent to them, who do not reject Him, given to them, who follow Him, who is calling them (*Lesquelz le reçoivent, ne le rejectent, leur estant donné, et le suyvent, estans appelez de luy*, COR III/II, 31.21-22). Thus: knowledge of God's Christ is shared, creates insight and is embraced!

2 See Zillenbillir 2006:97-103; Saxer 1994:131-137; Hesselink 1997:39-43.

3 For the Battles translation of the eighth Commandment, see Hesselink (1997:16): 'By this commandment we are forbidden to waylay one another's possessions. For the Lord wills that all robberies and oppressions that plague the weak, all frauds that cheat the innocence of simple persons, be far removed from his peoples. Therefore, if we wish to keep our hands clean and innocent of theft, we must abstain no less from all cunning and craftiness than from violent plunder'.

In 1538 Calvin and Farel had to leave Geneva. Calvin joined Bucer in Strasbourg, where he ministered to the French congregation in the city. To teach children belonging to this congregation he compiled *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne faite par maniere de dialogue*, in which a brief exposition of the Decalogue was included. He also thoroughly reviewed his *Institutio*, before he was called back to Geneva in 1542. Both these publications should now receive our attention.

#### 4. 1538/41: *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne faite par maniere de dialogue*

The Strasbourg compiled *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne faite par maniere de dialogue* (OS II, 152-157) was published between 1538 and 1541 (De Greef 2006:169). In terms of questions and answers this booklet offers a concise explanation of the confession (12 Articles) (OS II, 152.15-154.21), the Lord's Prayer (OS II, 154.4-156.4) and the Decalogue (OS II, 156.6-157.34). The eighth Commandment *Ne sois point larron* (OS II, 157.4) is clustered together with the last five commands. In his teaching, Calvin, however, does not specifically consider the eighth Commandment. What the Commandment means, however, is contained in his remarks about the other four. The minister in this regard asks: 'What do these Commandments of the Lord entail? The answer is: 'We are enjoined to bear no harm to anyone, whether in thought, in speech, in fact (deed), or omission of pleasure and that I do injure by facing (or confronting) his body, his wife, his children, his property and his good reputation' (OS II, 157.5-10).<sup>4</sup>

The last few questions of *La tierce partie* (OS II, 156.5) are aligned with the observation, put forward as an inquiry: *Mais peuls tu parvenir en ceste vie presente en si grande perfection?* ('But can you reach in this life such great perfection?'). The answer is not at all! (OS II, 157.18-19). 'Our nature is so corrupt with perversion that the only remission of sin and righteousness come from Christ' (*Noster nature est si corrupue quelle n'a aucun bien mais toute remission de peche et toute iustice viennent de Christ*, OS II, 157.27-29). Thus: 'put all your trust in Him and stay in Him' (*Mets doncques toute ta fiance en luy suel et demeure en luy*, OS II, 157.29-30). In Him there is no condemnation by the Law. Therefore the desire and affection towards his Law will be enflamed in you, Calvin points out (OS II, 157.31-32). In all these things, he concludes, we must give honour and glory forever to our Lord Jesus Christ. 'Amen.' (*Toutes ces choses te vueille donner nostre Seigneur JESUS CHRIST: Auquel soit honneur et glyre a iamais. AMEN.* OS II, 157.32-34).

The structure of *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne*, Faith-Prayer-Law, is noteworthy. It indicates a theological reordering, that comparatively became so characteristic of the 1539 reviewed *Institutes*. The terms of the classification Faith-Prayer-Law, the Law, however, received in the 1539 edition the 'middle position'. The exposition of the Commandments, as well as the explication of the meaning of the Law, follow the trajectories already argued in 1536 and 1537/8.

#### 5. 1539: *Institutio Christianae Religionis*

In the reviewed 1539 edition of the *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, Calvin does not consider the Law and the exposition of the Commandments in the initial chapters (as is the case in the 1536 edition), but later, in the second book. This book comprises *de cognitione dei redemptoris in Christo, quae Patribus sub Lege primum, deinde et nobis in Evangelio patefacta est* (OS III, 228.3-5). Chapter seven is devoted to the Law, given ... to keep alive the hope of salvation in Christ, until his advent (OS III, 32620-21). The Law was not affixed (*superaddo*,

4 *M. Que deffendent ces commandemens du Seigneur? L. Ilz nous commandent de ne porter aucun dommage a personne, soit en pensee / en parole / en fait / ou omission de plaisir. Et que ie ne face iniure a son corps a son femme a ses enfans a ses bien ne a sa bonne renomee* (OS II, 157.5-10).

OS III, 326.24) after the death of Abraham to lead the elect people (Israel) away from Christ, but to confirm their expectation (OS III, 326.24-26) of the Redeemer, that is, the blessing promised (*quo benedictionem ... promissam*, OS III, 326, 30-31). This alteration is the theological consequence of Calvin's Christological de-construction of the concurrence of knowledge of God and ourselves and the Law, so clearly argued in the 1536 edition, and integrated in the catechetical works published in 1537 and 1538.

Although 'a perfect righteousness is set before us in the Law' (OS III, 329.9-11), complete observance, Calvin wrote, is perfect righteousness in the sight of God, but in consequence of the depravity of our nature it is impossible for us to fulfil the Law (... *impossible esse in hac carne Legis implementum, si naturae nostrae impotentia, intuenur*, OS III, 331.34). The result of this must be despondency, confusion, and despair, seeing that we are all cursed and condemned by it (OS III, 329.36-330.1). But, he asserts, the Law has not, however, been given in vain (OS III, 330.9). We have indeed learned, Calvin says, that the promises are fruitless and powerless for us, unless God embraces us, without taking into account our works, and we by faith embrace the kindness and grace revealed in the Gospel (See OS III, 330.10-14). Although Calvin expounds his argument, the theological scaffolding supporting his 1539 reflection of the Law, is still the same as that of the 1536 *Institutio*.

Refining his teaching, he then elucidates 'the function (or office) and use of the Moral Law' (*officium usumque Legis*, OS III, 332.3.) It consists of three parts. The first is an exhibition of the absolute righteousness of God (*justitiam Dei*, OS III, 332.6). The Law is a kind of mirror in which we discover our impotence; then, in consequence of it, our iniquity; and, finally, the curse, as the consequence of both (OS III, 332.33-36). The more it declares the righteousness of God, the more, on the other hand, it discloses our iniquity; the more certainly it assures us that life and salvation are treasured up as the reward of righteousness, the more certainly it assures us that the unrighteous will perish (OS III, 333.25-30). Does this lead to despair? With the children of God the effect is different (OS III, 334.9-10). They know thus that they are fully dependent on the hand of God and consequently may take refuge in his mercy, rely upon it, and cover themselves up entirely with it; renouncing all righteousness and merit, and clinging to mercy alone, as offered in Christ to all who long and look for it in true faith (OS III, 334.16-21).

The second function of the Law, (*secundum Legis officium est*, OS III, 335.30) by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, is to restrain those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice. Such persons are curbed not because their minds are inwardly moved and affected, but because, as if a bridle were laid upon them, they refrain their hands from external acts, and internally check the depravity to which they would otherwise deliberately surrender themselves (OS III, 335.30-35, 336.1). Calvin observes that this fear and forced righteousness are for the good of society (*necessaria est publicae hominum communitati*, OS III, 336.160). This use of the Law also has the effect of keeping people to some degree in the fear and reverence of God, till, being regenerated by his Spirit, they begin to love Him from the heart (OS III, 337.19-22).

The third use of the Law (*tertius usus*, OS III, 337.23), in its effect on believers (*Nam tametsi digito Dei Legem scriptam et insculptam habent in cordibus, hoc est, sic affecti sunt et animati per Spiritus directionem ut obtemperare Deo cupiant ...* OS III, 337.25-28), is seen by Calvin as the best instrument for enabling them to learn daily with greater truth and certainty what the will of the Lord is whom they aspire to follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge (OS III, 337.29-31). Daily instruction by the Law advances to a purer knowledge of the Divine will (*progressus in puriore, divinae voluntatis notitiam*, OS III, 337, 37-33.1), avoiding the slippery ways of sin (*a delinquendi lubrico retrahatur*, OS III, 338.4). For the Law not only teaches, but also imperiously demands (*Non enim solum docet Lex, sed imperiose exigit quod mandate*, OS III, 340.16-17). Thus, he concludes, 'we spend our lives in the cultivation of righteousness' (*justitiam tota vita nobis necessario colendam*, OS III, 344.36-37).

The eighth chapter comprises *Legis moralis explicatio* (OS III, 343.24). At the outset, it was established, as Calvin asserts, that human life is constituted (or shaped by) in the Law, not merely in outward decency but in inward spiritual righteousness (*Initio constitutum sit non ad externam honestam modo, sed ad interiorem spiritualemque iustitiam, hominis vitam in Lege informari*. OS III, 348.7-9). By emphasising this meaning of the Law, Calvin is convinced that he is not introducing a new interpretation of his own: 'we are following Christ, the best interpreter of the Law', he notes (*sed Christum sequimur optimum Legis interpretem*, OS III, 349.15-16).

This is a statement of consequence. Accordingly, there is always more in the requirements and prohibitions of the Law than is expressed in words, he maintains (*Haec nobis secunda sit observatio, plus inesse semper in praeceptis ac interdictis quam verbis exprimitur*, OS III, 350.5-6). In almost all the Commandments, he says, there are *synecdochae*,<sup>5</sup> and that, therefore, any one would make himself ridiculous by attempting to restrict the meaning of the Law to the strict letter of the words. It is plain that a sober interpretation of the Law must go beyond these, he writes, but how far, is doubtful, unless some rule be adopted. The best rule, in his opinion, would be, Calvin postulates, to be guided by the principle of the Commandment, that is, to consider in the case of each what the purpose is for which it was given. For example, every Commandment either requires or prohibits; and the nature of each is instantly discerned when we look to the principle of the Commandment as its end (OS III, 350.15-24).<sup>6</sup>

In the 1539 edition, Calvin adds, and reflects upon, the rule according to which the Law should be interpreted. The key issue is that this rule should be determined by the purpose for which the Command is given. In this regard, the three functions of the Law he distinguished are important. But, if the whole of his argument is taken into account, the rule of interpretation can never be set apart from the underlying fundamental relationship of Christ and the Law, that is, the righteousness of God and its imputation to and embracement by pardoned man. However, it is also clear that Calvin has already applied this rule to the interpretation of the Law in his former works.

Against this background, the interpretation and explication of the eighth Commandment can now be considered.

## 6. The 1539 exposition of the eighth Commandment

The explication of the eighth Commandment – for the fourth time in as many years – entails two paragraphs (OS III, 384.7-386.19), closely knitted together to offer a comprehensive interpretation. Calvin adheres to the fundamental structure of his 1536 *Institution* exposition, which, within the framework of the existence of fear and love for God, prohibits and demands. However, it is striking that he does not now utilize the construct 'fear and love for God' as the fundamental motive for the significance of the Commandment. Instead, his point of departure is elsewhere: in the *righteousness* of God, or, as he puts it: 'since injustice is an abomination to God, we should render to each what belongs to him' (*Quoniam abominationi est Deo iniustitiae ...* OS III, 384.7). The *summa* is that we are forbidden to pant after the possessions of others and that we are consequently commanded to faithfully or honestly exert ourselves in preserving his possessions (for him) (OS III, 384.8-10), because injustice is an abomination to the righteousness of God.

5 Expressions in which the whole is indicated by a fragment or segment of it.

6 *Ane adeo in omnibus fere praeceptis manifestae sunt synecdochae, ut deridiculo iure sit futurus qui Legis sensum ad verborum angustias restringere velit. Ultra verba itaque progredi sobriam Legis interpretationem palam est: sed quousque, obscurum manet, nisi modus aliquis finiatur. Hunc ergo modum optimum foreo senso, si cepto expandatur cur datum nobis fuerit. Exempli gratia, omne praeceptum aut imperativum est, aut prohibitorium, (OS III, 350.15-24).*

In this new premise ('God-injustice-justice') Calvin finds the foundation for his argument. It should (accordingly) be considered that what is possessed has not come by chance, *sed ex distributione summi rerum omnium Domini* ('but by the distribution of the supreme Lord of all') (OS III, 384.12). God disseminated it. If, then, by evil devices someone is deprived of his/her possessions, *God's* – this is the ultimate consequence of his argument – dispensation is fraudulently set aside. God's government breaks through in giving and fulfilling this Commandment. It is a government full of justice. The offense is thus against God in the first place.

The corruptions of the Commandment, according to Calvin, emerge in all kinds of theft. These are embodied, he stipulates (OS III, 384.14-19), in:

- violence, when possessions are forcefully plundered and carried off in unrestrained brigandage;
- malicious deceit when goods are fraudulently intercepted;
- concealed craftiness when goods are alienated with a semblance of justice;
- flatteries when one is cheated of his goods under the pretence of a gift.

As a result Calvin emphasises that when *artes omnes* (all deeds) (OS III, 384.20) whereby possessions and money are obtained depart from sincere affection to a desire to cheat or to injure, they are to be considered as theft. Even though such possessions may be obtained by legal action, yet, according to Calvin, God does not judge otherwise. God sees:

- the intricate deceptions (OS III, 384.25);
- the hard and inhuman laws with which the more powerful oppresses and crushes the weak (OS III, 385.9-11);
- the enticements with which the wily man baits his hooks to catch the unwary (OS III, 384.28-29).

All these things elude human judgment, but not that of God. Such injustices or violations do not occur in matters of money, merchandise of land (agriculture) but in the right of each (*sed in iure cuiusque*, OS III, 384.32). We defraud our neighbours of their property if we repudiate the duties by which we are obliged to them. For he who does not carry out what he owes to others according to the responsibility of his calling, both withholds and appropriates what is another's (OS III, 185.1-3).

The second paragraph is devoted to observing the Commandment. It is duly obeyed, if, contented with our own lot (OS III, 385.4), we

- acquire (or are zealous to make) only honest and lawful gain (OS III, 385.6);
- do not seek to become wealthy (rich) through injustice (OS III, 6);
- do not attempt to deprive (rip away, plunder) our neighbour of his goods to increase our own (OS III, 385.6-7);
- do not hasten or strive to heap up wealth, cruelly wrung from the blood of others (OS III, 385.7-9);
- do not with excessive eagerness scrape together from everywhere by fair means or by foul to feed our avarice or satisfy our prodigality (OS III, 385.9-11).

Our constant and faithful aim should

- always be to help all by our council and aid so as to assist them in retaining their property (OS III, 385.11-13);

- be prepared to give up somewhat of our own if we have to deal with faithless and deceitful men, rather than to contend with them (OS III, 185.13-15);
- to share the necessity of those whom we see pressed by the difficulty of affairs, assisting them in their need with our abundance (OS III, 185.15-17).

The remainder of the paragraph (OS 111, 385.19 ff.) incorporates part of the interpretation of the 10th Commandment, as argued in the 1536 *Institutio*. In the 1539 edition, Calvin moved it to the explication of the eighth Commandment. It now serves the broad scope of the eighth Commandment and is utilized to exemplify the praxis of and order in the structure of a Christian society. And, social justice and injustice form a significant trajectory in his explanation. This is in line with the application Calvin made in the previous paragraph regarding theft. For example, he remarked there that if a shiftless steward or overseer wastes his master's substance, fails to attend to household business, unjustly spends and wantonly wastes the property entrusted to him, it is theft. If a servant mocks his master, if he divulges his secrets, if he betrays his life or goods, it is theft. If the master savagely harasses his household, it is theft (OS III, 384.33-38).

In short, the Commandment also entails how far we are bound in duty to others (OS III, 385.19). This entails the following:

Let the people ...

hold its *praefectos* (rulers)<sup>7</sup> in honour, patiently bearing their government, obey their laws and commandments, refusing nothing that can be borne without losing God's favour (Rom 13:1, 1 Pet 2:13ff, Tit 3:1) (OS III, 385.19-22);

Let the rulers ...

take care of their common people, keep the public peace, protect the good, punish the evil, manage all things as if they are about to render account of their services to God, the supreme Judge (OS III, 385.22-25);

Let the ministers of the church (*ecclesiarum ministri*);<sup>8</sup> ...

faithfully attend to the ministry of the Word, not adulterating the teaching of salvation (*salutis doctrinam*), delivering it pure and undefiled to the people of God. Let them instruct the people not only through teaching, but also through example of life and exercise authority as good shepherds (*pastores*) of their sheep (OS III, 385.25-29);

Let the people ...

in turn receive them as messengers and apostles of God, render to them honour of which the highest Master (*sumus Magister*) has deemed them worthy, give them those things necessary for their livelihood (OS III, 385.29-31);

Let the parents ...

undertake to nourish, govern, teach their children, committed to them by God, not provoking their minds with cruelty or turning them against their parents. Cherishing and embracing their children with such gentleness and kindness as becomes their character as parents (OS III, 385.32-386.1);

<sup>7</sup> The 1536 *Institutio* contains a list: *reges, principis, magistratus, et alios sibi praefectos* ... (OS III.29-30).

<sup>8</sup> The 1536 edition has *episcopi et ecclesiarum ministri* (OS 1, 52.38).

Let the children ...

owe obedience to their parents (OS III, 386.2);

Let the young ...

reverence old age as the Lord willed that age be worthy of honour (OS III, 386.2-4);

Let the aged ...

guide the insufficiency of youth with their wisdom and experience, wherein they excel the younger, not railing harshly and loudly against them, but by tempering severity with mildness and gentleness (OS III, 386.4-7);

Let servants ...

show themselves diligent and eager to obey their masters, and this not with eye-service, but from the heart, as the servants of God (OS III, 386.7-9);

Let masters ...

not conduct themselves severely and intractably toward their servants, oppressing them with undue rigor, or treating them abusively. Let them recognize them as their brothers, their co-servants under our heavenly Master, whom they ought to love mutely and treat humanely (OS III, 386.10-14).

Concluding, Calvin emphasises that our minds must always have regard for the Lawgiver that we may know that this rule was established for our hearts as well as for our hands, in order that men may strive to protect and promote the well-being and interests of others (OS III, 386.16-19).

The attentiveness and including of injustice and justice in the exposition of the Commandment in the 1539 *Institutio* is a noteworthy addition to his 1536 explication. He already very briefly raised the issue in the 1537 *Instruction/Catechismus*, which is a clear indication of his awareness of and sensitivity to the fact that Scripture condemned it. His instructive expounding of the matter in the 1539 edition should therefore not be traced to an experience of injustice in Geneva. It must be seen in connection with the shift Calvin executed with regard to the underlying theological motive: from the fear and love of God to the righteousness of God.

Would he accommodate these perspectives in the Catechism of Geneva (1542)? The following paragraph deals with this publication.

## **7. 1542: Le Catéchisme de l'Eglise de Genève, c'est a dire le Formulaire d'instruire les enfants en la Chrestiente**

On his return to Geneva, Calvin in 1542 offered the city and its church *Le Catéchisme de l'Eglise de Genève, c'est a dire le Formulaire d'instruire les enfants en la Chrestiente* (CO 6, 1-134) which was translated into Latin and published in 1545 as *Catechismus ecclesiae genevensis, hoc est, formula erudiendi pueris in doctrina Christi* (OS II, 72-15). In 1997 Ernst Saxer thoroughly introduced the Latin text, provided theological commentary and published a translation in German in the *Calvin-Studienausgabe* series (Saxer 1997:1-135). For the purposes of the article I have used his Latin text. In the *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften Band I/2 1535-1549*

Saxer's introduction to, and the French text of, the 'Genfer Katechismus von 1542' were included (Saxer 2006: 279-362). This French text is utilised in the exposition below.<sup>9</sup>

*De Lege* is introduced with a remarkably formulated question: *Quam autem vivendi regulam nobis posuit?* (CStA 56.14). 'Which rule has He given us for our life? The Law. The next question wants to know who wrote it. The answer is that God Himself did. On two tables. It was endowed to Moses and often explicated.<sup>10</sup>

Three questions guided the teaching on the eighth Commandment. The first question elevates the scope of the Command: is it limited to theft prohibited by human legislation, or does it reach beyond this limitation? The question intends to expose the real breadth and depth of the effect and impact of the Commandment: it cannot be restricted to human laws. The second question is aimed at revealing the inner and hidden transgression of the Commandment. The third question unlocks what the Commandment demands of us. Three questions, providing a firm pace and step towards a life spent in cultivating righteousness. These questions and answers are:

*Q204 M:* Let us come to the eighth Commandment (C: Thou shalt not steal).

*Q205 M:* Does it only prohibit the thefts, which are punished by human laws (par justice RB I/2, 327.19), or does it extend further?

C: Under the name of theft (CStA 2, 76.7), it comprehends all kinds of wicked acts of defrauding and circumventing by which we hunt (L: *aucupamur* > *aucupo*: 'hunt after, seek', CStA 2, 76.6) after and master or seize (*complecto*, CStA 2, 76.7) other's goods. Here, therefore, we are forbidden either to seize upon our neighbor's goods by violence, or lay hands upon them by trick and cunning, or acquire possession of them by any other unjust means whatsoever (... *soit par violence, ou cautelle, ou en quelque autre sorte que Dieu n'ait point approve*, RB I/2, 327.23-24).

*Q206 M:* Is it enough to withhold your hand (abstain) from the evil acts, or is covetousness (*cupiditas*, CStA 2, 76.16; *le vouloir*, RB I/2, 327.27) also here condemned?

C: We must ever return to this — that the Lawgiver (*legislator*, CStA 2, 76.18), being spiritual, wills not only to confine (or restrain Latin: *coerceo*, CStA 2, 76.14) outward thefts, but all schemes and councils which incommode others in any way; and especially covetousness itself, that we may not long to enrich ourselves at the expense of our brethren (French: *prochain*, neighbor, RB I/2, 327.31).

*Q207 M:* What then must be done to obey this Commandment?

C: We must endeavour (in preserving) to let every man have his own in safety.

The main point Calvin made is that this Commandment does not only prohibit thefts punishable by human laws, but that it comprehends all kinds of wicked acts of defrauding and circumventing by which we hunt other men's goods. Since the Lawgiver is spiritual – and we must ever return to this, he says – the Command intends not only to check outward thefts, but all councils which incommode others in any way and especially covetousness itself that we may not long to enrich ourselves at the expense of our neighbours.

9 See also for a recent translation Pelikan and Hotchkiss, 2003:320 ff; 342 for the eighth Commandment.

10 *Quis huius divisionis est author? Deus ipse, qui in duas tabulas descriptam Moisi tradidit, et saepe testatus est regidi in decem verba (CStA 56.21-22).*

We are thus forbidden to

- seize upon our neighbour's goods by violence; or
- lay hands upon them by trick and cunning; or
- gain possession of them by any other indirect and unjust means whatever.

These prohibitions resonate with the list that Calvin compiled in the 1536 *Institutio*. Then he emphasised that the Commandment prohibits the interception of people by fraud, to seize possessions, to deceive in business transactions and to lay our hands by way of guile and fraud on the possessions of others. Obeying the command is shaped in the endeavour to let all keep their own property in safety. This could be linked to the 1536 remark, that indeed if we fear and love God, we would rather devote ourselves to endorse the preservation of the property of others. The exposition is also in agreement with the list of thefts Calvin provided in the 1539 edition of the *Institutio*: violence, malicious deceit, concealed craftiness and cheating by way of flatteries (OS III, 384.14-19).

## 8. 1551: *La maniere d'interroguer les enfans qu'on veut recevoir a la cene Seigneur Iesus Christ*

The ultimate text utilized in our survey is most properly also the last text Calvin compiled with an explicit catechetical purpose. *La maniere d'interroguer les enfans qu'on veut recevoir a la cene Seigneur Iesus Christ* (CO 6, 147–160) comprises 21 questions, required by a minister in catechizing children who desire to receive the Lord's Supper. According to De Greef (2006:170-171), these questions were first included in a 1551 booklet *ABC francois*, which was intended to be used in the schools. In a footnote,<sup>11</sup> the editors of the CO observed that *La maniere* is, for the first time, also incorporated in the Catechism of 1553. The text of the interrogation that was included in the New Testament of 1562 had additions which are printed in italics in the *Corpus Reformatorum*: a total thus of 28 questions.

The questions and answers can be divided into five sub-divisions. The first deals with faith and its contents. Then follow a few questions on the Ten Commandments. Thereafter there follow questions focusing on the significance of Christ's merits as basis for man's salvation, trailed by prayer and the sacraments, with emphasis on the Lord's Supper and the proper reception thereof. In the interrogation the questions on the Commandments are formulated in such a way that it channels the applicant to confessing Christ.

The first question related to the Commandments is insistent: Should God be served according to his Commandments, or should He be served according to the traditions of men? The answer is obvious: Not according to the '*commandemens les hommes*', but according to those of God (CO 6, 154.3-7.) Subsequently, the candidate is required to recite the Ten Commandments and indicate where they are recorded in Scripture. Then follows the question: '*Peus-tu accomplir les commandemens de Dieu de toymesme? Non*' (CO 6, 156.3-6). The interviewee must acknowledge that she/he cannot fulfil God's Commandments by her/himself. The following question indicates a way leading from this dead end: 'Who is it that accomplishes them in you?' (CO 6, 156.8). And the answer is: The Holy Spirit (CO 157.3). The applicant is thus led to reflect on the work of the Holy Spirit. The question, therefore is, when God has given you his Holy Spirit, can you perfectly accomplish the Commandments? The answer is definite: not at all (CO 6, 157.5-8). The purpose is to confront the applicant with the next statement: And all the while God denounces (or dooms)

11 *"Cette pièce se trouve pour la première fois dans le Catéchisme de 1553. Elle est reproduite dans les Manuels de 1558 et 1561. Le texte du Catéchisme dans le Nouveau Testament de 1562 a de additions que nous imprimons en italique. Nous négligeons la traduction latine dont il existe également deux révisions, la première dans les Catéchismes de 1561 et de 1563, la seconde dans une édition de 1570 etc."* (CO 6, 147.11-14).

and rejects all those who will not entirely fulfil his commands. This is to be recognized as the truth (CO 6, 157.9-13).<sup>12</sup>

Following is the disentangling in Christ: 'By what means will you be saved, and delivered from the curse of God?' '*Par la mort et passion de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ*' (CO 6, 157.14-19). The subsequent explication is clear: 'Because by his death He has restored us to life, and has reconciled us with God his Father, and as Paul said, He died for our sins and is aroused for our justification' (CO 6, 157.23-24 – 158.2-3).

The underpinning theological design is similar to what Calvin already mapped out in his 1539 *Institutio*. Although *La maniere* did not explicate the Commandments, and this includes the eighth Commandment, this text was thus not excluded from our investigation.

## 9. Conclusion

The sketch that profiled Calvin's explanation of the eighth Commandment ('You shall not steal') in his catechetical works, is now completed. It commenced with the Catechism of 1537/8, followed by *l'Institution puerile de la doctrine Chrestienne* (1538-41), the 1542/5 Catechisms and in conclusion, by way of reflection, *La maniere d'interroguer les enfans* (1551). These were related to Calvin's great pedagogical works, the *Institutes* (1536, 1539). Any lesson plan, based on the catechetical interpretation of the eighth Commandment, will provide a platform for bringing all the outcomes that Calvin argued in his 1539 *Institutio*, within the reach of the children.

In teaching children, Calvin kept to the theological framework, in which he deals with the Law in his *Institutes*. The trajectories that he follows in his explication of the Commandment in the *Institutes*, also surface in his catechetical education. The emphasis shift from the 'fear and love of God' (*Institutio* 1536) to 'God's righteousness' (injustice-justice) (*Institutio* 1539) as a determining theological motive for the interpretation of the Commandment, can also be traced in his catechetical work. Calvin, therefore, explains to children that our lives in Christ, in the righteousness of Christ, are shaped by what is prohibited and demanded by the Commandment. Because: The more clearly God's Law discloses his righteousness, the more it unmasks our ingenuity and condemnation. And this is in his Christ. In Christ God's countenance shines full of grace and kindness even toward poor and unworthy sinners. It is by faith that Christ is embraced and enjoyed only by believers, the children are assured, who receive Him, sent to them, who do not reject Him, given to them, who follow Him, who is calling them. Cultivated in Christ, His righteousness takes shape in us, living the Commandment.

