

## Becoming One with God

### An Overview and Contrast of the Major Emphases of Johannes Tauler and John Calvin Regarding Union with God

By [Rev. Joel Kletzing](#)

Separated by two centuries both Johannes Tauler and John Calvin preached in Strasbourg, Germany. Beyond that incidental geographical similarity, their differences seem far easier to identify than further similarities when one enters a study of spirituality. Although Tauler's influence on another great reformer, Martin Luther, is well documented, no evidence was discovered in the preparation of this paper which would indicate that Calvin relied on or was influenced by the earlier minister. James Clark lists four themes in Tauler to which Luther was attracted: complete resignation to the divine will; attacks on outer works as useless in themselves; the soul's suffering and sense of being forsaken by God; and his attitude toward Scholasticism.<sup>1</sup>

Many modern Reformed theologians would react strongly at any hint that Calvin's spirituality is in any way compatible with mystical spirituality. Yet work has been published regarding the influence that St. Bernard of Clairvaux had upon Calvin.<sup>2</sup> While their language may have been different, that work sought to reveal common ground regarding that particular Medieval mystic's views on justification and union with God (among other aspects of spirituality) with the magisterial reformer's views.

Tauler, a disciple of Meister Eckhart who was condemned as a heretic, represents a speculative brand of mysticism that many modern Reformed theologians would see as dangerously tending toward blasphemy due to its nature of elevating humans to oneness with God in essence. The mystical element of Christianity pursues an immediate encounter with God which mediates a loving knowledge of God, transforming the person's consciousness and whole way of life.<sup>3</sup> This immediate encounter did not seem to be a goal for the reformers. Visions were regarded as part of God's continuing revelation by

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<sup>1</sup> James Clark, *The Great German Mystics: Eckhart, Tauler and Suso* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Limited, 1949), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> See *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* by Dennis E. Tamburello in the Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Bernard McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism," *Church History* 65.2 (Je 1996): 214-215.

the mystics in contrast to the reformers who counted on the Bible containing complete revelation.

While a growing number of studies are demonstrating the continuity between late Medieval thought and that which developed in the Reformation, a study of contrasts between Tauler and Calvin better serves to highlight some of the discontinuity between Medieval and Reformation doctrines which shaped spirituality. This paper will seek to briefly compare the basic beliefs regarding human nature in both Tauler and Calvin and to observe the resulting differences in the direction of the respective spiritualities.

### **Johannes Tauler**

Tauler was born around 1300 in Strasbourg. He belonged to the Dominican order and most of his sermons were preached to convents in Strasbourg or Basel. Approximately eighty sermons of his have been preserved, and through these one may attempt to become acquainted with this influential man. It is unclear whether he ever met Eckhart, but it is clear that he was heavily influenced by the Meister, at least by his writings. The disciple knew that his master had been condemned as a heretic, and so he was careful to not push the mystical limits of speculation as far as Eckhart chose to do. For example, Tauler refrained of speaking of the divine which is beyond the Trinity or of becoming of one essence with God as his predecessor had taught.

In his sermons he had a strong pastoral and practical style, encouraging his hearers that temptation can be defeated and that strong and troubling feelings will pass, urging them to persevere if a feeling of goodness from God is lost. Such encouragement showed that he related well to those to whom he ministered and to their struggles of everyday life. He often used examples from nature which made it easy for common folk to relate to his teaching. In Sermon 11 he described the battle against temptation in terms of a hart being pursued by hounds. The thirst in the hart was explained by the preacher as representing the thirst for God that develops in the midst of temptation. He “alone is our truth and peace, our justice and comfort.”<sup>4</sup> He describes how hunters will at times hold the hounds back and feed them a little so that the hart may cool off and begin the contest again with renewed strength. So, he says, God staves off temptations and pressures so He might minister to His own who in turn will be better equipped for the chase. “All this God permits to happen,” he continues, “because of His great care and love for us. He allows the soul to be hard pressed, till there is no other path open to it but God, in Whom rests all peace and truth and consolation.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes Tauler, *Sermons*, trans. Maria Shradly (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985), 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

However, not all of the sermons contain information so easily digestible. Much of what he taught about human responsibility and growth in spirituality was complex and built upon principles which often seemed to be in conflict. As an example of this complexity, the tension between human responsibility in pursuing union with God and God's initiative in the process is revealed in passages such as the following. In Sermon 47 he expressed human responsibility this way: "Do not expect, however, that God will infuse you with virtues without any effort on your part. Never believe that Father, Son and Holy Spirit will simply flow into a person who has not been bent on acquiring virtue."<sup>6</sup> Sermon 23 records him saying, "When the Holy Spirit finds that we have done our part, He comes with His light, which outshines all natural light and infuses supernatural virtues such as faith, hope, and charity, and the accompanying graces."<sup>7</sup> Sermon 37 tells the reader, "As soon as we enter our house to search for God there, God in His turn searches for us, and the house is turned upside down."<sup>8</sup> Then in Sermon 26 one discovers these words: "If, therefore, [the Holy Spirit] should be fitly received, it is He who must prepare the place, create the receptiveness in the soul, and also dwell there to receive Himself."<sup>9</sup>

The sentence following this quote introduces concepts which are foundational to understanding Tauler's beliefs concerning human nature. He continues on, "It is the ineffable abyss of God that must be His dwelling and the place where He is received, not that of creatures."<sup>10</sup> Bernard McGinn summarizes Tauler's teaching on the divine abyss by describing it as unfathomable mystery. The word abyss is of Greek derivation and means literally "without bottom." Tauler presents God as an abyss of love. He uses *abgrunt* (abyss) and *grunt* (ground) interchangeably at times. *Abgrunt* may also be recognized in Tauler as a deeper region of the soul than *grunt*, a region of "total ungraspability."<sup>11</sup>

In Tauler's understanding, there is a part of humans which is uncreated. The divine abyss dwells there. It is known as the ground (*grunt*) of the soul (similar in principle to Eckhart's spark of the divine) and is the place in the soul from which God cannot be separated. Tauler describes this existence as where "the Image of the Blessed Trinity rests in the most intimate, hidden, and inmost ground of the soul, where God is present essentially, actively, and substantially. Here God acts and exists and rejoices in Himself, and to separate God from this inmost ground would be as impossible as separating Him from Himself" (Sermon 29).<sup>12</sup> In the same section he explains that because of this arrangement, "the soul possesses

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500)*, vol. IV of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), p. 262.

<sup>12</sup> Tauler, p. 105.

everything by grace which God possesses by nature.” Then to emphasize man’s responsibility to take initiative in exploring union with God he adds, “In the measure in which man surrenders himself and turns to that inmost ground, grace is born in the highest way.”<sup>13</sup>

To make a preliminary contrast with Calvin’s assumptions regarding human nature and the nature of the soul, it should be noted that the authority Tauler cites immediately in the context of the above-stated doctrine, is Proclus, a pagan philosopher. This practice assigns the defining authority of one of Tauler’s key concepts to a person not recognized as divinely inspired and not attempting to represent Biblical truths. Calvin’s key teachings would rest on many references to Holy Scripture and to the church fathers as well. Tauler does not rely exclusively on pagan philosophers as his sources. After Proclus, he cites Jesus’ saying that “The kingdom of God is within us.” For one seeking sublime union with God, logically in Tauler’s understanding one would turn inward to the soul in order to find God there. When Tauler does use Biblical references as the proof of his teaching, unlike the reformers, he employed allegory heavily and found hidden meanings in the text that supported speculative mystical spirituality. To modern Protestants such interpretation of the Bible might appear imaginative and seem as if it gives license to the preacher to find whatever doctrine desirable in a text.

To understand what the union with God he promoted would be like, Tauler cites Proclus who describes it as a state of divine darkness where all is “still, silent, at rest, and above all sense perception.”<sup>14</sup> How does one arrive at this divine darkness? Proclus directed the seeker to concentrate attention on this ground of the soul with all intellect, then to rise above all rational methods.

For Tauler such a pattern stems from the behavior of God as the members of the Trinity relate to each other. In Sermon 1 he describes a process from which he believes the divine ground of the soul originated and which is the key to enjoying union with God. He believes that it is in God’s nature to communicate and to pour Himself out which the Father does first through the Son, then the Spirit as love and finally in His creation. Then this outflowing is followed by an inflowing, a return to the Source.

The Father “turns inward, comprehending Himself, and He flows outward in the generation of His Image (that of His Son).”<sup>15</sup> Then as He turns to Himself in self-delight once again He flows out as love as the Holy Spirit. So there is a pattern. The Father “turns inward, goes outward, and returns to Himself again.”<sup>16</sup> This pattern accounts for the divine ground of the soul. God has turned inward and flowed outward in His creation, and now there is implanted in humans an essential inclination (*gemuete*) to return to God. Before creation, “man was

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

everlasting in God....” “When he [man] was in Him, he was God in God.”<sup>17</sup> Tauler further explains, “What man now is in his createdness, he was from the beginning of God’s uncreatedness, one with Him in essence. And until he returns to that imageless state which was his when he issued from the origin, from uncreatedness to createdness, he will never find his way back into God.”<sup>18</sup> So one must strive to shed all natural inclination, all inordinate pleasure and any possessiveness in order to return to one’s original state which will open the door for union with humanity’s original Source once again. Yet in the same sermon (44) which contains these truths about humans having originated from the same essence as God, the preacher says that as the ground is united with the Word and they become one, the union is not one of essence, for “the soul retains its created nature in this union.”<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the latter point is meant to clarify the former, but the opposite seems to be produced. A reader who possesses familiarity with Eckhart might wonder if Tauler shared an affinity with his master regarding the doctrines which seemed to the church as pantheism (that man becomes God and shares the same essence because God is in everything), but was forced to interject statements that tend toward self-contradiction in order to safeguard being condemned as well. Were it not for confusing disclaimers such as this, one might suspect that Eckhart’s speculations would shine through more brilliantly in Tauler.

Sermon 10 states that “We know that all the elements possess an inherent tendency to return to their natural place of origin. This is true of every created thing;” so certainly the human soul should “rush back to his eternal source, his goal and his light.”<sup>20</sup> It would follow then that Tauler taught that to be in union with God one must turn inward to that divine ground in order to flow outward to God. In so doing “spiritual motherhood” may be attained in the soul as birth is given to God there.<sup>21</sup> In the same context where spiritual motherhood is presented (Sermon 1) the innate ability of the human memory, understanding and free will to “grasp God and partake of Him” is taught. The soul possesses a higher part which touches eternity and a lower part that is bound up in sensible and animal matters due to the fall. As will be observed in the latter half of this paper, such a belief concerning a divine part of the soul is contradictory to Calvin’s teaching of total depravity.

The soul’s goal, in Tauler’s mystical scheme, is to turn away from time and createdness<sup>22</sup> through practices of detachment and turn fully to eternity and uncreatedness which is implanted within it by the Creator. McGinn summarizes this union as the divine abyss being receptive to itself inside the annihilated

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

soul.<sup>23</sup> Human will, desire and worldly activity must be abandoned. Among the distractions to union with God are friendships, food, inordinate affection for creatures, society, fashions, etc.<sup>24</sup> The soul should be stripped of itself in its surrender to God.<sup>25</sup> However, Tauler did not advocate a complete withdrawal from the world but attempted to present a way to find God in the midst of one's vocation.<sup>26</sup> Nor did he promote a monastic lifestyle with many outwardly religious activities as the key to union with God.<sup>27</sup> Prayer, however was distinguished as the sure means of ascent to God, especially use of the Our Father which was taught by the "greatest of all the masters."<sup>28</sup> By prayer God may enter the soul's deepest ground.

In such withdrawal into one's interior he promised that a second of the interior union would be far greater than anything the exterior world had to offer,<sup>29</sup> although he had never experienced it himself.<sup>30</sup> This union with God causes the soul to become "forgetful of its own being, unaware of word or concept, feeling or perception, knowledge or love. There is but the pure simplicity of God, an unfathomable abyss, a being, a spirit."<sup>31</sup> In Sermon 37 Tauler describes this union in that "the soul soars far above itself, right into the very core of God. So much does the soul take on God's hue that, could it behold itself, it would take itself for God,"<sup>32</sup> and later he says the soul and God are one, so the soul sees itself as God.<sup>33</sup> Does this mean it could worship itself?

Achieving such union with God, even on the highest level, enjoying sweetest communion with God does not assure a person of salvation. It seems that granting salvation is only by God's good pleasure and is separate from the experience of a person turning inward to discover the divine.<sup>34</sup> In looking ahead to the Reformation what is missing is the concept of forensic (legal) justification. The role of Christ in the human quest toward union with God is chiefly that of an example in Tauler's system of spirituality. "His manifold suffering should draw us out of ourselves, and ... we should extinguish our own dark light in His true, essential light."<sup>35</sup> Over against forensic justification is an infusion of divine virtue in response to human initiative to prepare oneself.<sup>36</sup> Over against a new standing with God in which context the Spirit of God sanctifies a believer (a

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<sup>23</sup> *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, p. 264.

<sup>24</sup> Tauler, p. 159.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> At least, such an experience is not recorded in his surviving writings.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

doctrine that was well developed in the Reformation), Tauler's mystical perspective focused on satisfaction through a works-driven experience of union with the inner ground of the soul and thus with God. The problem of sin does not seem to be remedied by the cross, but if humans simply turn away from their sins, God will forget them also.<sup>37</sup>

If spirituality is defined as the way a person believes or behaves, it seems that the risk in Tauler's spirituality would be the very self-centeredness which he condemned because his beliefs and behavior are very self-focused. The key concept which would safeguard his method from self-serving ends is the notion that God is resident in every human. In other words, in the end, by turning inward, one is actually seeking God and honoring God. However, if God is not there as he assumes, one would only find self and honor self. He says, "Whoever wishes to discover this Kingdom – where God reigns with all His riches in His very essence and nature – he must look for it where it is: in the very depth of the soul, where God is infinitely closer to the soul, more inherent, as the soul is to itself."<sup>38</sup> If God is not to be found there, then turning inward would fail to create union with God.

A post-Reformation Protestant would likely want to inquire more closely of Tauler as to the source of the authority for his view. His allegorical methods of interpretation seem to open the door for him to derive from Scripture texts what he wishes to find there.<sup>39</sup> His appeal to pagan philosophers who teach that God is found within leads one to question whether any revelation recorded in the Bible would be necessary at all for a journey into God. How much can one trust another who claims to have found God within? If Calvin's teaching about the deceptiveness of the human heart is introduced into the discussion, human beings may no longer be trusted as authorities based on their own experience. Tauler trusted the soul itself to be a source of revelation.<sup>40</sup> And without Tauler being able to speak from experience, he had to rely on what other mystics said as authorities concerning the message he preached.

Tauler was not exceptionally different from other Medieval notables. There was great emphasis on humility, imitation of Christ, and what amounted to a works-based salvation. Jesus was viewed as a doorway to union with God, and the idea of atonement does not seem to be in the forefront of Tauler's thinking. He adopted the traditional formula, "He became man so that man could become

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<sup>37</sup> Steven E. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509-1516) in the Context of Their Theological Thought*, vol. VI *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Tauler, p. 126.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Kieckhefer gives an example of Tauler's allegorizing as he assigned meaning to the cross on which Christ died. The top piece of the cross signified God's love, the left beam representing humility, the right purity and the footpiece obedience. Cited in "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety," *Church History* 67 no. 1 (Mr 1998): 49.

<sup>40</sup> Ozment, p. 20.

God.”<sup>41</sup> Since the ground of the soul desires to be stripped of all that is not God, there is much work to be done on the part of humans. Tauler’s was an age that stressed great devotion in one’s pursuit of God.

The reformers would not see the pinnacle of spirituality as an experience of spiritual ecstasy in the here and now. They stressed a connectedness with God, but not a union of essence as Eckhart did, and they stressed union with God as a continuing state as a result of justification founded on the atoning work of Christ rather than an event that was found simply by melting into God.

And one would be hard pressed to find in the reformers an emphasis on moving past the rational in pursuit of God. This is not to say that the reformers were concerned only with the mind and not the heart. But their emphasis on the Word of God demanded that the rational part of humans be integrally involved in spirituality. Such an emphasis on sanctifying the rational part of humans spares them from having to answer questions Tauler may have faced such as, How can a created person escape createdness in order to separate from all that is not God? If one ceased createdness, could one still exist? Can rational answers for these concerns be found or is an escape into irrationality the answer? Apparently, for Tauler, this oneness with God was so much higher than rational thought, that the Word of God (along with the Body of Christ) were removed in that state because they were hindrances to that oneness.<sup>42</sup> Tauler’s attempts to move beyond reason make his writings seem confusing and self-contradictory.

Another difference that will show up between Calvin and Tauler is the nature of the human soul in relation to the Image of God. Calvin believed that humans are made in God’s image. Tauler taught that the human soul is the Image itself.<sup>43</sup> He taught that humans have three faculties – sensory, intellectual and spiritual, but only the spiritual faculties were created in the image of God.<sup>44</sup>

Tauler taught an innate desire of the human abyss to be lost in the divine abyss.<sup>45</sup> Again, this would be a difference with the coming Reformation which taught that human desire for God was not a natural desire, innately placed in each person, but was only a product of God’s sovereign work. Calvin would hold strongly that the effects of the fall perverted human desires and left humans in a state of spiritual death, unable to incline toward God. Tauler held to the idea of *gemuete* which was an eternal inclination of the soul toward God.<sup>46</sup> That part of the soul is never cut off from God but is in constant communion, and it penetrates

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, p. 271.

<sup>42</sup> Ozment, p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Tauler, p. 128.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism From Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Ozment, p. 16.

reason and will and draws a person back to original uncreatedness.<sup>47</sup> The soul and God are viewed as being in covenant – God committed to reunification with the soul and the soul committed to surrender, even if a human is not aware of this covenant relationship.<sup>48</sup>

## **John Calvin**

Albrecht Ritschl is quoted as saying that “wherever mysticism is found, the thought of justification no longer retains its true significance as the key to the whole domain of the Christian life.”<sup>49</sup> Instead, a mystical union with God where deity is transfused into a person directly when one transcends rationality seems to take center stage. The cross may be relegated by some mystics to be simply an example of self-denial and love, and the concept of atonement virtually neglected. Tauler had little talk about a change in nature or standing with God. For Tauler the potential for having a good standing with God was built into each individual. One only had to search within for it.

Calvin’s model of spirituality is very different. It looks without the individual to the Scriptures. And within the Scriptures it looks in faith to the promises of God. Apart from the gracious regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, there is no potential for spiritually dead persons to have union with God. There is no innate God within. There is no doctrine of having flowed out from the Trinity and having natural urges to flow back. While union with God is a major emphasis for Calvin, some would be surprised by the emphasis he places on it if they are aware of his teachings regarding the heights of divine majesty and the depths of natural human despair. This despair is man’s condition apart from justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification and glorification in Christ and His work on the cross. Apart from Christ no union with God is possible. Through faith in the Gospel, union with God is possible. But this union is more than an ecstatic experience. It is a new relationship graciously given in justification and developed over the lifetime of a believer in sanctification, to be completed in the glorious full realization of such union in heaven. Calvin nowhere teaches humans were or will become divine, and when he speaks of them being partakers of the divine nature he refers to divine attributes/qualities and life that are graciously given.

Calvin was born in 1509 in northern France. He was educated in law after earning a bachelor’s degree at the University of Paris and eventually took interest in the reform movement in the church gaining popularity in Europe. Most of his ministry was in Geneva with the exception of a few years in exile in Strasbourg (1538-1541). His most famous work is Institutes of the Christian Religion which will be the main source of information for the following section.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Tamburello, p. 3.

Beginning with book one, one may find almost immediately the strong emphasis on external sources for revelation as opposed to internal sources for the Christian. The heading for section 1.6.1 reads, "God bestows the actual knowledge of Himself upon us only in the Scriptures."<sup>50</sup> There is no approaching God apart from Scripture. He refers to the patriarchs as having knowledge of God that brought life to the soul, but he refers to this knowledge not in ecstatic terms but in terms of intimacy with God on a continuing basis in the context of a relationship.<sup>51</sup> The mind is regarded as prone to false imaginations of God (1.6.3).<sup>52</sup> It seems that without Scripture's authority Tauler's (and Eckhart's) ideas of the soul would be regarded as inventions of the mind and imagination. Fanatics are those who abandon Scripture and appeal only to the Spirit or some direct access to God (1.9.1). Calvin explained that if the apostles were in tune with the Spirit, one should follow their examples of reverence for the holy writings. Paul, who was caught up into the third heaven, pursued proficiency in the Law and the Prophets. He does not develop a spirituality which pursues ecstatic experiences but instead one which pursues a new way of life for the transformed believer. Paul's words to Timothy state that all Scripture is useful for teaching, admonishing, and reproving with the goal of Christian perfection in mind (2 Timothy 3:16-17).<sup>53</sup> Further, Jesus promised that the Spirit would use what He had taught them in words to lead them (John 16:13). The Spirit was not given to invent new revelations and create unheard of doctrines.<sup>54</sup> Nor did Jesus promise that the disciples would be moved by the Spirit beyond rationality. "Those whom the Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture" (1.7.5).<sup>55</sup> Those who seek revelation from the Spirit within themselves rather than from God in the written Word and invent new doctrines are duped by Satan into falsehood (1.9.2). He pokes fun at speculations conceived while snoring (1.9.3).<sup>56</sup>

The reason external revelation is necessary and human speculation must be rejected is because the corruption of human will and nature requires total renewal of the mind and will (2.3.1-5).<sup>57</sup> Without God's grace, no good work would be done (2.3.12).<sup>58</sup> This implies that the pollution of sin is so great that even our understanding is darkened (2.3.2). Here he specifically states, "It is futile to seek anything good in our nature."<sup>59</sup> Only the powerful grace of God can change human nature and effect union with God. There is no divine ground of the

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<sup>50</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in two volumes, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles vols. XX and XXI in *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 69.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289ff..

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290-291.

soul found in the Scriptures. Another explicit statement says the soul “is utterly devoid of all good.”<sup>60</sup> Unless a special act of regeneration is produced by the Spirit there is no innate zeal to glorify God.<sup>61</sup> “Because of the bondage of sin by which the will is held bound, it cannot move toward good...” (2.3.5).<sup>62</sup> Calvin might say that Tauler’s calls to make oneself ready to receive God would fall on deaf ears unless God’s sovereign mercy were at work to change the hearts of the hearers (2.3.8). There is nothing one can do to prepare oneself for grace. Would it be grace if it were goodness merited by human action?

In contradiction to Tauler’s gamuete, or the essential inclination of the soul toward God from which it came, Calvin cites Solomon in 1 Kings 8:58 to show that by nature man’s stubborn heart glories in rebelling against God’s law (2.3.9).<sup>63</sup> Because of sin humans are completely cut off from the life of God and there is no potential in human nature to do good.<sup>64</sup> Tauler taught that the reason a person seeks God is because of the divine part placed there in creation. Calvin uses an analogy regarding a branch that is removed from the tree. He says, “In vain this silly subtlety is alleged: there is already sap enclosed in the branch, and the power of bearing fruit.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, there is no spark of the divine in humans that would naturally cause a seeking after God. Nowhere did Christ instruct His disciples to look within themselves to find God or to find good.<sup>66</sup> Instead they were to look to Him, the living Word as the way and truth and life. In his commentary on Second Corinthians 4:6 Calvin directed that God is not to be sought out in His unsearchable height (as one might point out that the mystics do), but only in Jesus the Christ. If persons search for anything of God apart from Christ they “wander out of the way.” He continues in the same context to say, “It is more advantageous for us to behold God, as He appears in His only-begotten Son, than to search out His secret essence.”<sup>67</sup>

This leaves would-be followers of God in need of life, in need of divine intervention. He cites 1 Corinthians 2:14 as evidence that the natural man cannot receive the things of God and Jeremiah 24:7 to indicate that God must first grant a new heart to any who would know Him (2.2.20).<sup>68</sup> In another place he says, “I take it for granted that there is such life energy in God’s Word that it quickens the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> In contrast to Tauler’s use of the phrase “The kingdom of God is within us” as alleged proof that God is to be found within, in the *Institutes* (2.15.4) Calvin refers to this passage in Luke 17:21 and explains it in terms of the kingdom of God being spiritual and not consisting of outward, material advantages. Christ is still to be sought in the Gospel.

<sup>67</sup> John Calvin, *The Commentaries of John Calvin on The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, vol. II, vol. XX in Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, reprint 2003), p. 200.

<sup>68</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. 279-280.

souls of all to whom God grants participation in it” (2.10.7).<sup>69</sup> This implies that in Calvin’s estimation not all are given equal opportunity as would be the case if all had a divine ground of the soul. The French reformer looks to the Old Testament saints as an example. He regards them as united to God through the Word and says that by embracing that Word they had “a real participation in God.”<sup>70</sup> This Reformation spirituality is one that focuses on the Word of God as central for daily practice and meditation. Because of the curse of sin, the Institutes teach, humans are compelled to look upward (not inward) (1.1.1).<sup>71</sup> While the human mind possesses naturally an awareness of divinity (1.3.1),<sup>72</sup> this concept is far different from the spark of the divinity in mystical thinking.

At times Calvin’s language sounds as if it has common ground with mystics. He speaks of the Holy Spirit enflaming “our hearts with the love of God ...” (3.1.3),<sup>73</sup> but the work of the Spirit is to awaken faith in the knowledge that God is a merciful Father and that Christ has effected reconciliation by His work on the cross and brought to us righteousness and sanctification and life (3.2.2).<sup>74</sup> In contrast to Tauler, the work of the Spirit is rooted in a rational understanding of the promises and the historical record of the Word of God. The new standing in Christ believers share because of the work of the Holy Spirit in them results in joy, but what is absent is talk about obtaining ecstatic experiences of the immediate presence of God being the goal of daily living. In his commentary on 2 Peter 1:4 Calvin notes that by the promises of God believers are made partakers of the divine nature, and he says that there is nothing better.<sup>75</sup> He further elaborates on the concept of being a partaker of the divine nature by saying that all God’s things in a manner become our things. In fact, God makes Himself ours. But this refers to quality and not essence. The commentator speaks ill of the Manichaeans who dreamt “we are a part of God” and that after running the race of this life, persons will revert to an original state. Further, he referred to those as fanatics who teach that believers pass over into the nature of God as if His nature swallows up human nature.<sup>76</sup> Believers may become one with God only as far as human capacities allow. Vice may be removed and the glory and immortality of God may shine through such persons. In the Institutes he again addresses what he calls the Manichaean “delusion” that the soul is a “derivative of God’s substance ...,” “as if some portion of immeasurable divinity flowed into man” (1.15.5).<sup>77</sup> He further explains that when the Apostle Paul speaks of the restoration of the image of God in mankind, he is speaking of being made to conform to God, not an inflowing of substance but simply the grace and power of

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 434.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 541.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

<sup>75</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Second Epistle of Peter*, trans. John Owen, vol. XXII in Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, reprint 2003), p. 370

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>77</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. 190-191.

the Spirit.<sup>78</sup> When the Reformer comments on Ephesians 5:30-32, the passage describing the union of believers with Christ, the Head of the church, there he does indicate a partaking of the same substance of Christ, but he qualifies this to mean life and power, not divine essence.<sup>79</sup> He is careful to maintain the creature/Creator distinction.<sup>80</sup>

Adam by his fall became alienated from God (1.15.4).<sup>81</sup> Faith is the link that reunites human and divine. Faith is defined in the *Institutes* as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (3.2.7).<sup>82</sup> Faith is a supernatural work and stretches beyond natural human comprehension (3.2.14).<sup>83</sup> Calvin asks, “Shall we then attribute to it [i.e., the mind] the keen insight by which man can penetrate to God and to the secret places of the Kingdom of Heaven? Away with such madness!” (2.2.20)<sup>84</sup> The union with Christ that results from the supernatural gift of faith (3.2.30)<sup>85</sup> removes condemnation, grants His righteousness, and leads to increasingly sweeter communion with Him daily (3.2.24).<sup>86</sup> J. Todd Billings summarized Calvin’s thought on unification with God by noting that it comes by imputation of Christ’s righteousness to our human nature. It is not synergistic.<sup>87</sup> The old sinful self dies in regeneration. The Creator grants new life and thus a capacity to enjoy Himself. Full humanity is not possible apart from partaking of divinity.<sup>88</sup> Because of sin there can be no good human action apart from God’s action. God is the fountain of life and goodness.<sup>89</sup>

Where a mystic would seek an experience, the Reformation promoted a way of life based on a new standing rooted in forensic justification, Christ having removed sins by His death on the cross and all guilt having been removed so that believers could enjoy adoption into the family of God. The idea of mystical bliss might be considered a part of eschatological glorification in the mind of the reformers. Mystical thinkers desire a foretaste of heaven now. Reformed thinkers

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>79</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, vol. XXI in *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, reprint 2003), pp. 324, 326.

<sup>80</sup> J. Todd Billings, “John Calvin: United to God Through Christ,” *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), p. 207.

<sup>81</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 189.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 551.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 559.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 576.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 570-571.

<sup>87</sup> Billings, p. 200.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

seem to be content to defer such experience until the life to come arrives (3.2.28).<sup>90</sup>

Calvin (like Luther) would have appreciated Tauler's emphasis on self-denial and imitation of Christ (see 3.7.1ff.). But Calvin would have differed from Tauler in that his goal would have been to show love for what he has received in Christ rather than try to prepare a place for the Spirit who would hopefully bring an ecstatic experience.

Like Tauler also, Calvin clarifies that while believers are one with Christ His essence is not mixed with theirs (3.11.5).<sup>91</sup> But Calvin nowhere speaks of the soul thinking that it is God or regarding itself as God as Tauler did. In a footnote in the Institutes the editor notes that absent from Calvin's teaching is the thought of being absorbed into the sphere of the divine being (3.11.10).<sup>92</sup>

The Genevan preacher's emphasis on election was a concept foreign to Tauler. The Institutes reveal the belief that no one can come to the Father unless the Father draws him, and the Father draws whomsoever He will (John 6). This election is not based on human effort (3.22.3,7,10).<sup>93</sup> Nor is it based on any alleged inherent divinity resident in humans that desires to reunite with divinity. God finds nothing in a person that arouses Him to do good to an individual (3.14.5).<sup>94</sup>

Based on these theological considerations Calvin's spirituality demonstrated the following emphases. First, he showed a strong reverence for the written Word of God in the devotion which he modeled for his congregation and in which he led them. His liturgy in Geneva heavily relied on the Psalms as expressions of worship. He encouraged the use of God's Word as fitting words to be offered back to God. The sermon based on passages of Scripture was central. The liturgies for baptism or other occasions were peppered with allusions to the Bible. Because of his influence there are Reformed churches in modern society that employ the regulative principle – the belief that unless it is authorized directly by Scripture, a practice should not be included as an expression of corporate devotion to God.

Secondly, rather than look inward to find God, the Lord's Supper was an opportunity to feed on Christ by faith. He differed from others who taught a bodily presence of Christ at the table, maintaining that Christ's body was seated at the Father's side in heaven. But he proclaimed the Communion Table as a means of grace because the Savior is present spiritually and can be fed upon in one's

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<sup>90</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 574.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 730.

<sup>92</sup> Footnote 20, *Ibid.*, p. 737.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 935, 940, 945.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 771.

heart. Apart from a participation in Christ's suffering and sacrifice, humans would remain alienated from God.

Thirdly, believing that the highest human good is union with God when believers are brought into the likeness of Christ,<sup>95</sup> repentance becomes of great importance so as to conform more and more by the gracious transforming power of God into the likeness of Christ. To be united with Christ involves dwelling in His kingdom, under His rule.<sup>96</sup> He took on human nature to communicate the divine nature to His people who are adopted because of His work on the cross. Clothed in human flesh, Jesus defeated death and sin, and won a victory for all who believe. Calvin stressed the Christian's unity with Christ's humanity which also partook of the divine nature.<sup>97</sup> At the resurrection the believer's state is described as being "fully in God, filled with God, cleaving to God, completely possessing God" and "one with God."<sup>98</sup> Until that day, the follower of Jesus is always in progress. Union with Him is effected by the Spirit who gives faith through preaching of the Word and participation in the sacraments.<sup>99</sup> The purpose given for the writing of the Institutes in the dedication to King Francis I was the teaching of true piety. The controversy over what has become known as the five points of Calvinism was not the centerpiece of the writing. It was how to live in union with Christ. Otto Grundler summarizes Calvin's definition of true piety as a response of love and reverence after learning of the benefits promised in the Gospel.<sup>100</sup> In the same context Grundler summarizes the ground for Calvin's piety by explaining that the innate sense of divinity occurring naturally in a person does not produce piety. Sin prevents the offering of a fitting response of obedience and service to God. The Word of God, special revelation from God, becomes the basis for Christian spirituality (which of course results in repentance as the Spirit of God produces conviction for sin when the Word of God is preached).

## Conclusion

The opening pages of Calvin's Institutes speak of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humans. Calvin's piety is built on rational principles of knowledge revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Tauler, on the other hand, presses for a participation in this life in something that is beyond rationality. How can rational creatures leave behind their creatureliness?

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<sup>95</sup> Robert C. Doyle, "The Preaching of Repentance in John Calvin: Repentance and Union with Christ," *God Who Is Rich in Mercy*, ed. Peter T. O'Brien and David G. Peterson (Homebush West, Australia: Lancer Books, 1986), p. 293.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>100</sup> Otto Grundler, "John Calvin: Ingrafting into Christ," *The Spirituality of Western Christendom*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1976), p. 173.

A weakness in Tauler's spirituality is his lack of authoritative basis for proclaiming the idea of humans having flowed out from God and having retained a ground of the divine in the soul even after the fall. The grounds for such a major principle one would hope would be well documented. It seems that Tauler relies on philosophical speculation rather than the precedent set by Biblical writers. The introduction of the concept of total depravity as taught by Calvin (as well as other reformers) brings suspicion on all that is found within humans and all human inventions which attempt to explain the soul or the God within.

Tauler's spirituality is characterized by confusion regarding human and divine roles. Since the *gemuete* is supposed to incline the soul to God and permeate the will and sensory faculties, one could assume that the initiative in spirituality is divine. Yet there are other sermons in which he stresses the initial responsibility of persons to flee createdness and rationality and pursue God on their own. Because of a flight from rationality, Tauler does not offer many specific spiritual disciplines except detachment and prayer.

Calvin's spirituality teaches a helplessness on the part of humanity to prepare for God. The Spirit illuminates the mind to be freed from spiritual blindness and to accept revelation. This act of grace is followed by loving service and expressions of gratitude on the part of the believer. Only as faith is given is a tie with God established as the Holy Spirit ingrafts the believer into Christ and a living, intimate relationship is engaged. Every part of a believer's life – service within the church, serving within one's daily vocation, serving one's family, is then to be lived out under rule of the Word of God out of love for Jesus. The mystical union with Christ should become increasingly evident in the process of sanctification as believers are restored into the image of Christ. Because of union with Christ a right spirit is placed in believers who then engage in a voluntary obedience, not to merit an ecstatic experience or to gain union with Christ but as a result of that union.<sup>101</sup> The reformer referred to the restoration of the image of God in humans as "participation in God."<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps Tauler was influenced by Eckhart in respect to the fact that Eckhart did not deal much with original sin. He believed sin was nothing and therefore had not much to say about it. Tauler did not stress forensic justification. Believing in the inherent divine ground of the soul in each individual, if sin were removed, union with God seemed according to his teaching as if it would come naturally. If what binds it is removed, deity will swallow up creatureliness. This presents a weakened God who had to await human activity before coming to union with Himself in the soul and presents also strong potential in human activity, something Calvin demonstrated was not in step with Biblical authors.

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<sup>101</sup> J. Todd Billings, "United to God through Christ: Assessing Calvin on the Question of Deification" *Harvard Theological Review* 98:3 (2005): 321.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

The sacrifice of Christ played a greater role in Calvin in overcoming what he perceived as man's inability to help himself at all in inviting union with the divine. He taught that if a person possessed Christ (or Christ possessed that person) that the person received both justification (legal removal of guilt, paving the way for union with God) and sanctification (moral transformation by the Spirit), a living out of the union with Christ. Without justification, how could a person be assured of salvation? In Tauler's works-oriented scheme, no peace could be had in the area of assurance because he only taught an infusion of righteousness as did Osiander whom Calvin combated in the Institutes.

Because Tauler and Calvin started with different assumptions about the fundamental makeup of fallen human beings (Tauler claiming humans possess an intrinsic propensity to do good and a union with God inherent in them and Calvin seeing humans as completely alienated from God by sin), their pursuit of God was different and their expectations of God were different. Tauler promoted an escape from creatureliness. Calvin espoused a hope of all of life being transformed as created humanity reaches full potential in being conformed to the image of Christ in union with Him. Tauler sought a sinking into the dark abyss of nothingness in God, an ecstatic experience of grasping after the ungraspable. Calvin sought the Word of God to transform all of life as the Holy Spirit creates faith in the heart of the elect who then believe the promises of God and because of their new standing in Christ enjoy God's favor daily, not expecting ecstasy until the resurrection, but instead being willing to suffer with Christ by imitating Him and denying self and finding joy as a result of this living union with Christ. The life and blessings Jesus received from the Father are transferred to those in union with Him.<sup>103</sup> So the believer lives in daily fellowship. Tauler may have sought an experience; Calvin promoted a new state of being.

William Bouwsma in regard to Calvin's spirituality points out the recurring theme of glorifying God<sup>104</sup> which serves to highlight a difference of focus between the mystical preacher and the reformer considered in this paper. In reading Tauler's sermons, a theme of glorifying God is not as apparent as in Calvin.

Tauler begins considerations of spirituality with a deified person. His focus is on the person, looking within the person to find the divine. His stress is on human action for the sake of human ecstasy. His flight from self ironically was very self-focused.

Calvin emphasizes the majesty of God and human dependence on the divine. He emphasizes looking outside of self to God's revelation. He stressed God's sovereign action to change one's nature, to grant faith and to close the gulf that separates the divine and the human. His goal is to glorify God or to bring

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<sup>103</sup> Tamburello, p. 88.

<sup>104</sup> William J. Bouwsma, "The Spirituality of John Calvin," *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt, vol. 17 *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), p. 323.

pleasure to God as an act of love and gratitude for the work of Christ on the cross and the sovereign choice of God to include a person in that work.

Tauler taught that to go out of oneself one had to turn inward upon oneself. Calvin taught in essence that one must go out of oneself in order to find God, and what is produced in the process is that one discovers himself or herself to be made a new person. Tauler turned inward to himself to find peace and at best could hope for a fleeting experience which would transform daily living (which he apparently never found). Calvin turned outward to the promises of the Gospel and found peace and goodness and assurance from God resulting in a new state of existence which joyously affected daily living.

Joel Kletzing is a small town pastor serving the same Reformed church for over 23 years. He is married with two nearly-adult sons. He appreciates opportunities to learn and has been educated at Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed schools but has stopped enrolling in any further programs for the present so that he can instead devote time to serving African pastors who do not have the opportunity to access very much formal education.

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