

John Calvin, the Nascent Sabbatarian: A Reconsideration of Calvin's View of Two Key Sabbath-Issues

By Stewart E. Lauer

INTRODUCTION

More than 440 years after his death, John Calvin's opinions on doctrinal and exegetical questions remain well respected in many quarters, particularly in Reformed churches. Somewhat ironically, for someone to be able to show that Calvin supports his exegesis or doctrinal formulation tends to give that position a credibility somewhat akin to that which Calvin himself would likely have accorded only to the views of Christ and his apostles. At any rate, given such stature, it should be no surprise that the French reformer's views on all sorts of doctrines have been carefully scrutinized and debated. His treatment of the Sabbath is no exception.

The current work will re-examine several of Calvin's writings on the subject, including his two sermons on the fourth commandment (on Deut. 5:12–15). Until fairly recently, these messages were not readily accessible. "For too long the wealth of material in the Deuteronomy sermons has been neglected."¹ Despite their 1980 publication in English, they have still not—in the opinion of the current author—been adequately reckoned with in the present day understanding of Calvin on the fourth commandment.²

There has been a tendency in Calvin studies on the Sabbath to posit a disjuncture of sorts between these sermons and *the Institutes*,³ with the former thought to support sabbatarianism, or at least what has been termed "practical sabbatarianism" (Gaffin, 109), while the latter work is said to express a "non-Sabbatarian" theology.⁴ Regarding the binding force of the fourth commandment on the Christian church, these Calvin-writings seem so different from each other that early (c. AD 1600) proponents of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath have been accused of ignoring the *Institutes* (in favor of the sermons):

It is ... highly significant that there are *no references whatsoever* to Calvin's *Institutes* in any of the Sabbatarian literature [among the Puritans in the period after Calvin], even though this landmark theological work was well known ... and was even available in the English language.⁵

Correspondingly, regarding a prominent Puritan sabbatarian, Primus observes, "Most of Bound's references to Calvin are to the Deuteronomy sermons ... Calvin's

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1. John H. Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. by D.E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976) 75.

2. In his 1998 revision of his (previously unpublished) master's thesis, Richard B. Gaffin explains his (originally) having excluded Calvin's two sermons on the 4th commandment from consideration at that time, "My 1962 thesis did not deal with two sermons on the fourth commandment. At that time I was unable to read them in the original (French) and unaware of existing English translations"; *Calvin and the Sabbath: The Controversy of applying the Fourth Commandment* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 1998) 109. Cf. "Calvin and the Sabbath: A Thesis Submitted to the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Mastery of Theology." Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, 1962. Rpt. Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981.

3. Citations from the *Institutes* are as given by the author cited or from the Battles edition. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., *Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

4. John H. Primus, *Holy Time: Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer Univ. Press, 1989) 134.

5. *Holy Time*, 120. Unless otherwise noted, throughout this article, the semi-bold italic face is used to add emphasis to words in quotations. Italicized words within quotations, unless otherwise specified, are always from the original author.

two sermons on the fourth commandment” (*Holy Time*, 120). On the other hand, regarding what he deems the “most critical, definitive Sabbatarian issue, the divine appointment of Sunday as the New Testament, Christian Sabbath,” Primus concludes, “in short, Calvin in his theology is *not Sabbatarian*.” Later, he pointed out, “Anti-Sabbatarians like Peter Heylyn could, and did, draw on Calvin for support against the Sabbatarians” (120). Primus also alludes to the (supposed) differences between these two sermons and the *Institutes* when he opines,

A consideration of this material will also make it quite clear why the Sabbatarians chose to ignore it. On the other hand, a careful consideration of the Deuteronomy sermons will reveal why Bound appeals to them with such regularity (*Holy Time*, 121).

In short, the evidence that students of Calvin perceived a discrepancy regarding the Sabbath day between his Deuteronomy sermons on the fourth commandment and his *Institutes*’ teaching on it goes back about 400 years.

Moreover, there has been a trend toward reading into this purported difference what amounts to a disjunction between Calvin’s theology and his practice, attributing the ostensibly ‘non-Sabbatarian’ *Institutes* to Calvin’s (principled) theology, and his apparently Sabbatarian practice to a (pragmatic) genuflection toward the practical realities of life which necessitate setting apart a particular day—theology notwithstanding.⁶ Gaffin, adding a brief consideration of the Deuteronomy sermons—in large part block quotes from them—to his ‘slightly modified’ (1962) material on Calvin and the Sabbath,⁷ judges:

6. Primus contends, “The best source for Calvin’s theology of the Sabbath is book 2, chapter 8 of the *Institutes*” (*Holy Time*, 121), and, “in his ethics [Calvin] would be quite comfortable with many of the Puritan emphases.... Calvin’s approach [to Sabbath practice] is strongly colored by his practical concern for good order in the church”; For Calvin, “sheer practical necessity requires cessation of labor on the [Sunday] Sabbath, and nothing more (Primus, “Puritan Sabbath,” 75).

7. Gaffin explains his (1998) addition to his ThM thesis of this sermon material: “I will discuss them for the sake of completeness but only briefly and largely by quoting excerpts”; Gaffin, 109. Of the revisions he makes to his ThM thesis, Gaffin’s preface explains that the paper “has been thoroughly rewritten here for greater clarity and readability, but with only slight modifications in basic format and substance (apart from the concluding Evaluation in chapter 5 ...)”; *ibid.* 7.

8. See below for fuller quotation and reference.

9. *John Calvin’s Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Benjamin

On examination [the sermons] reinforce but *add little to the total picture of Calvin’s views* we have already obtained. They are, however, unique in opening an instructive window on how he preached on the Sabbath/Lord’s Day issue, particularly ... on what may be called the “*practical Sabbatarianism*” they reveal (Gaffin, 109).

Here the dilemma arises: it appears that some Calvin scholars (at least taken together) seem to suggest that his “practical sabbatarianism” was inconsistent with his theological principles. Put in its starkest terms, is it really credible to think that if Calvin believed Christ’s coming had abolished any *God-imposed* duty to observe a particular day of the week as holy, that he would deliver a sermon to Christ’s flock requiring it to “have [Sunday] fully dedicated to him”?⁸ Surely, it is possible that either his practice or his theology has been misconstrued.

On the matter of Calvin’s consistency, Gaffin’s opinion is weighty:

If there is a consensus on anything among Calvin scholars, including those who are unsympathetic, it is that he was consistent and straightforward in presenting his ideas. To conclude that he is guilty of contradicting himself requires the strongest possible evidence, proof that will stand the test of evaluation in the light of all of his writings (Gaffin, 26).

This leads to the question whether Calvin’s theology is not really non-sabbatarian, or his practice is not, in fact, sabbatarian. To answer the question we look first at his practice, then at two key points in his Sabbath theology, the question of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance and Calvin’s view of the change of the day observed from Saturday to Sunday.

CALVIN’S SABBATARIAN PRACTICE

Quoting passages in Calvin’s (Deuteronomy sermons) parænesis regarding *the first day of the week*; such as,

[a] Moreover, let us realize that it is not only for coming to the sermon that the day of Sunday is instituted, but in order that we might devote all the rest of time to praising God.... we ought to observe Sunday as if from a tower in order that we might climb high upon it to contemplate the works of God ... Thus when people profane in this manner the holy order [Sunday] which God has instituted to lead us to himself, why should they be astonished if all the rest of the week is degraded?⁹

[b] let us recognize that it is not enough for us to come to the sermon on Sunday in order to receive some good doctrine and to invoke the name of God, ... May we reduce to memory only what we have previously known by [his] good leisure, that our minds may be delivered from all that hinders us and prevents us from recognizing the works of God. Rather its purpose is to gather us in order that according to our weakness we might be trained to devote ourselves better to the service of God, that we might have this day fully dedicated to him, to the end that we might be withdrawn from the world and, as we have said, that it serve us for the rest of our life;¹⁰

and,

[c] on Sunday it is not enough for each in his own way to think of God and his work, but it is essential for us to gather on that particular day ... it is necessary to have a special day which should be totally dedicated to that end (Farley, 111),

—Gaffin concludes, “Calvin shows himself ... to be remarkably close, in practice, to later Puritan views, those given confessional status in the *Westminster Standards*.”¹¹ Thus, he opines, it seems impossible to deny Calvin’s “practical Sabbatarianism.”¹² If this is true, then surely another look at Calvin’s *Sabbath theology* is in order.

John Primus notes “two cardinal principles of Sabbatarian theology”: (1) “that the Sabbath command is rooted in the Creation order and is therefore moral and universal in scope,” and (2) “that the first day of the week and no other is especially sanctified by God as the Sabbath, making it literally the Christian Sabbath.”¹³ Primus firmly denies Calvin held to these:

Calvin did not express these [two] views. He seems at times to flirt with the idea of some abiding, internal connection between the Sabbath and Creation, but he falls short of declaring the fourth commandment a Creation ordinance. *Holy Time*, 132.

Similarly, Pastor Kazuo Matsuda expresses his understanding of Calvin’s Sabbath theology:

In the OT, the Sabbath observance was strictly required but that it is not now in the NT is because the Sabbath day (4th commandment) was a prior expression of the spiritual rest (redemptive rest) which is fulfilled in Christ. In the NT, spiritual rest is manifested by the

faith of believing in Christ. *In the OT it was manifested by the keeping of the seventh day*. Therefore, the keeping of the seventh day which had been the outward sign of spiritual rest has been abolished, and *only the inward substance continues to exist*.¹⁴

This essay argues that parts of Calvin’s Sabbath theology have been seriously misunderstood and that he was sabbatarian in both practice and theology. While dealing primarily with Calvin’s own writings, this present work also looks at previous studies by Primus, Gaffin, and Matsuda.¹⁵ It will reconsider (1) Calvin’s view of the origin of the Sabbath Day ([universal] creation ordinance or not?) and (2) his understanding of the replacement of the seventh day Sabbath by the Lord’s Day (when and by whom?), and conclude that Calvin does

W. Farley translator and editor (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1980) 110. According to Farley there were several translations and editions of these sermons in English between 1579 and 1583. It appears that his (1980) is the first new translation in 400 years. In passing over these sermons, Gaffin’s ThM thesis is probably typical of much of 20th century Calvin scholarship prior to Farley’s work (see note 2 above). It will likely take time for scholarship to digest fully these (functionally speaking) new found data. A modern revision of the 1582 Golding translation (of which a facsimile was published by Banner of Truth in 1987), edited by J. R. Hughes in 1996, is available at: www.reformed.com/pub/jc_sab_1.htm [Accessed on September 21, 2006].

10. Farley, 111; brackets around ‘his’ are the translator’s own.

11. For references to the Westminster Standards in this article see standard texts such as *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1976; 6th ed. 1990), or *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms: The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as adopted by The Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* (Willow Grove, Pa.: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005).

12. Gaffin, 114, 109; cf. *The Westminster Larger Catechism* #116, #117, #119. Without using the term, Primus, too, seems to recognize Calvin as a ‘practical Sabbatarian’. Of the Deuteronomy sermon material, he opines: “It is the material in which Calvin offers his recommendations on how to observe the day of rest and worship. On this issue Calvin, like Bound and the Westminster Confession, urges a full, weekly day of rest from daily labor and recreation, a day that should be used not only for public but also for private worship” (“The Puritan Sabbath,” 75). Actually, as is clear from the several extracts given above, the sermons’ parænesis is more forceful than mere ‘recommendations’ (e.g. *ibid.*, 69) and is as specific as to which day as are the *Westminster Standards*: Sunday.

13. *Holy Time*, 132.

14. “The Doctrine of Worship in the Westminster Confession of Faith—Concerning the Sabbath Day” in the volume, *Pastor Kazuo Matsuda’s Collection of Theological Essays—On the 34th Anniversary of the Mission to Establish Itayado Church* (Kobe, Japan: Itayado RCJ, 1994), Japanese essay title: “Uestominsta Shinkou Kokuhaku-ni okeru Reihairon—Ansokunichi-ni tsuite—,” 190. All translations from the Japanese are by the present author.

15. Gaffin, *Calvin*; Primus, “Puritan Sabbath” and *Holy Time*; and Matsuda, “Worship,” 187-201.

indeed meet the above definitional criteria for sabbatarian theology.

(1) THE SABBATH DAY:
A (UNIVERSAL) CREATION ORDINANCE?

Primus and Matsuda agree that, in the words of the latter, “Calvin does not support the notion that the Sabbath Day was a creation ordinance.”¹⁶ As already mentioned, the former explains that while some Puritans (such as Bound), “argued that the Sabbath command is *rooted in the Creation* order and is therefore *moral and universal in scope*,” nevertheless, “*Calvin did not express these views*.” Rather, Calvin “seems at times to flirt with the idea of some abiding, internal connection between the Sabbath and Creation, but [he] falls short of declaring the fourth commandment a Creation ordinance” (*Holy Time*, 132). Primus concludes, “on the matter of the creation origins of the fourth commandment, Calvin was ambiguous at best” (134). If by “origins of the fourth commandment,” Primus means not only the very words of that statute, *per se* (recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5), but the “Sabbath command,” more generally (this seems a fair inference from his wider reference to a “connection between the Sabbath and Creation”), then Primus and Matsuda agree: “Calvin does not support the notion that the Sabbath Day was a creation ordinance” (Matsuda, 195).

On the other hand, Gaffin seems to disagree—at least in part. He suggests that those who “have asserted either that Calvin nowhere teaches that the Sabbath is grounded in creation, or, specifically, that this idea is missing in the *Institutes*” have “overlooked the import

of” his *Institutes*’ assertion that, “the Lord commended [observing the Sabbath] by his own example *that they might observe* it with greater piety.” Gaffin opines that, while “certainly there is no explicit mention, in terms of language that came into vogue in later discussions, that the Sabbath is a ‘creation ordinance,’ . . . it is equally certain that [Calvin] here refers implicitly to Genesis 2:3.”¹⁷ From the *Institutes*, then, he concludes:

In short, the notion of the Sabbath institution as a creation ordinance (in the sense of being grounded in God’s own resting after creating), although not explicitly stated, is consonant with and perhaps even implied in the teaching of the *Institutes* (Gaffin, 31).

Similarly, Gaffin deduces from Calvin’s comment on Genesis 2:3 that “[t]here the grounding of this [fourth] commandment in creation is stated explicitly.”¹⁸ So Gaffin seems to affirm that Sabbath observance is, for Calvin, an ordinance grounded in God’s own Sabbath observance in creation.

However, in his final word on the subject, Gaffin qualifies his support, drawing a curious distinction: “the Sabbath institution” but “not necessarily weekly Sabbath observance” is (for Calvin) “a creation ordinance,”

The fourth commandment, being one element in the Decalogue, is one of God’s immutable laws and binding on humanity in all ages; in that sense the Sabbath institution (though not necessarily weekly Sabbath observance) is a creation ordinance (Gaffin, 141).

In the surrounding context, Gaffin does not elaborate on the distinction between “the Sabbath institution” (not Calvin’s term) and “weekly Sabbath observance.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, it seems obvious that Gaffin is unwilling to affirm that Calvin satisfies Primus’ criteria for classification among the sabbatarians, since he does not affirm Calvin believes both, (1) “that the Sabbath command is rooted in the Creation order” and (2) “that the first day of the week,” or any particular day for that matter, “is especially sanctified by God as the Sabbath.”

Which view of Calvin on the Sabbath and creation—is either—is correct?

The Case Against the Sabbath as a Creation Ordinance in Calvin

Primus builds his case against the Sabbath as a ‘creation ordinance’ in Calvin by pointing to his appeal to God’s “own creation activity” as (merely) “a model for the fourth

16. Quoting Calvin, Matsuda explains the reformer’s treatment of the 4th commandment’s appeal to creation as its ground: “From this passage it may be probably conjectured that the hallowing of the Sabbath was prior to the Law’ (on Exod. 20:11). That the Sabbath Day existed before the Law is also manifested in Moses having prohibited the gathering of manna on the seventh day (Exod. 16:22–30). However, Calvin does not support the notion that the Sabbath Day was a creation ordinance.” Matsuda, 195.

17. Gaffin, 30–31; *Institutes* II.8.30.

18. Gaffin, 81; we point out that earlier in this, Gaffin’s concluding paragraph regarding Calvin’s Genesis 2:3 commentary, when he calls the “comment the clearest evidence that for Calvin the fourth commandment, given at Sinai, reflects a creation ordinance,” Gaffin seems less than firm in his support for the notion that Calvin actually holds the Sabbath as such. It is hard to grasp the force of ‘reflects’ in such a context.

19. In the light of Gaffin’s (p 81) recognition that, commenting on Genesis 2:3, Calvin “explicitly stated” that “this [fourth] *commandment*” is grounded in ceation, the difference implied by this distinction seems particularly hard to pinpoint. See below for more on Gaffin’s qualifications of his support for seeing the Sabbath as a creation ordinance in Calvin.

commandment” and Calvin’s supposed vagueness in identifying, “when ... was the Sabbath first instituted” (*Holy Time*, 126). Further, he claims Calvin rejected the view that the Sabbath duty applies generally to mankind:

In his Deuteronomy sermon 35, Calvin asserts—in marked contrast to the Sabbatarians—that since the Sabbath is in essence a sign of spiritual rest for God’s people, the fourth commandment is not universally applicable to all mankind. It is a sign for sanctified people, a sign of God’s covenant relationship. “God saith, I have given you the Sabbath day to be as a sign that I make you holy, and that I am your God who reigneth among you. This is not common to all mortal men. For God granteth not such grace and privilege to the paynims and infidels, as to make them holy. He speaks but only to the people whom he adopted and chose to be his heritage.” Calvin underscores this argument by stating that the Sabbath is a “sign of God’s separating of his faithful Church from all the rest of the world.”²⁰

Matsuda’s treatment of these matters is quite similar to Primus’s: to the question, “When does Calvin believe the Sabbath Day was set?” he responds by quoting from Calvin’s comment on Exodus 20:11: “It is not credible that the observance of the Sabbath was omitted, *when God revealed the rite of sacrifice* to the holy (Fathers).” By “the holy Fathers,” Matsuda then explains, “Calvin is talking about the Patriarchs, the ancestors of the Jews,” and “in commenting on Genesis 2:3, Calvin emphasizes the model of God’s work of creation as the basis for requiring making ‘the seventh day’ a day of worship” (Matsuda, 195–196).

Both Matsuda and Primus think Calvin views God’s act in Genesis 2:3 (“God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it”) not as having established the day as holy for man (Adam), but as having formed a model to which God himself then appealed later when God actually instituted the Sabbath as a duty (probably sometime between Abraham and Moses). Primus takes the sermon’s comment on the giving of the Sabbath day/fourth commandment to Israel, “I have given you the Sabbath day ... This is not common to all mortal men,” as meaning that Calvin does not believe that the Sabbath day/fourth commandment is “universally applicable to all mankind” (*Holy Time*, 123).

Gaffin’s Defense of the Notion of a (Universal) Sabbath Creation Ordinance in Calvin

If what Gaffin seems to suggest is correct, that is, if

Calvin’s subtle appeal to Genesis 2:3 refutes those who “have asserted ... Calvin nowhere teaches that the Sabbath is grounded in creation,” then the key text to study to settle the question is *Calvin’s comment on Genesis 2:3*. About that commentary passage, Matsuda contends, “in commenting on Gen. 2:3, Calvin emphasizes *the model* of God’s work of creation.”

On the other hand, Gaffin believes the Genesis 2:3 comment “provides the clearest evidence that for Calvin the fourth commandment given at Sinai reflects a creation ordinance and, therefore, is perpetually binding on all.” Yet, he makes only a partial defense of Calvin as a sabbatarian on this point: during the course of his treatment of the reformer’s 2:3 comment, he eventually denies Calvin held to a key element of the full sabbatarian position. Calvin did not, Gaffin says, “insis[t] that Christians are bound by either of the above alternatives” (those are, they must set apart “[1] one day in seven or [2] the seventh day specifically”). For, he explains, in Calvin’s eyes such alternatives “would be nothing less than to reintroduce a Jewish ceremony” (Gaffin, 76). Did Calvin consider the Sabbath to be a creation ordinance, as later theologians did? If so, what exactly was ordained? Observing a particular day, or, observing some other “Sabbath institution”? Surely Calvin’s exposition of Genesis 2:3—the place in Calvin’s corpus where Gaffin says “the grounding of this [fourth] commandment in creation is stated explicitly” (81)—merits further study.

Calvin’s Understanding of Genesis 2:3: The Sabbath a Creation Ordinance, or Not?

On Genesis 2:3’s “And God blessed the seventh day,” Calvin comments:

[God] set apart a day selected out of the remainder for this special use. Wherefore, that benediction is nothing else than a solemn consecration, by which God claims for himself the meditations and employments of men on the seventh day. This is, indeed, the proper business of the whole life, in which men should daily exercise themselves, to consider the infinite goodness, justice, power, and wisdom of God, in this magnificent theater of heaven and earth. But, lest men should prove less sedulously attentive to it than they ought, *every seventh day* has been especially selected for the purpose of supplying what was wanting in daily meditation. First, therefore, God rested; then he blessed

20. *Holy Time*, 123, citing the Golding translation of 1583, p 207; it corresponds to Farley’s translation, p 119.

this rest, that in all ages it might be held sacred among men: or he dedicated *every seventh day* to rest, that his own example might be a perpetual rule. The design of the institution must be always kept in memory: for God did not command men simply to keep holiday *every seventh day*, as if he delighted in their indolence; but rather that they, being released from all other business, might the more readily apply their minds to the Creator of the world. Lastly, that is a sacred rest,²¹ which withdraws men from the impediments of the world, that it may dedicate them entirely to God...

... We must know, that this is to be the common employment not of one age or people only, but of the whole human race. Afterwards, in the Law, a new precept concerning the Sabbath was given, which should be peculiar to the Jews, and but for a season; because it was a legal ceremony shadowing forth a spiritual rest, the truth of which was manifested in Christ. Therefore the Lord the more frequently testifies that he had given, in the Sabbath, a symbol of sanctification to his ancient people. Therefore when we hear that the Sabbath was abrogated by the coming of Christ we must distinguish between what belongs to the perpetual government of human life, and what properly belongs to ancient figures, the use of which was abolished when the truth was fulfilled.²²

In order to address the ultimate question, (B) “Did Calvin consider the Sabbath Day to be, what, in later parlance, became known as, a ‘creation ordinance’ for all mankind?” and to do so on the basis of the above comment, it is necessary also to consider, (A) “What is the force of Calvin’s thrice used expression ‘every seventh day’ (which is in bold italics above)?”

Gaffin’s View of Calvin on Genesis 2:3

Gaffin addresses (A) by first conceding (to prominent Calvin students such as Voetius, A. Kuyper and L. Praamsma), “a plausible case can be made that he does teach [based upon Genesis 2:3] that the New Testament church is bound to keep one day out of seven as its day of rest and worship,” since Calvin’s (repeated)

21. The editor attaches the following footnote at this point: “Both in the Amsterdam edition of 1761, and Hengstenberg’s, the word is *vocatio*; but as the French translation gives *reste*, and the Old English one *rest*, there can be little doubt that the original word was *vacatio*, as the sense of the passage seems to require.— Ed.”

22. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. I, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, translated by John King (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) 105–107.

use of the term “every seventh day” *could mean* that “one day of the week has been singled out to be kept by Christians as the weekly rest, without specifying what day that is.” However, then Gaffin rejects that “plausible” reading, first countering that by “every seventh day,” Calvin could also have meant “the seventh or last day,” only. He then concludes that this latter understanding is the correct one. He provides two grounds: (a) because Calvin is here commenting on Genesis 2:3’s “God blessed the seventh day,” and (b) because “as his exposition unfolds” Calvin continues to deal with *the seventh day* itself (e.g., “God claims for himself the meditations and employments of men on the seventh day [die septimo]”) and “the three references to the phrase ‘every seventh day,’ cited above, “begin to appear” immediately thereafter. In other words, since in the immediate context Calvin has been talking about ‘the seventh day’ (itself), Gaffin argues “every seventh day [, too,] ... refers specifically to the seventh day.” Hence, according to Gaffin, when Calvin writes “every seventh day” he means ‘every Saturday’ (Gaffin, 74–75).

A Critique of Gaffin’s View of Calvin on Genesis 2:3

One may say that Gaffin’s (counter) argument (a) begs the key question. To contend that because Calvin is commenting on “[God blessed] the seventh day” that therefore the term “every seventh day” has essentially the same force as does the expression “the seventh day,” itself, simplistically *presumes* wrong what others have argued, to wit, that Calvin shifts terminology (the seventh day → every seventh day) in order to be able express the perpetual (hence, including the NT era) implications of the originally Saturday-bound (‘the seventh day’) command. Since Gaffin is presuming away the other (Voetius-Kuyper-Praamsma) view, not refuting it, Gaffin’s argument (a) can prove no more than that by “every seventh day” Calvin *might* simply mean ‘every Saturday’. In fact, three considerations indicate the contrary; they support the view of Voetius, et al., namely: according to Calvin’s comment on Genesis 2:3, that verse establishes the keeping of one day out of seven as a duty for all mankind—what later became known as a creation ordinance.

First, with respect to semantics, the very fact that Calvin shifted his expression from the ‘seventh day’ (used twice at the start) to ‘every seventh day’ (used thrice thereafter) in commenting *on the first expression* suggests to the reader a significant change in denotation. Yet, as Gaffin would have it, the two expressions would

be (contextually) synonymous; in modern English, both terms would denote, “every Saturday.” Gaffin offers no alternative explanation for the terminology change.

Second, there are express indicators in the very section of the 2:3 comment where Calvin shifts to “every seventh day” which show that he has moved on from (strict) exegesis to parænesis: his exposition has moved on from explicating the original force of the Hebrew phrase to expounding its abiding (“perpetual”) application *in the Christian church*.²³ Calvin’s paræneses such as, “men should daily exercise ...” and, “lest men should prove ...” suggest he has moved on from pure exegesis and has begun to exhort his own (Christian) readers. For his readers, of course, the Lord’s Day is the ‘every seventh day.’ Thus, the appearance of parænesis aimed at them signals to his readers that the broader denotation for the expression is not merely possible, but intended, since without it, the exhortation would be toward [Saturday] Sabbath keeping—unthinkable in the light of Calvin’s attitude toward the Jewish Sabbath.²⁴

Third, the terms “all ages” and “perpetual” in the clauses, “he blessed this rest, that *in all ages* it might be held sacred,” and “he dedicated every seventh day to rest, that his own example might be *a perpetual rule*,” show quite plainly that Calvin *is generalizing* from the 2:3a decree’s original, immediate jurisdiction (Adam and his era) to include the church age expressly—an intention which likewise signals a construction for “every seventh day” that encompasses not only ‘every Saturday’ of old, but also ‘every Lord’s Day,’ at least from that point in time when (Calvin believes) “the ancients ... substitute[d] the Lord’s Day (as we call it) for the [Saturday] Sabbath.”²⁵ In the same vein, Calvin’s paragraph expounding Genesis 2:3a concludes by discussing the permanent precept in an express contrast with the Jewish Sabbath: it is “not of one age or people only, but of the whole human race,” over against the “new precept concerning the Sabbath ... *peculiar to the Jews*.” So then, according to Calvin, by 2:3a, God’s sanctifying act established a holy day “every seventh day” as duty for all peoples, but the fourth commandment, proper (the very words of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5) was an (written) ordinance given “peculiar[ly] to the Jews,” and requiring Saturday observance. Sunday observance (every seventh day) fulfills the former duty and (nowadays) replaces the latter (Jewish expression) of the perpetual duty. Thus, for three reasons, even though, lexically speaking, “every seventh day” could strictly denote “every Saturday,” (contra Gaffin) the context *requires* it have a broader denotation.²⁶

Calvin’s term, “every seventh day,” then, is a

generalized or applicative paraphrase of the scriptural words being commented on, “(God blessed) the seventh day,” such that both the OT’s “every seventh day” (the seventh day) and the NT’s “every seventh day” (the first day of the week) are comprehended in the term. Thus, in answer to (B) [did Calvin consider the Sabbath Day a creation ordinance?] Calvin (implicitly) expounds Genesis 2:3 as establishing a duty for a weekly

23. Although he denies such indicators of a denotational shift exist, Gaffin recognizes that the existence of such “clear indicators to the contrary” would show that “when Calvin speaks of ‘every seventh day,’ he means [not] specifically the seventh day,” but every seventh day, more generally (“the ‘one-day-in-seven’ principle”); Gaffin, 74–75.

24. See *Calvin’s Understanding* on the previous two pages.

25. *Institutes*, II.8.34. See below for the meaning of this assertion about (very) early church history.

26. Gaffin seems to offer an additional ground for his contention that “every seventh day” in Calvin’s comment on “God blessed the seventh day” refers to ‘every Saturday’: Because, “as [Calvin’s] exposition [of 2:3a] unfolds, he discusses what it means that God ‘sanctified’ the seventh day[,] ... clearly talking about the seventh day and not one day in seven” and because, “a few lines further, in the same context and with the same emphasis on the meaning for humanity[,] ... the three references to the phrase, ‘every seventh day,’ cited above, begin to appear,” therefore, the phrase, “every seventh day,” “not only includes the bare notion of one day in seven but *also* refers specifically *to the seventh day*.” (*Calvin*, 75).

Gaffin’s logic is confusing and his exegesis of Calvin seems to shift subtly, but seriously. In the previous paragraph, Gaffin argued for “the presumption that when Calvin speaks of *every seventh day*,” he *means specifically the seventh day* [to the exclusion of the broader meaning],” based upon the ground just dealt with, above. Then, at the conclusion to his “further” (“Further, as his exposition unfolds ...”) ground, Gaffin shifts to contending that “every seventh day” “not only includes the bare notion of one day in seven but *also* refers to the seventh day,” a contention which *includes* the broader notion (“the bare notion of one day in seven ... also”). Thus, by his second ground’s “conclusion,” as worded, it would seem that Gaffin, has contended for the position he sought to refute in the previous paragraph, broadening the term to include ‘one day in seven,’ more generally.

However, even if one assumes that what Gaffin meant to write in that concluding sentence (of the additional ground) was, that “every seventh day” refers “[not to] the bare notion of one day in seven but *also* refers specifically to the seventh day” [emphasis/strikethrough added], this additional ground, too, cannot stand, for essentially the same reason that his first fails. While it is certainly true that early in the unfolding argument Calvin refers to “the seventh day,” i.e., Saturday (he does so twice), he is obviously quoting the Genesis wording. That he applies it to “employments of men,” somewhat generally, when he comments, “God claims for himself the meditations and employments of men on the seventh day,” does not indicate Calvin has yet moved from exegesis to application, since the expression can read naturally as referring to men, generally in the period covered by Genesis (Adam and his seed). However, in the sentences that follow, Calvin not only switches from “the seventh day” to “every seventh day,” he explicitly states that God’s action “dedicated every seventh day ... [to] be a perpetual rule.” At the same time, as previously mentioned, he begins to express parænesis, seemingly applying the 2:3a decree to his own generation.

Sabbath-keeping for all mankind, “in all ages”—not only for Adam’s day, but for Calvin’s. It is fair to say (even if the term is a bit anachronistic) that, in his comment on Genesis 2:3, *Calvin teaches weekly Sabbath keeping as a universal creation ordinance*.

So how (assuming Calvin is not self-contradictory) is the aforementioned contrary evidence to be explained? Primus appeals to Calvin’s purported vagueness as to when the Sabbath was first instituted, to Calvin’s own appeal to God’s hallowing of the seventh day at creation as *merely* a model or example (not an ordinance), and to Calvin’s assertion in expositing the giving of the fourth commandment that “God granteth not such grace and privilege to the paynims and infidels, as to make them holy.”²⁷ Similarly, Matsuda appeals to Calvin’s comment on Exodus 20:11, “It is not credible that the observance of the Sabbath was omitted, *when God revealed the rite of sacrifice*” to suggest that Calvin believed God instituted the Sabbath before Sinai, but *well after creation*, during the period of “the Patriarchs, the ancestors of the Jews,” in order to prove Calvin did not embrace the notion that Genesis 2:3 established the keeping of the Seventh Day as the Sabbath Day for all mankind. In short, taken together, Matsuda and Primus contend three things show Calvin did not recognize 2:3 as establishing (anachronistically speaking) a creation ordinance: (1) his supposed view that Sabbath-keeping was first instituted sometime well after creation, (2) his assertion related to the fourth commandment, that “God granteth not such grace and privilege to the paynims and infidels,” but to the Jews, alone, and (3) his taking Exodus 20:11’s appeal to creation as seeing God’s action as *merely* a model for the fourth commandment.

The resolution of these alleged contradictions with the above understanding of the Genesis commentary is to be found primarily in the distinction Calvin shows in his comment on Genesis 2:3 between two Sabbath precepts: a “perpetual rule” for all, and “a new precept ... peculiar to the Jews ... but for a season.”²⁸ Context requires the two ordinances be taken as distinct with respect to time and (original) jurisdiction. The former precept was clearly decreed at creation and is universal respecting

time and race. The latter precept (the fourth commandment, proper) was imposed by God at Sinai (and then *written* on stone), but, Calvin, infers, must have been (orally) revealed previously by God to the (Jewish) Patriarchs, “when God revealed the rite of sacrifice.” It is given to the Jews alone and, in some sense, was “abolished when the truth was fulfilled” (Calvin, *Genesis*, on 2:3). Even if arguments (1) and (2), above, may be valid in part with respect to the later precept (Sinai), there is no sense in which they apply to the earlier precept (Gen 2:3). As to the argument (3) that Calvin sees God’s creation-rest as only a model (not *inherently* normative), two things must be noted. First, while it is certainly true that Calvin sees Exodus 20:11 as *modeling* the fourth commandment proper after God’s rest at creation, such model-language in no way excludes normativity for God’s consecration of the seventh day (in Genesis 2:3). Second, regarding Calvin’s exposition of the fourth commandment (proper) in the (reputedly non-sabbatarian) *Institutes*, Gaffin shows “the notion of the Sabbath institution as a creation ordinance (in the sense of being grounded in God’s own resting after creating), although not explicitly stated, is consonant with and perhaps even implied in the teaching of the *Institutes*” (Gaffin, 31).

Calvin’s View of Genesis 2:3: Conclusion

Consonant with his exposition of the (Sinai-given, Jewish) fourth commandment in the *Institutes*, in the words, “God blessed the seventh day,” Calvin finds a Sabbath ordinance decreed for all mankind in every age. The Jews—orally from the time of their patriarchs and in writing from the time of Moses—were given the fourth commandment proper, but the original Sabbath decree goes back to the creation week. That decree, teaches Calvin, sanctifies “every seventh day,” both of old (i.e., Saturday) and now (i.e., Sunday). Calvin’s comment on Genesis 2:3, then, teaches that a Sabbath day was set at creation and may justly be called a creation ordinance; this teaching that in no way conflicts with his view of the (later revealed) fourth commandment.

(2) CALVIN’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE REPLACEMENT OF THE SEVENTH DAY SABBATH BY THE LORD’S DAY

Given then (1) that Calvin saw Genesis 2:3 as decreeing a perpetual ordinance “not of one age or people only, but of the whole human race,” not only “dedicat[ing] every seventh day to rest ... [but particularly] a sacred rest, which withdraws men from the impediments of the world, that I may dedicate them entirely to God”

27. See *Calvin’s Understanding of Genesis 2:3* given earlier.

28. Calvin says of 2:3a, “that benediction is nothing else than a solemn consecration, by which God claims for himself the meditations and employments of men on the seventh day.” He says that that blessing-consecration established “a perpetual rule” such that every seventh day is to be observed as “the common employment not of one age or people only, but of the whole human race.” In contrast, he continues, “Afterwards, in the Law, a new precept concerning the Sabbath was given, which should be peculiar to the Jews, and but for a season” (see the fuller quote given previously above).

(Commentary on Genesis 2:3), and (2) that in Genesis 2:3 (cf. Exod. 20:11) that day was expressly the seventh day of the week, *Saturday*, why does Calvin preach thusly about *Sunday* to his congregation?

It is not only for coming to the sermon that the day of *Sunday* is instituted, but in order that we might devote all the rest of time to praising God... we ought to observe *Sunday* as if from a tower ... to contemplate the works of God ... Thus when people profane in this manner the holy order [*Sunday*] which God has instituted to lead us to himself, why should they be astonished if all the rest of the week is degraded?²⁹

When and by whom was this change of day made?

Calvin's Understanding of the Replacement—According to Primus, Matsuda and Gaffin

The above Deuteronomy sermon's parænesis notwithstanding, Primus thinks Calvin does not believe God ever established a sacred Sunday for the church, or even an abiding consecration of every seventh day, *per se*:

In a decidedly non-Sabbatarian passage, Calvin states explicitly that the church is neither bound to the first day by divine authority nor absolutely bound to the rhythm of one day in seven. He writes, "Nor do I cling to the number "seven" so as to bind the church in subjection to it. And I shall not condemn churches that have other solemn days for their meetings, provided there be no superstition."³⁰

He claims, rather, "The Jewish Sabbath was abandoned by the early Christian community in order to overthrow superstition," and, that a "different day" [was] used by the early Christians for the day of worship ... Sunday." While he says Calvin finds the church's choice of "the first day of the week is peculiarly appropriate," a "lawful selection that serves the peace of the Christian fellowship" ("Puritan Sabbath," 63), Primus firmly rejects any notion that Calvin sees the church's practice as appointed by God. Thus, he concludes: "Calvin does not hold, as the Sabbatarians did, that the Christian community is absolutely tied to the observance of the first day of the week or even to the rhythm of one day in seven."³¹

Gaffin, similarly, believes "Calvin did not hold that the change from the seventh to the first day ultimately rests on special revelation [from God]." In answer to the question as to when and who made the change, he says, "Calvin plainly credits these 'ancients' with having

substituted the Lord's Day for the Sabbath." Gaffin is uncertain as to their identity, though he seeks some elucidation from "[*Institutes*] section 28, [where] we saw, the 'early fathers' are commended for perceiving that the typical character of the Sabbath has been abolished." However, "who specifically or even what era of the church's history Calvin has in mind is difficult to say... these references are so vague."³² Finally, Gaffin offers this determination:

The likely proper conclusion, then, is that Calvin considers the specific day on which Christians assemble for worship a matter not integral to God's command. Therefore, *the action* of the "ancients" in substituting the first day for the seventh, although personally acceptable to him, *was solely their own* and not based on revelation (Gaffin, 42).

Thus, according to Gaffin, Calvin believed that (mere) men—not God—chose the church's new sacred day.

29. From the Deuteronomy sermons: see *Calvin's Sabbatarian Practice*, above.

30. *Holy Time*, 125–126, quoting the *Institutes*, II.8.34.

31. *Holy Time*, 133. The last five words of this cited sentence, "except as a minimal requirement," have been left out. Their meaning is enigmatic, if not in hopeless conflict with their immediate context. Rigorously speaking, if Calvin believes "the observance of the first day of the week or ... even ... one day in seven" is "a minimal requirement," he nonetheless believes it to be required! The observance of the Lord's Day (or, perhaps an alternative day each week) is (if [every] 7[th day] be a minimal requirement) a floor below which the Christian church must (absolutely) not fall in its setting aside of days for the Lord. Yet it is patently obvious that Primus is contending that Calvin had no such rigorous view of the Lord's Day, rather he argues that, at least in principle, which day, and even how many days, of the week must be observed were open to ecclesiastical adjustment. Thus, rigorously speaking, the phrase deleted (above) makes nonsense out of Primus' argument in the main part of the sentence. The phrase arose earlier in his work as a means of attempting to reconcile the 'every-seventh-day' Sabbatarianism of Calvin's Genesis 2:3 comment (denied by Primus, but confirmed above) with Primus' own assertion that Calvin "criticizes the legalistic 'fixing of one day in seven'" (pp 125–127). The previous section of the present work has already shown that in the Genesis 2:3 comment, Calvin exposit v 3a as establishing a universal duty to observe 'every seventh day', then (Saturday) and now (Sunday). Thus, strictly speaking, while the deleted words are faithful to Calvin, they cannot be considered in their original context (sentence) without vitiating that context of its meaning in Primus' essay.

32. Gaffin, 41. At one point (p 102), Gaffin, citing the *Institutes* II.8.34 ("the ancients ... substitute"), seems to settle on "the church fathers" (usually a term for the 2nd century & thereafter) as "the ancients" in view, writing, "the church fathers chose the first day of the week." However, elsewhere (p 41) he opines that Calvin's references to "the ancients ... likely have in view those who held authority in the church in its *very earliest* days."

Matsuda agrees:

Calvin makes clear that the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, having been set as the Sabbath day does not hold legal authority as by God's commandment; [rather] it [the choice of the day] was a selection freely made by the church (Matsuda, 194).

The Problem with Primus, Matsuda and Gaffin's Views of Calvin's Understanding

In asserting that for Calvin “the specific day ... for worship [is] not integral to God's command” and “rests [not] on special revelation” (Gaffin), and “that the church is [not] bound to the first day by divine authority” (Primus), these scholars seem to have given priority to a passage (*Institutes* II.8.34) where as Gaffin acknowledges, what “Calvin has in mind is difficult to say,” over one where, in the space of one paragraph, Calvin first writes, “the day of *Sunday is instituted* ... in order that we might devote [also] all the rest of time [outside of public worship] to praising God,” and then, “when people profane in this manner the holy order which *God has instituted* ... why should they be astonished if all the rest of the week [after Sunday] is degraded.” Gaffin and Primus seem to have deferred to the “difficult” passage over the clear one (both men cite at length from both the *Institutes* II.8.34 and this sermon).³³

In this single paragraph, all of which instructs Calvin's hearers to consecrate ‘Sunday’ (the word appears six times, once or more in almost every sentence), Calvin's latter sentence's (active voice) referent to that “which *God has instituted*” obviously denotes the same institution mentioned passively in the former sentence's clause, “the day of Sunday *is instituted*.” Thus, according to this 1555 sermon, *it is God who instituted Sunday*, not only for public worship (“coming to the sermon”) but

33. Gaffin actually cites from both of the very sentences in question: Gaffin, 41–42 & 113.

34. Gaffin, too, takes “the holy order which God has instituted” to be Sunday. Gaffin, 113.

35. According to lexicons such as BDAG (2.b “pl. (ἡ) μία (τῶν) σαββάτων (i.e. ἡμέρα) the first day of the week”) and Friberg, and modern translations, “On the first day of every week” (NRSV=NASB=NRSV=NIV=RSV; even the KJV so reads: “Upon the first day of the week”), Paul refers to the 1st day of the week. However, Calvin's Latin translation “In una sabbatorum,” is rightly rendered, as at the start of his comment, “On one of the Sabbaths.” Calvin misunderstood the Greek idiom, “κατὰ μίαν σαββάτων.”

36. Obviously, Calvin's Greek text carried the plural reading, μίαν σαββάτων (TR), not the singular adopted by NA, μίαν σαββάτου. The French also reads the plural, “à un des sabbats.”

as a “holy order” under which “all the rest of the time,” too, is to be devoted “to praising God.”³⁴

Consequently, if Calvin's sermon is to be understood as consistent with his exposition of the fourth commandment in the *Institutes*, the change of day executed by “the ancients” must (in Calvin's mind) have been an act of God himself—whether by divine revelation (expressly rejected by Gaffin) or by inspiration, it may not be possible to determine. Either way, Calvin definitely believes that God himself, apparently acting through “the ancients,” made the change from the [Saturday] Sabbath to Sunday, the Lord's Day.

Calvin's Own Understanding of the Replacement of Saturday by Sunday

In his commentary on 1 Cor 16:2a, Calvin sheds great light on the current questions. Both his assertion that “the probability is ... *the apostles* ... afterwards, ... they *set aside* that day [Saturday], *and substituted* another [Sunday],” and his mistranslation of 16:2a's κατὰ μίαν σαββάτων by “*in una sabbatorum*” greatly clarify when and by whom Calvin believed the change of day had been made.³⁵ As cited below, Calvin's exposition of v 2 first quotes his own translation's first phrase, then explicates it,

2. *On one of the Sabbaths* [In una sabbatorum].³⁶ The end is this—that they may have their alms ready in time.... The clause rendered on *one of the Sabbaths*, (κατὰ μίαν σαββάτων,) Chrysostom explains to mean—the *first Sabbath*. In this I do not agree with him; for Paul means rather that they should contribute, one on one Sabbath and another on another; or even each of them every Sabbath, if they chose. For he has an eye, first of all, to convenience, and farther, that the sacred assembly, in which the communion of saints is celebrated, might be an additional spur to them. Nor am I more inclined to admit the view taken by Chrysostom—that the term *Sabbath* is employed here to mean the *Lord's day*, (Revelation 1:10,) for the probability is, that *the Apostles*, at the beginning, retained the day that was already in use, but that afterwards, constrained by the superstition of the *Jews*, they set aside that day, and *substituted another*. Now the *Lord's day* was made choice of, chiefly because our Lord's *resurrection* put an end to the shadows of the law. Hence the day itself puts us in mind of our Christian liberty. We may, however, very readily infer from this passage, that believers have always had a certain day of rest from labor— not as if the worship of God consisted in idleness, but because

it is of importance for the common harmony, that a certain day should be appointed for holding sacred assemblies, as they cannot be held every day.³⁷

Calvin clearly thinks it most likely that *the apostles themselves changed the day*, and he apparently believes that they made the change sometime in the latter part of the apostolic period: “The Apostles, at the beginning, retained” the (Saturday) Sabbath. “Afterwards, . . . they set aside that day, and substituted another. . . . *the Lord’s Day*.” When? Calvin’s mistranslation of 16:2a’s first three words to read, “on one of the Sabbaths,” instead of “on the first day of every week” (NASB, NIV, NRSV, etc.) shows he believed that, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the Apostles had not yet changed the day.³⁸ His tying “the Lord’s Day” to Revelation 1:10, though in a statement disputing with Chrysostom,³⁹ (taken together with his recognition that the apostles likely changed the day) indicates he thinks the change took place between the writing of 1 Corinthians (c. AD 55) and Revelation (traditionally in the 90’s). In summary, the 1 Cor 16:2 comment, taken together with the Deuteronomy sermon’s assertion that God instituted the change of day, clarify that Calvin thought God himself, through the agency of Christ’s apostles, changed the church’s sacred day from the (Saturday) Sabbath to the Lord’s Day, Sunday.

It remains to explain how this (clear) teaching can help to explain the key passage in Calvin’s *Institutes* which is cited ‘to prove’ Calvin opposed viewing Sunday, or even any specific day of the week, as set apart by God as sacred, the *Institutes* II.8.34:

Nor do I cling to the number “seven” so as to bind the church in subjection to it. And I shall not condemn Churches that have other solemn days for their meetings, provided there be no superstition. This will be so if they have regard solely to the maintenance of discipline and good order.

Pastor Matsuda suggests the teaching’s most likely meaning (if it is to be reconciled with the Genesis 2:3 comment):

In commenting on Gen. 2:3, Calvin emphasizes the model of God’s work of creation as the basis for requiring making “the seventh day” a day of worship. This appears to be inconsistent with his emphasis in the *Institutes* that the church today is not bound by the rhythm of ‘one day out of seven.’ However, *this conflict can be resolved if one takes into consideration that*

Calvin takes worshipping ‘one day out of seven’ to be a minimum requirement. (Matsuda, 195).

In other words, he suggests that “not clinging to the number seven” is explicated by the next sentence, which recognizes that churches (nowadays) may designate supplementary days (in addition to the Lord’s Day) for worship.⁴⁰ After all, Calvin thought the apostles had taken the liberty to designate Sunday in place of the (Saturday) Sabbath, as the means of obeying the creational mandate to set apart “every seventh day.” So perhaps Calvin (who after all believed that, in theory, every day should be a day of worship) saw the apostolic church’s new day-designation as a suitable precedent for even the non-apostolic church to designate additional days for worship, provided they did so without superstition.⁴¹

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, the distinction that some have made—between Calvin as a teacher of a non-sabbatarian theology and a practitioner of sabbatarianism in the life of the church—is

37. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. XX, *1 Corinthians*, translated by John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 68.

38. This (mistaken) understanding is confirmed in the *Institutes*, II.8.33, “Indeed, in the churches founded by him, the Sabbath was retained for this purpose [= ‘the peace of the Christian fellowship’]. For he prescribes that day to the Corinthians for gathering contributions to help the Jerusalem brethren [1 Corinthians 16:2].” Calvin’s mistake is surprising given his explication of another instance of the same expression in Mat 28:1. There he explains *μία σαββάτων*: “The two Evangelists [Luke & Matthew] give the name of *the first day of the Sabbaths*, to that which came first in order between two Sabbaths.” Obviously, in the order of the days, Sunday comes first between two [Saturday] Sabbaths.

39. Calvin not only wrongly rejects the denotation for 1 Corinthians 16:2’s *κατὰ μία σαββάτων* (actually) asserted by Chrysostom (the Lord’s Day), but he misreads that Father. Calvin writes, “Chrysostom explains [the phrase] to mean—the *first Sabbath*.” The Schaff edition’s translation of Chrysostom’s comment on the verse is accurate, “Ver. 2. ‘On the first day of the week,’ that is, the Lord’s day”; *Homilies on First Corinthians*, XLIII.2. Calvin apparently mistranslated Chrysostom’s comment, just as he did 1 Corinthians 16:2 itself.

40. Clearly Calvin preached to his congregation on other days. The two Deuteronomy sermons, 34 and 35, on the fourth commandment were delivered on Thursday and Friday, respectively. Farley, 97, 115.

41. Just what superstition Calvin condemns is debated and is beyond the scope of this essay. For two views, see Gaffin, 39–40; 43–44, and Primus, “Puritan Sabbath,” 61–62. Obviously, however, the complete consecration of the first day of the week to public worship, with the devotion of “all the rest of time to praising God” (Farley, Deuteronomy Sermon 5, p 111; see the citation under *Calvin’s Sabbatarian Practice* above), thus “set[ting] aside our affairs and earthly business” (ibid. 113) is not, in Calvin’s thinking, superstitious observance of a day. Otherwise, Calvin himself would be guilty of commending the same superstition he condemns.

groundless. If categorized in terms of the Sabbath debate that was to take place over the century following his death, Calvin's theology must be grouped with the sabbatarians. His doctrine of the Sabbath essentially meets Primus' standard, the "two cardinal principles of Sabbatarian theology." Namely, for Calvin, like the Puritans, (1) "the Sabbath command is rooted in the Creation order and is therefore moral and universal in scope," and (2) "the first day of the week and no other is especially sanctified *by God* as the Sabbath."⁴² Thus, in terms of later terminology, for Calvin, Sunday is arguably "literally the Christian Sabbath." Calvin's commentary on the key verse used to argue for the Sabbath Day as a creation ordinance (Gen 2:3), is abundantly clear in its support of such (sabbatarian) theology; other key passages in Calvin that have been adduced to deny his sabbatarianism were shown above to have been misunderstood. Calvin views God's having hallowed the seventh day—which he expounds by the generalizing paraphrase, "every seventh day"—as having set such a day apart permanently and universally. That creational decree was followed by the giving of the fourth commandment to the ancestors of the Jews (orally to their Patriarchs) and in writing (on Mount Sinai). The fact Calvin believes that *in part* the fourth commandment has been abrogated by the coming of Christ, in no way diminishes his conviction that God "dedicated every seventh day to rest, that his own example might be a perpetual rule . . . that is a sacred rest, which withdraws men from the impediments of the world, that it may dedicate them entirely to God." Such Sabbath keeping is "to be the common employment not of one age or people only, but of the whole human race" (*Genesis Commentary*, on 2:3).

Furthermore, contrary to the understanding of Primus, Matsuda and Gaffin, Calvin thought the change of the keeping of the Sabbath Day, "every seventh day," from Saturday to Sunday to be God's institution, through the apostles. His comment on 1 Corinthians 16:2 shows that Calvin believed "the Apostles" were probably "the ancients" who had made the change, but in any event, in a Deuteronomy sermon Calvin expressly

states that the "holy order" of Sunday-observance is one "which God instituted." Thus, regarding what Primus calls the decisive sabbatarian issues, the Sabbath as a creation ordinance and Sunday as the divinely sanctioned Christian expression of that ordinance, Calvin is fully sabbatarian.

Calvin's mistaken translation of the first phrase in 1 Corinthians 16:2, taking it to refer to "one of the [Saturday] Sabbaths" instead of to the "first day of the week" apparently mislead him to infer that the apostles had made a decision to change the day more than twenty years after the resurrection. Furthermore, it probably helped to lead him to grant to the church in later generations, the freedom to "have other solemn days for their meetings" in addition to the divinely instituted Lord's Day.⁴³

While Calvin did not use the term "Christian Sabbath" and would not have agreed with the Westminster Assembly on the timing of the day change when it wrote, "from the beginning of the world *to the resurrection of Christ*, God appointed the seventh day . . . ; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath," Calvin, like the Divines, believed, based upon Genesis 2:3, that the command to "kee[p] holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself" as "a perpetual rule," instructs the "the whole human race" to do so "by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the publick and private exercises of God's worship."⁴⁴

It is interesting to ponder how Calvin's Sabbath theology might have been altered if he had realized that, contra his reading of 1 Corinthians 16:2, "the Jewish Sabbath almost disappears from recorded Christian practice after Christ's resurrection," and that furthermore, "the indirect evidence is very strong, and shows not merely that the Lord's Day was kept by Jewish Christians, but that it originated with them," for it is likely "that the church in Palestine *originally* observed both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day."⁴⁵

In short, Calvin's understanding of the biblical doctrine of the Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath, while off slightly due largely to an exegetical error, and (understandably) not so well developed as that of his Puritan successors, is in sufficient agreement with them on the central issues that he is certainly not 'non-sabbatarian' as some have suggested. In fact, one may justly categorize Calvin together with later sabbatarians; the term 'nascent sabbatarian' would seem most appropriate. ■

42. The full citation under *Calvin's Sabbatarian Practice* above.

43. Actually, in the fifth paragraph of its 21st chapter, "Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day," the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, too, recognizes the Christian church (today) has the liberty to hold, "thanksgivings upon special occasions, . . . to be used in an holy and religious manner"

44. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, answers 58–60, and Calvin's comment on Genesis 2:3 (see *Calvin's Understanding* above).

45. Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott: 1978) 30–32.