## 10. Bibliography

BR, see Saxer, E., 2006.

Calvin, J. 1863–1900, 'Opera quae Supersunt Omnia', in G. Baum, E. Cunitz & E. Reuss (eds.), *Corpus Reformatorum*, Schwetschke, Braunschweig.

Calvin, J. 1926–1962, *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, vols. I–V (= OS I–V), E.P. Barth, G. (W.) Niesel & D. Scheuner (eds.), *Monachii in Aedibus, Chr. Kaiser, München*.

Calvin, J. 1994, *Instruction et Confession de Foy dons on use en l'eglise de Geneve*, in E. Busch, A. Heron, C. Link, P. Opitz, E. Saxer & H. Scholl (eds.), *Calvin-Studienausgabe, Band 1: Reformatorische Anfänge [1533–1541], Teilband 1/1, 138-207*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen (CStA).

Calvin, J. 2002, *Ioannis Calvini Opera Omnia III. Scripta Ecclesiastica II. Instruction et confession de foy don't on use en l'Eglise de Geneve. Catechismus seu christianae religionis institution ecclesiae genevensis*. Edidit Anette Zillenberger. *Confessio genevensium. Preadicatorum de trinitate*. Edidit Marc Val, in A. Zillenbiller (Ed.), *Librairie Droz, Genève*. (COR)

<sup>12</sup> *Et toutes fois Dieu maudit et reiecte tous ceux qui ne parferont entierement ses commandemens.*

CO, see Calvin, J. 1863–1900.

COR, see Calvin, J. 2002.

CtSA, see Calvin, J. 1994.

De Greef, W. 2006, *Johannes Calvijn zijn werk en geschriften*, Kok: Kampen.

Hesselink, I. John, 1997, *Calvin's First Catechism. A Commentary. Featuring Ford Lewis Battle's Translation of the 1538 Catechism*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky.

OS, see Calvin, J. 1926–1962.

Pelikan, J. & Hotchkiss, V. (Eds.), 2003, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition. Volume II*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

Saxer, E. 1994, *Genfer Katechismus und Glaubensbekenntnis (1537)*, in E. Busch, A. Heron, C. Link, P. Opitz, E. Saxer & H. Scholl, (Eds.), *Calvin-Studienausgabe Band 1 Reformatorische Anfänge (1533–1541) Teilband 1/1*, 131–137, 138–207, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen.

Saxer, E. 1997, *Der Genfer Katechismus von 1545*, in E. Busch, (Hrsg., u.ä.), in *Calvin-Studienausgabe Band 2 Gestalt und Ordnung der Kirche*, 1–9, 9–135, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen.

Saxer, E. 2006, 'Genfer Katechismus von 1542', in M. Bucsay, E. Busch (Hrsg., u.ä.), *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften Band I/2 1535–1549*, 279–362, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen.

Zillenbiller, A. 2002, *Instruction et confession de foy don't on use en l'Eglise de Geneve. Catechismus seu christianae religionis institution ecclesiae genevensis*, in A. Zillenbiller and M. Val (Eds.), *Ioannis Calvini Opera Omnia III. Scripta Ecclesiastica II. Instruction et confession de foy don't on use en l'Eglise de Geneve. Catechismus seu christianae religionis institution ecclesiae genevensis*. Edidit Anette Zillenberger. *Confessio genevensium. Preadicatorum de trinitate*. Edidit Marc Val, IX–XX111, 1–121, Librairie Droz, Genève.

Zillenbiller, A. 2006, 'Genfer Bekenntnis 1536/37', in M. Bucsay, Busch, E. (Hrsg., u.ä.), *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften Band I/2 1535–1549*, 97–136, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen.