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Randall C. Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, xii + 548 pp. Notes, indices. \$55.00 U.S. (cl), ISBN 0-268-04500-3.

Review by R. Ward Holder, Saint Anselm College.

In his last work, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor and Theologian*, (Baker, 2006), Randall Zachman sought to introduce students to the thought of John Calvin, but with a particular aim. Zachman wanted to paint Calvin as a theologian who saw his task as reading scripture with the Church, and whose manner in reading scripture was deeply contemplative. His new work is not an introduction; it develops that insight further. In *Image and Word*, Zachman examines the question of Calvin's contemplation. Does the Genevan reformer constrain himself and all other believers to contemplation of the word of God, and thereby avoid all possibility of idolatry? Or, does Calvin find a place for deliberation upon the beauty that God has made? To use the transcendentals, is Calvin wholly about Truth and Goodness, or does he also find a place for Beauty?

The origin of the questions that drive this particular setting derives from the recent history of Calvin scholarship. Zachman clearly knows that his thesis represents a movement against the stream of much of the scholarly analysis of Calvin, and devotes a significant portion of his introduction to this issue. He notes that prominent Calvin students of both Protestant and Roman Catholic allegiance have tended to see Calvin as tied to the hearing of God's Word, against seeing the work or image of God in the created order or in humanity. Zachman counters, not with the (impossible) thesis that Calvin prefers images to the Word, but that in Calvin's theology, the Word is linked to the work of God in so many *loci* that the evidence demands its place as a central idea in Calvin's conception of the ways that humans come to understand God. In other words, Zachman wishes to overcome the hegemony of the Word in Calvin studies with an interdependence of word and image.

One of the greatest virtues of the volume is Zachman's careful delineation between Calvin's doctrinal teaching, and the development of that teaching. Zachman has grasped, more than many historical theologians, that the only proper answer to the question "What did Calvin teach about x?", is another question, "When?" Scholars such as Thomas Davis and Irena Backus have been noting the great care that must be exercised in seeing Calvin's thought as primarily static. In Zachman's presentation, the developmental moments of Calvin's thought are carefully defined, before moving on to the mature presentation. Thus, in the first chapter, Zachman sets out Calvin's consideration of God's self-manifestation in the universe in Calvin's preface to Olivetan's New Testament in 1535, in the catechism of 1537, in the 1539 *Institutes*, in the 1543-1545 *Institutes*, in the commentaries on the epistles to the Corinthians and to the Hebrews of 1546-1549, in the commentaries on Genesis and Acts from 1554, in the Psalms commentary of 1557, and in the final Latin edition of the *Institutes* of 1559. Only after these historical moments are all set forth does

Zachman set out his thesis that in Calvin's thought, the universe presents itself as a self-manifestation of God.

The book presents a model of historical research for a theologian. Too frequently, historical theological scholarship commits historical error, such as arguing for the lack of development in Calvin's thought on the basis of his 1559 *Institutes*, or seeing exaggerated importance through a failure to compare issues across time and genre. Time and again, Zachman makes the opposite choices, drawing the reader's attention to evidence from across Calvin's theological life, and from a variety of types of sources, including biblical commentaries on both the Old and New Testament, various editions of the *Institutes*, catechetical writings, polemical treatises, and liturgical texts. While Calvin eschewed the images that were common to the piety of the church of the early sixteenth century, his denial of images was more nuanced than a simple rejection. Zachman demonstrates that for Calvin, humans tend to create "dead images" that lead to idolatry. These are opposed by the "living images" that God alone creates for the edification and delight of the faithful. "The faith of the godly therefore rests on a twofold foundation: the Word of God that they hear and the work of God that they see and experience..." (p. 159).

Zachman does not simply come to praise Calvin. He notes that Calvin's ideal of Word and Image finally presents an "unresolvable tension." Calvin insisted that the symbols that God gave the faithful truly and actually present the reality they signify, and are vehicles for God's earthward descent. However, Calvin wants his readers and hearers to seek the true reality behind these symbols in Heaven, and presents a series of ladders for believers to ascend toward God. Zachman notes that Calvin creates this tension "...in order to maintain the dialectical relationship between the visibility and invisibility of God, and the presence and absence of God, which he thinks is maintained by images of divine creation and not by images of human devising" (p. 440). While that creative tension might lead believers and theologians to greater engagement with Calvin's thought and the divine realities, it can also confuse and obscure the very aims toward which Calvin aspired.

At times, Zachman's argument invites if not contention, then at the very least a close reading and re-examination of the evidence. Such is the case when he sets forth Calvin's development in his thought on the sacrament of ordination. Clearly, Zachman has succeeded in his argument that Calvin's thought underwent some kind of change. However, his conclusion that Calvin adopts it as a sacrament in 1549 begs the question. The Genevan church never adopted it, and Calvin's 1559 *Institutes* clearly only allows for two sacraments. Was Calvin simply of two minds, or were there political considerations that complicated the implementation of this sacrament?

There are several aims of Zachman's book. First, Zachman's picture of Calvin returns him solidly to the catholic fold. He argues that the issue of severing ties with the Church did not exist for Calvin, that this is a mis-reading and a polemic holdover from an earlier time. Calvin's refusal to divide Word from Sign even in his earliest works demonstrates his alignment with orthodox catholic theologians from the patristic period to his own. Further, Zachman detects an "increasing catholicity" in Calvin's thought as he developed. Zachman never denies that Calvin and the Roman Church have definite disagreements, but he wishes to clarify that this locus is not one of them. This particular strand of the argument invites some of the closest scrutiny, as noted above. Second, Zachman wants to set the record straight for the community of readers of Calvin. Calvin did not fall either on the side of the purity of

the Word, or on the devotion to the Image. Rather, he devised a method of grasping both manners of revelation which allowed him greater flexibility for critique of the excesses of the day, while permitting him greater flexibility in maintaining fealty with the received orthodox tradition.

Finally, Zachman sees the greatest possibilities for engaging Calvin's thought fruitfully, as a resource for both ecumenical and Reformed constructive theologies, when the false understanding of Calvin's denial of images is cleared away. When a clearer picture of Calvin's theology of God's manifestation develops, far more useful studies can be assayed. Zachman has produced a solid piece of Calvin scholarship that will stimulate significant conversation about both the issue of Calvin's theological imagination, and his relationship to the prior Catholic tradition.

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