text" (247). The work concludes with a bibliography (251-66), a general index (267-72), and an index of textual variants (273-74).

It would be difficult to claim that Kannaday has done anything other than proven his case. Yet there remain a few points of contention with the work. First, his claim that apologetic literature "would have been read almost exclusively by those who were already part of the Christian community" (35; also 48, 103) is asserted, not demonstrated, and seems to contradict what he says elsewhere about apologists writing to convert pagans (52). Furthermore, it is not immediately apparent that the dates and locations of critics and apologists in dialogue coalesce with the scribal variations that Kannaday would like to place within the discussion. Also, some would be uncomfortable with Kannaday's occasional dependence on variant readings in Codex Bezae, which is probably not the first source one should consult to make weighty statements about scribal tendencies. Some discussion of the genealogical relationships between variant readings would have been helpful. That is, can multiple apologetic readings be traced to a singular, earlier parent tradition? Finally, though clearly out of the hands of the author, it is a shame that an otherwise carefully worked book contains an index that is out of order (273-74) and formatting errors (esp. 62).

Nevertheless, Kannaday's work is an admirable success. That he communicates it with such clarity and a touch of wit speaks highly of the maturity of his writing skills in relating an often tedious subject in a lively and engaging way. That he has reintroduced textual criticism to church history is an important contribution, which can and should cause modern gospels scholars to familiarize themselves afresh with the historical realities during which the devoted scribes who transmitted our texts lived and carried out their work.

Daniel M. Gurtner  
Bethel Seminary  
St. Paul, Minnesota


This book is not a study of Calvin per se, neither is it a study of Calvin's theology. Specifically, it is a study of Calvin's ideas by a Calvinistic philosopher; "... it is concerned with Calvin as a receiver, user, and transmitter of theological ideas, and particularly of those theological ideas that have philosophical aspects and histories to them" (1). If read in that light, it is an immensely helpful book, and that for at least three reasons: (1) it is a book by a Calvinist studying Calvin; (2) it is a book by a Calvinistic philosopher studying Calvin; (3) it shows some of the liabilities of a philosopher studying Calvin.

First, it is helpful to see one with an allegiance and commitment to Calvin studying him from that angle. Helm begins with a sympathy and empathy toward Calvin, and thus the views he sets forth seek to be true to the best of Calvin's own theology. The second and third reasons, however, are central to the purpose of the book and, thus, will provide the focus for this review.
The second reason that his book is helpful is that it comes to us from one who is a philosopher, and a philosopher in the analytic tradition, and who, therefore, as he reads Calvin, is all the while interacting with much of that tradition, and seeking to incorporate, or at least insinuate, Calvin's ideas into elements of it. We will peruse a few of the chapters in order to bring out the focus of (2) above, and then we will look at (3), some possible liabilities.

In ch. 1, "God in Se and Quoad Nos," Helm articulates a distinction between the "that" and the "what" of God. According to Calvin, says Helm, we can know that God is eternal, self-existent, and all-good, but we cannot know what God is. Thus Calvin affirms that we cannot comprehend the divine essence of which eternity, self-existence, and complete goodness are aspects. Only God knows what God is (19). This is the case because there is, according to Calvin according to Helm, an epistemological gap between God and creation. There is, accordingly, a gap between God's essence and his nature. This is not a gap in which there is no bridge, because the nature of God is a partial revelation of his essence. It is simply an affirmation that it is God's essence that we cannot know.

Chapter 2, "The Trinity," is a very helpful chapter on Calvin's distinctives with respect to that doctrine. It lays out the substance of Calvin's difference from the rest of the tradition in that he holds the Son to be autotheos as God, though his person is derivative of the Father. Calvin is concerned that there are hints in the Christian tradition (such as the Athanasian creed) of a subordination of the deity of the Son. He argues, therefore, that the Son does not derive his essence from the Father, but his person.

Helm moves from this to a discussion of Calvin on the "begottenness" of the Son. Here Helm detects a "pared down" sense of begottenness in Calvin's view.

First, it is stripped of its causal connotations: the person of the Son is not caused to be. And, secondly, it is stripped of the idea that begetting is an act of originating, that the one who is begotten does not exist until begotten by the begetter. Furthermore, in every case of begetting what is begotten has the same specific nature as the begetter but not the same numerical nature, except in the case of the alleged eternal begetting of the Son. For the Son, being essentially God, has the same numerical nature, in spite of being begotten (according to Calvin) as to his person by the person of the Father. (55-56)

Given this pared-down version, Helm inquires: "What truth is now being safeguarded by the assertion that the Son is begotten of the Father when this is understood in the pared-down sense? These are questions not only for Calvin but for the entire tradition that he represents" (56).

Chapter 3 is entitled, simply, "The Extra." Here Helm seeks to explicate the substance of and reasons for (what has been called) the extra Calvinisticum—"This is the view that in the Incarnation God the Son retained divine properties such as immensity and omnipresence and that therefore Christ was not physically confined within the limits of a human person" (58). Helm notes that the extra Calvinisticum could perhaps accurately be called as well the extra Catholicum in that Calvin's view was not so much fueled by a dispute with Lutherans on the Lord's Supper, but rather was following in the tradition of church history, from Athanasius to Aquinas. In that vein, there is a nice section on the Chalcedonian background to Calvin, including an interaction with some Barthian notions of Christology.
Related to "the extra" is the communication idiomatum. The Son of God is not confined by his human nature. There are three options available to one holding such a view: (1) The predication of properties of the one or the other nature to the whole person of Christ. (2) The predication of properties of the divine nature to the human nature of Christ. (3) The predication of properties of the human nature to the divine nature of Christ" (72). In terms of Calvin on the communication idiomatum, we can ascribe properties of either nature to the one person, Jesus Christ, but we cannot ascribe properties of one nature to the other.

No one who subscribed to Chalcedonian Christology would disagree with (1). The crux of the matter is focused on (2) and (3). Helm's conclusion is interesting:

... what is Calvin's view of the communicatio? In brief, he has no difficulty with the ascription of divine and human properties to the same person, the person of the Mediator; in this he follows the schoolmen. But he departs from them by not calling this an instance of the communication of properties. Rather, he seems to take up the Lutheran usage of the communicatio, especially senses (2) and (3) above, and particularly the ascription to divinity of human properties, but he claims that such expressions are rhetorical and not literally the case. (76)

The fourth chapter, "Providence and Evil," is rich in historical and philosophical data. Helm lays out ten arguments that Calvin gives against Castellio in the former's "Defense of the Secret Providence of God." He moves from there to note Calvin's scholastic methodology, and then to a comparison of Calvin's view of providence with Zwingli's. A discussion of the question of whether Calvin was a determinist, together with a discussion of the libertines, rounds out the chapter.

Helm's discussion of Calvin on "Divine Accommodation" (ch. 7) is, perhaps, central to every other discussion in the book. According to Helm, Calvin holds that "... much of our knowledge of God is due to God's gracious accommodation of himself to our straitened epistemic condition" (184). Central to this epistemic gap is Calvin's view of divine accommodation. Helm detects three kinds of accommodation in Calvin's thought. There is, first, a morally indexed sense of accommodation. Because of hardness of heart "... Calvin yields to no one in his insistence on divine sovereignty. Yet ... God limits himself in his relation to Israel. He may even be said to be in thrall to the passions of his rude, primitive people; not only limiting himself, but being limited by them" (185). There is, secondly, human accommodation, that is, contexts in which we accommodate ourselves to God.

It is the third kind of accommodation, however, revelational accommodation, that is a central piece of Calvin's theology. In this third kind of accommodation, Calvin "... seems to have appealed to accommodation principally in connection with our understanding of the activity of God himself" (187). For Calvin, "... texts such as 1 Samuel 15:29 or Numbers 23:19 take precedence over those such as Genesis 6:6 or 1 Samuel 15:11 because they tell us what God is, not merely what he is like. ... God is accommodating himself to us." So, "God as he is in himself has an unalterable plan formed in eternity. God as he seems to us 'repents'" (188). This language of repentance "... is not ascribed with full literalness." It does not carry with it "the same semantic value" as with humans (189). For Calvin, therefore, the notion of divine accommodation "governs the use of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language in Scripture to characterize God" (192).
In “Natural Theology and the Sensus Divinitatis” (ch. 8), Helm attempts to work out Calvin’s views on the two concepts (natural theology and the sensus), to show the relationship between them, to mark out distinctions in the sensus itself (distinctions between the pristine and the perverted sensus), and then to relate it all to discussions in so-called Reformed epistemology. This discussion is quite helpful, particularly because it takes from Calvin’s sermons and commentaries in Acts 14 and 17 and seeks to bring together different strands in Calvin’s theology.

It is disappointing, however, in that certain nuances with respect to our knowledge of God seem to be obscured by philosophical categories. For example, in a discussion of the extent, if any, of a true knowledge of God had by all, Helm seems to think Calvin confused.

It is hard to accept that Calvin is altogether consistent at this point. If someone knows that God exists, and possesses sufficient knowledge to make him inexcusable for the bad use that he makes of it (as Calvin goes on to argue), then surely he knows something, his belief has some cognitive content, however much it may be accompanied by falsity. Yet Calvin appears to deny this. But if he does deny it, then how is he warranted in due course in moving from the question of God’s existence to what he calls the ‘second point’, the question of what God is like?... However that may be, it appears that Calvin is willing to recognize a ‘point of contact’ here, an overlap in cognitive content between pagan and Christian beliefs about God. (213)

As he continues his analysis of Calvin’s understanding of Paul on Mars Hill, Helm notes, “One possible conclusion is that Calvin thought that natural theology was possible but not necessary for the ab initio knowledge of God, but that it was sometimes usable as an apologetic tactic in the way that, he might argue, Paul used it at the Areopagus” (218).

Chapter 9, “Revelation,” begins with the prolegomena issues of Scripture’s authority. Here Helm divides the terrain in terms of external proofs and internal proofs (including self-authentication). With regard to external proofs, Helm, as he does throughout this book, wants to show Calvin’s consistency with Thomas Aquinas, and thus with the mainstream Christian tradition prior to Calvin. The “heart of the matter” with respect to Scripture’s authority, however, lies in the internal proofs, which proofs include Scripture’s self-authentication. Here self-authentication is combined with the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, such that Helm defines the internal aspect of Scripture’s authority in the following way: “If S by the illumination of the Spirit comes to believe that what the Scriptures teach is God’s word then he ought ideally to be fully convinced that this is so, and may in fact be fully convinced” (254). Helm sees self-authentication as “a function of the meaning or perceived meaning of a text” (255). He then goes on to ferret out the relationship between self-authentication and certainty. After further discussion on the assurance of faith, evidence, and on whether or not Calvin was an externalist in epistemology, Helm notes (rightly) that B. B. Warfield got backwards Calvin’s argument for Scriptural authority. For Calvin, it is the internal indicia, not the external, that provide the ground for Scripture’s authority. “Warfield has somewhat overstated the case, or rather has managed to get Calvin’s discussion back to front” (279).

Chapter 11, “The Power Dialectic,” moves through a discussion of the distinction between the potentia ordinata and the potentia absoluta, and Calvin’s relationship to that discussion. Helm disagrees with Steinmetz who argues that no such distinction exists in Calvin.
He shows Calvin using the distinction, yet modified so that God is not a tyrant and is not arbitrary. In an excursus, he seeks to show that “the direct influence of Scotus’s ideas on Calvin’s is minimal” and notes that “if Calvin is to be pigeon-holed, it is wiser to think of him, if not as an eclectic, then as being in the tradition of the intellectualism of Thomas Aquinas, even though he rarely cites him” (346).

In ch. 12, “Equity, Natural Law, and Common Grace,” there is a helpful excursus on Abraham’s sacrifice, concluding that it is not, for Calvin, a resolution of the logical problem of evil, nor an example of Divine Command ethics, but is an example of a kind of “evidential problem of evil.” Helm goes on to argue that

... when Calvin is referring to equity and natural law he is talking about structures, usually ethical and political structures. By contrast, his references to ‘common grace’ and equivalent expressions are references to gifts, usually to gifts to individuals or to classes of individuals, though not exclusively so; sometimes gifts given to almost the entire race. The distinction is thus one of direction and emphasis, and it would be unwise for any interpreter of Calvin to attempt to polarize Calvin’s ideas around one as opposed to the other idea; to affirm natural law and not common grace, or common grace and so not natural law. (388)

The final chapter, “Faith, Atonement, and Time,” is perhaps a good place to begin to explicate the third reason (3) that this book is helpful, that is, some of the liabilities possible when a philosopher attempts to subsume theology or a theologian under his own discipline. What begins to happen in such cases is that theology loses its biblical moorings.

With respect to the atonement, for example, Helm analyzes Calvin’s wrestling with just how it can be that God can be wrathful toward us at one point in time, then gracious toward us at another point. Here is one way that Calvin sees it:

As, however, this also is necessary to be known by us—that Christ came forth to us from the foundation of God’s free mercy, the Scripture explicitly teaches both—that the anger of the Father has been appeased by the sacrifice of the Son, and that the Son has been offered up for the expiation of the sins of men on this ground—because God, exercising compassion towards them, receives them, on the ground of such a pledge, into favour. (395, quoting Calvin’s commentary on 2 Cor 5:19)

This seems to indicate that Calvin held “that Scripture explicitly teaches both” that the Father is angry with those for whom Christ died and that he loves those same people. However, Helm seeks to work out a solution to the tension presented by such an affirmation. After quoting Calvin’s commentary on 2 Cor 5:19, Helm avers:

So the truth about atonement, about reconciliation to God, has to be represented to us as if it implied a change in God, and so an inconsistency, an apparent contradiction, in his actions towards us. But in fact there is no change in God; he loves us from eternity. There is, however, a change in us, a change that occurs as by faith Christ’s work is appropriated. The change is not from wrath to grace, but from our belief that we are under wrath to our belief that we are under grace. (395)

That is, in order to avoid any idea that God’s disposition toward the elect could change (since such an idea, for Helm, would mean that God is not immutable), Helm locates the notions of wrath and grace within our own doxastic structure, and not within the disposition of God. Helm defends his view by an appeal to God’s accommodation. “God accommodates himself by appearing as wrathful until, by faith, the believer apprehends
the merit of Christ and as a consequence comes to realize that God has eternally loved him. Before that, though it is true that God eternally loved him the believer has not good reason to think that he does, and plenty of reasons to think that he doesn’t, because the wrath of God rests on the sinner” (397).

Helm’s construal carries with it significant theological problems, problems with which, as far as I know, Calvin has never been plagued. Most significantly, it seems near impossible to make sense of any biblical (objective) notion of propitiation if all that is askew is our own doxastic content.

There are other places where philosophy seems to obscure theological orthodoxy. In his analysis of Calvin on the Incarnation, for example, Helm notes:

Perhaps Calvin’s view amounts to this: in the Incarnation there is a uniquely powerful and loving and gracious focusing of the divine nature upon human nature, rather than a transfer of the Son of God to a spatio-temporal location. This focusing makes it possible for us to say that God the Son is so present with human nature that there is a union of natures in Jesus Christ. God in the person of the Son, through whom all things are created, focuses upon one unique aspect of his creation in uniting to human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. God the Son was not simply present by being active, he was present by being in union. The character of this divine presence sanctions the language of person with respect to the result. (64)

It seems one would be hard pressed to find such language in any of the Reformed orthodox, and certainly in Calvin, and for good reason. It would be difficult to entertain such ideas and at the same time to affirm the historic, biblical notion of Incarnation. Such a notion includes the fact that the second person of the Trinity did not become another person (for then there would be four persons of the Trinity), but rather took on something that was not his in order to accomplish the Triune God’s purposes in salvation. So, says Calvin (in his commentary on Phil. 2:7),

[a]s, then, Christ has one person, consisting of two natures, it is with propriety that Paul says, that he who was the Son of God, in reality equal to God, did nevertheless lay aside his glory, when he in the flesh manifested himself in the appearance of a servant.

Calvin here echoes biblical language, that the Son of God did come down, taking on human flesh and a human nature, rather than that he focused himself in a unique way, while remaining outside of time.

And it is this eternal/temporal problem that is, perhaps, the underlying culprit in much of Helm’s analysis of Calvin. To cite just one more example, in the chapter on divine accommodation, Helm wonders how actual dialogue can take place between God and man:

Under normal circumstances conversational dialogue between people obviously entails the need to be able to reply to what has been said. But can a timeless God react by making a reply to what has been said to him? An obvious objection is that if God is timeless, he cannot believe anything that requires for its sense and appropriateness the occurrence of an event before the formation of the belief. If God literally replies to something that is uttered, his reply will have to occur after what it is a reply to. (201)

Helm goes on to note William Alston’s conjecture of a reply of simultaneity, which, while it might extricate us from such tensions, would nevertheless involve a relationship of simultaneity between God and his creation, which, Helm rightly notes, is a massive question to tackle.
What, then, shall we say about these liabilities? I must confess that virtually every chapter in the book left me wondering if I had ever read Calvin at all. That could well be my problem, but there are a few points that should be made with respect to Helm's "grid" as he works through Calvin's ideas.

Perhaps the first, and most important, thing to say is that there is no easy synthesis between Calvin's ideas and philosophical concerns. This is undoubtedly the case whenever the latter take conceptual precedence over the former. Helm is aware of this, and does seem to avoid it in some cases, but the citations above indicate that certain philosophical views and concepts can serve to construe at least some of Calvin's ideas in such a way as to be unrecognizable in terms of historic Reformed or Calvinistic theology.

Not only so, but if philosophy is allowed, conceptually, to have its way with theology proper, then it may become difficult to articulate the rest of theology as well. For example, Helm notes that "much of our knowledge of God is due to God's gracious accommodation of himself to our straitened epistemic condition" (184). In thinking of accommodation, therefore, Helm sees it as one, though central, aspect in Calvin of our knowledge of God. However, if Reformed scholasticism is any indicator of Calvin's notion at all, then we would have to affirm that all (not much) of our knowledge of God is by way of God's accommodation. God's own knowledge, according to the scholastics, was archetypal with reference to himself, and ectypal with reference to things outside himself. Our knowledge, on the other hand, is never archetypal but is exhaustively, from first to last, ectypal. If this construal is dependent in any way on Calvin's understanding of God's accommodation, then we can avoid, at least initially, such ambiguous locutions as whether or not certain language of God is "literal" or metaphorical, and begin instead by understanding that (as in the distinction between God in se and God quoad nos), while there is definite continuity between God's accommodated revelation to us (which is ectypal) and his archetypal knowledge, the latter is never ours and could never be.

Not only so, but we would be hard pressed to question, on the basis of biblical testimony and Reformed theology, whether or not God actually came down to his creation; whether he actually had conversations, complete with subsequent replies, with his creatures; whether his disposition toward us, at one time, was wrath and at another subsequent time when we were, by faith, in Christ, grace. We are not hard pressed to question these because of philosophical naiveté, necessarily, but rather because God and his relationship to his creation, as expressed in Scripture, is the beginning point of our philosophizing.

Helm's book is unique. As far as I know there is nothing like it. For that reason alone, anyone interested in the thought of John Calvin must include it in his library. We have not been able to look at other, fascinating chapters on angels, the soul, and free will. This review does scant justice to the breadth and scope of material covered in the book. While most Reformed theologians will likely end the book perplexed at various levels, no one who reads it will have read anything quite like it before.

K. SCOTT OLPINT
Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania