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Calvin, Theologian of Sweetness*

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This article is based on two theses: one general, one more specific. The general one is that one's vocabulary reflects one's character. Or, to put it a little differently, the words we choose to describe our ideas and our emotions reveal more about our personality than we usually realize. The second, more specific, thesis is this: Calvin's fondness for and frequent use of the noun *sweetness* and its cognates reveal not only something about Calvin's style and personality, but it also has theological ramifications.

For those enemies and detractors of Calvin who allege that he knew little or nothing about the love and grace of God, this will come as a shock. However, even for Calvin's admirers and those who are familiar with his theology this may come as a surprise. Much has been made by Calvin scholars of his favorite metaphor, the mirror¹ and his frequent references to a labyrinth and abyss,² but as far as I know, no one has noted how frequently the Reformer uses words such as *sweet*, *sweetly*, and *sweetness* to depict fundamental theological themes. This is surprising in view of the fact that such words occur approximately sixty-seven times in the McNeill-Battles edition of the *Institutes*. Battles is far more consistent in his translation of the two key words *dulcêdo* and *suavitas* and their verbal and adjectival forms as *sweet* and *sweetness* than were Beveridge and Allen, the earlier English translators.³ Further research has discovered hundreds of occurrences of these words in Calvin's commentaries, sermons, and treatises. Granted, these words are sometimes used in a more literal sense of taste, e.g.,

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¹See William Keesecker, *A Calvin Treasury*, 2d ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 119. The many words he includes range from "adoption" to "worship," but "sweetness" is not included.

²William Bouwsma has highlighted Calvin's use of these metaphors in his *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), chap. 2 and 4.

³The French equivalents are *douceur* and *plaisir*.

when Calvin contrasts something that is sweet with that which is bitter. In the majority of cases, however, Calvin uses these words to designate a quality of God's goodness or the believer's experience thereof. Here we see a side of Calvin's personality and theology that I believe deserves special attention.

We may not gain any new theological insights from Calvin's use of these words, but this investigation will, I submit, show an affective or emotive dimension of Calvin's theology thus far overlooked and will also fill out and complement his treatment of certain doctrines in a particularly delightful way.

Historical and Biblical Sources

Historians will be interested in possible sources that may have influenced Calvin in his fondness for this terminology. I have not been able to do a thorough study of the use of these terms in predecessors and contemporaries who were influential in Calvin's theological development; for example, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Erasmus, and Luther. However, Augustine uses the words *suavitas* and *dulcêdo* frequently,⁴ but many more could be found in Bernard and medieval mystics.⁵ There are also over 50 references in one of

⁴Calvin never speaks quite like this in the following passage in Augustine's *Confessions*: "After saying all that, what have we said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness." Translated by Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 5. Cf. the quotation from Augustine regarding the Lord's Supper in the *Institutes* 4.17.6. A further search reveals that Augustine uses the word *suavitas* 61 times in his treatises and *dulcedo* 91 times.

⁵In the *Institutes* III.3.15 Calvin quotes Bernard who uses the word *sweetness* in the same manner as Calvin does.

Although such direct quotations by Calvin of Bernard are rare, his influence may be considerable. A beautiful twelfth-century hymn ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux has two stanzas in which "sweetness" is used in a manner akin to Calvin.

1. Jesus, the very thought of Thee with sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see, and in thy presence rest.
2. Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame, nor can the memory find
a sweeter sound than Thy blest name, O Saviour of mankind.

The Hymnbook, David Hugh Jones, editor (Richmond, 1955), 404.

According to a note in the Library of Christian Classics (LCC), p. 890 in the McNeill-Battles edition of the *Institutes*, "the word *dulcêdo*, 'sweetness' was prominent in the vocabulary of the medieval mystics, including Bernard, Richard of St. Victor, Rolk, and Ruysbroeck." For other references, the editors refer to LCC, vol. 13, *Late Medieval Mysticism*, ed. Ray C. Petry (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 68-72, 105-11., 210-12, 235, and 313-16. One would be hard pressed to find twentieth-century examples, but the nineteenth-century popular London preacher and expositor, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was fond of using *sweet* and *sweetness* in his writings. In his devotional classic, *Morning and Evening*, there are countless illustrations of such a usage similar to Calvin. Two examples:

For Jan. 9, A.M.: "Not all the music blown from sweet instruments, or drawn from living strings, can yield such melody as this sweet promise, 'I will be their God.'"

For May 14, A.M.: "The smiles of His [Christ's] Father are all the sweeter to Him because His people share them" (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1994).

Luther's chief works, his commentary on Galatians,⁶ and, in Luther's sermons, the word *dulcis* occurs 105 times and *suavis* 40 times. Hence, particularly, as over against Luther, Calvin is not unique in this regard. However, in view of the popular image of Calvin, his frequent use of these terms is especially significant.

One should not overlook the fact that the words *sweet* or *sweeter* are used in a special sense several times in Scripture. In the Psalms, which for Calvin were "the mirror of the soul," the Word or words of God are sometimes described as sweet. For example, Psalm 19:10: "the ordinances of the Lord are . . . sweeter than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb"; Psalm 119:103: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"; Proverbs 16:24: "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body," and the interesting reference in Revelation to "the little scroll" that John took from the hand of the angel and ate, and "it was sweet as honey in [his] mouth" (Rev. 20:10).

In his commentary on the Psalms and his sermons on Psalm 119, Calvin made much of these references and, as we shall see later, uses this language frequently to describe not only various aspects of God's Word but also and above all the goodness and grace of God.

A biblical phrase that is particularly attractive to Calvin in this connection is found in the Pentateuch in relation to the sacrificial system. Even prior to the development of the cultus there is the reference to Noah, who after the flood built an altar and offered burnt offerings. Then we read, "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor" (Gen. 8:20). Calvin uses this reference to a pleasing odor in a fascinating variety of ways to note a sacrifice *of sweet savor* or odor to God (emphasis mine).⁷ Later in Leviticus a similar phrase occurs frequently: There the priests are instructed to offer a burnt offering, "an offering by fire *of pleasing odor* to the Lord" (Ex. 29:18; Lev. 1:9, 13, 17; 2:9, 12; 3:5, emphasis mine).

This language is picked up by the apostle Paul and used figuratively in three different letters. In 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 we read: "We are *an aroma of Christ* to those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to the one *a fragrance* from death to death to death, to the other *a fragrance* from life" (emphasis mine). A more explicit sacrificial allusion is found in Philippians through Epaphroditus: gifts, he says, that were "*a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*" (emphasis mine). In Ephesians 5:2, the apostle urges us to "live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, *a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*" (emphasis mine).

⁶This count is based on "the revised and completed translation based on the Middleton text of Luther's 1531 lecture on Galatians by Philip S. Watson (London: James Clarke, 1953).

⁷The Latin word here, *odor* can mean simply a smell, scent, or odor, but it is almost always translated as a "sweet odor" or "sweet savor," influenced apparently by the biblical references.

The Application of the Sacrificial Imagery

This image becomes one of Calvin's favorite ways of describing how believers can honor and glorify God. When commenting on 2 Corinthians 2:14 where we read that "Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from him," Calvin employs the sweet/sweetness terminology in a variety of ways in relationship to "the health-saving savour of [Christ's] grace (*odore gratiae suae salvifico*). Then he elaborates:

He [Paul] takes the metaphor of the "savour" (*odoris*) further, using it to bring out both the pleasant *sweetness of the Gospel* and its power and efficacy in breathing life into men. . . . From this we learn that the only way to make right progress in the Gospel is to be attracted by *the sweet fragrance of Christ* so that we desire him enough to bid the enticements of the world farewell.⁸

Then, in reference to the following verse (15) where Paul says "we are the aroma of Christ," Calvin translates it as "sweet savour [or smell] of Christ" (*Christi suavis odor*) and comments: The apostles are called a sweet savour not because they give forth any fragrance from themselves but because the teaching that they bring is fragrant enough to fill the whole world with *its sweet smell*." Moreover, faithful ministers of the gospel "have *a sweet savour* before God, not only when they quicken souls by the fragrance of salvation but also when they bring death to unbelievers." For "if anything is *a sweet savour* to God, it ought to be for us also."⁹

Another passage that uses this sacrificial language is Ephesians 5:2 where it is said that "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." For "fragrant offering" Calvin translates "a sacrifice of sweet smell" (*victima boni odoris*) and comments: "If the reconciliation of men effected by Christ was a sacrifice of a sweet smell, we, too, shall become *unto God a sweet savour* when this holy perfume is shed upon us."¹⁰

The third allusion to the sacrificial system is in Philippians 4:18 where Paul says that the gifts he has received from the church were "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." Calvin makes the following application: "For what better thing can be desired than that our acts of kindness should be sacred offerings, which God receives from our hands and *in whose sweet odour* he takes pleasure?"¹¹

⁸Comm. 2 Cor. 2:14, T. A. Smail translation, Torrance edition, emphasis mine.

⁹Comm. 2 Cor. 2:15, emphasis mine. "No matter what result the preaching of the Gospel has, whether it gives life to men or kills them, it is a good and sweet savour to God (2 Cor. 2:15)," Comm. Acts 24:24, translation by John W. Fraser, Torrance edition.

¹⁰Comm. Eph. 5:2, T. H. L. Parker translation, Torrance edition, emphasis mine. Henceforth, all similar phrases will be my emphasis.

¹¹Comm. Phil. 4:18, Parker translation.

Calvin is so fond of this metaphor that he uses it in countless other contexts, even when there is no allusion to an offering of “a pleasing odor to the Lord.” For example, when the psalmist repeats a request to God in Psalm 86, Calvin concludes that when the saints do likewise and “discharge their cares into the bosom of God, this importunity is a *sacrifice of sweet savour* before him.”¹²

Further, a virtue that Calvin prized highly, viz., humility, “is as a *perfume of a sweet odor*,” which will procure acceptance with God.¹³ Whereas ingratitude is one of the greatest sins as far as Calvin is concerned, thanksgiving or gratitude is “a *sacrifice of sweet odor*” to the Lord.¹⁴ Patience is also “a *sacrifice of sweet odor* to [God] if we bear our punishment with equanimity.”¹⁵

Commenting on the phrase in Psalm 133:1-2, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity,” which is like “the dew of Hermon,” Calvin adds that “a holy unity has not only a *sweet savour* before God, but is productive of good effects, as the dew moistens the earth and supplies it with sap and freshness.”¹⁶

The sacrifices of Abel were acceptable to God because they were “pervaded by the good odor of faith” and had “a *sweet smelling savour*.”¹⁷ Similarly, when our works “are suffused with the scent of the grace of Christ, they *emit a sweet fragrance (suavem fragrantiam spirent)* before God, whereas otherwise they smell bad.”¹⁸ However, it is not only our works when done out of gratitude that please God, but God’s servants themselves when they are faithful like those in the honor roll of faith in Hebrews 11 “bring with them [God’s] blessing like the *fragrance of a sweet odor*.”¹⁹ Not only that, God makes the ashes of those who have been martyred for the faith “*yield a sweet and pleasant odor*.”²⁰

Although we honor and glorify God by the sweet smelling sacrifices of humility, obedience, faithfulness, and gratitude, that which surpasses all of our sweet offerings is the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The thief on the cross

¹²Comm. Psalm 86:6. Cf. Comm. Psalm 141:2: The prayers of God’s people are “acceptable to God *with the sweetest incense* and most excellent sacrifice.”

¹³Comm. Psalm 16:2.

¹⁴Comm. Psalm 28:20. “The acknowledgment of God’s kindness is a *sacrifice of sweet smelling savour*: yea, it is a more acceptable service than all sacrifices,” Comm. Genesis 24:52.

¹⁵Comm. 1 Peter 2:20, W. B. Johnston translation. Almsgiving is another virtue that pleases God, for when “the wants of the poor are relieved,” they are “*sacrifices of a sweet savour to God*,” Comm. John 12:8.

¹⁶Comm. Psalm 133:3.

¹⁷Comm. Gen. 4:5.

¹⁸Comm. Hebrews 13:20, W. B. Johnston translation.

¹⁹Comm. Hebrews 11:38.

²⁰Comm. Psalm 37:33.

somehow recognized in the death of Christ “*a sacrifice of sweet savour* able to expiate the sins of the world.”²¹ The thief could not have realized, of course, that it was Jesus’ “obedience unto death” that made his death “*a sacrifice of sweet savour* for expiating all sins.”²²

And when Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea brought spices to embalm Christ’s body, “so great was the *efficacy of that sweet savour* which Christ’s death breathed into the minds of those two men that it easily extinguished all their carnal desires.”²³ (By “carnal desires” Calvin is referring to ambition and the love of money.) Now, the risen, ascended Lord “from his heavenly glory sheds upon the world *the sweet savour* of his righteousness.”²⁴

Allured and Attracted by Sweetness

Another motif in Calvin’s use of sweetness terminology revolves around the verbs *attract* or *allure*. This is especially theologically significant in view of the common misunderstanding or caricature of Calvin’s doctrine of God’s sovereignty and predestination. If God is sovereign, omnipotent, and his will determines the destiny of individuals and nations, one might conclude that there is little place for a free and spontaneous interplay between God and humanity. At best, God might be conceived of as exercising a secret power that allows for no meaningful human response. At worst, God is portrayed as the great Enforcer whose will overwhelms our wills.

As over against such caricatures, it will come as a surprise to find Calvin speaking more in the mode of a Process theologian—at least superficially—than in the mode of the so-called God of Calvinism. Calvin affirms again and again that God does not force his will upon us but in various ways seeks to allure or attract us sweetly to respond to his offers and invitations. Calvin speaks often of the secret power of the Holy Spirit, but that power works in us winsomely, not forcibly, as the following passages will show. Here the key modifier is the adverb *sweetly* (*suâviter*),²⁵ or the noun *sweetness* (*dulcêdo*).²⁶

In regard to the created order and human sinfulness Calvin refers to Paul’s address to the people in Lystra where he says: “In past generations he allowed all nations to go their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:16-17).

²¹Comm. Luke 23:42.

²²Comm. John 19:12.

²³Comm. John 19:40.

²⁴Comm. John 16:10.

²⁵The adverb *suâviter* also means “pleasantly,” “delightfully,” “attractively.”

²⁶The noun *dulcêdo* can also be translated as “pleasantness,” “delightfulness,” and “charm.”

By this means, adds Calvin, God “*sweetly attracts men* to the knowledge of himself *with many and various kindnesses*,” but “they do not cease on this account to follow their own ways, that is, their fated errors.”²⁷

Because the revelation of God in nature was ineffective because of human sinfulness, God seeks to win our favor by more direct and personal means. Even prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, believers under the old covenant placed their trust in God because of their knowledge and experience of God’s goodness and grace. David, for example, according to Calvin, affirms in Psalm 116 “that he was *attracted with the sweetness of God’s goodness* to place his hope and confidence in him alone.”²⁸ Later, when the psalmist pleads, “Hear my voice, O Jehovah! According to thy mercy” (Psalm 119:149, Calvin’s version), Calvin concludes that the psalmist, aware of his need of divine mercy, went to “the word in which *God sweetly alluring men to himself promises that his grace will be ready and open for all*.”²⁹

This portrayal of God is characteristic of Calvin’s view of God and further undercuts the notion that Calvin knows little or nothing of the love, mercy, and grace of God.³⁰ Calvin notes, for example, that the psalmists frequently praise God for his mercy or steadfast love (NRSV). The psalmists do this, Calvin points out, because “in preference to [God’s] power or justice, though his glory shine forth in them also, we will never never promptly and heartily sound forth his praises *until he win us by the sweetness of his goodness*.”³¹

Calvin makes the same point in his comment on the opening words of the twenty-third psalm: “The Lord is my shepherd”; although here he adds an admonition: “Although God by his benefits *gently allures us* to himself as it were *by a taste of his fatherly sweetness*, yet there is nothing into which we more easily fall than into a forgetfulness of him.”³² Hence, “how shameful” is our folly, “how detestable our ingratitude, if we are not equally affected [as were Jacob and Joseph], when our heavenly Father, having opened the gate of his kingdom, *with unutterable sweetness* invites us to himself.”³³

The sweetness of God and his fatherly goodness shine forth above all in his Son. Although Christ was endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit, “it was not

²⁷*Institutes* I.5.14.

²⁸Comm. Psalm 116:1.

²⁹Comm. Psalm 119:149.

³⁰As B. B. Warfield, Edward Dowey, Garret Wilterdink, and others have shown, the attributes of God that are most prominent in Calvin’s writings are “gratuitous mercy” and “fatherly goodness.” Cf. my treatment in *Calvin’s First Catechism. A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 115-17.

³¹Comm. Psalm 118:1.

³²Comm. Psalm 23:1.

³³Comm. Gen. 48:1.

fitting that the power of God that causes terror should be put forth in him, but the power that would *allure the world by the sweet taste of goodness and kindness*, to love him and long for him.³⁴ For Christ, like a good shepherd, “is *tenderly and sweetly inviting us to come to him*.”³⁵

The love of God comes to its apotheosis in the death of the beloved Son. As Jesus himself said, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). This moves Calvin to write:

He wants us to perceive by faith the *infinite sweetness of His goodness*; and then He persuades us for this reason to strive after love. Thus Paul writes in Ephesians 5:2: “Walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God *for an odour of a sweet smell*.” God could have redeemed us by a word or a wish, save that another way seemed to Him best for our sakes: that by not sparing His own and only-begotten Son He might testify in His person how much He cares for our salvation. And those hearts must be harder than iron or stone which are not softened by *the incomparable sweetness of the divine love*.³⁶

However, there is also a warning for those who do not respond to God’s gracious gift of new life in Christ. As we read in John 3:36, “But he who believeth not on the Son shall not see life” (Calvin’s rendering). Calvin comments “Just as he (the Gospel writer) had proclaimed life in Christ to *allure us by its sweetness*, so now he adjudges to eternal death all who do not believe in Christ.”³⁷

The Sweetness of the Law

Calvin’s emphasis on the third use of the law—the law as a norm and guide for believers—is well known, but it still may come as a surprise to see how often the Reformer refers to the law in terms of sweetness. There is a biblical basis for this in Psalms 19 and 119 where we read: “The ordinances of the Lord are “sweeter than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10); and “How sweet are your words (again, God’s ordinances and precepts) to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103).

Concerning the former verse, Calvin simply comments, “The Psalmist now exalts the law of God both *on account of its price and sweetness*.” Later in his exposition of this verse, however, he feels it is necessary to explain how it is that the law can be described as “sweeter than honey.”

³⁴Comm. Acts 10:38. In reference to the miracles performed by the apostles as recorded in Acts 5:12-16, Calvin observes that these were like Christ’s in that they “bear witness not only to his power but also to his goodness, so that he may attract men to himself *by the sweetness of his grace*,” Comm. Acts 5:12.

³⁵Comm. Psalm 110:7.

³⁶Comm. John 15:13.

³⁷Comm. John 3:36.

To this esteem of the law there must be added love to it, and delight in it, so that it may not only subdue us to obedience by constraint, but also *allure us by its sweetness*; a thing which is impossible, unless, at the same time, we have mortified in us the love of carnal pleasures, with which it is not wonderful to see us enticed and ensnared, so long as we reject, through a vitiated taste, the righteousness of God. From this we may again deduce another evidence, that David's discourse is not to be understood simply of the commandments, and of the dead letter; but that he comprehends, at the same time, the promises by which the grace of God is offered to us. If the law did nothing else but command us, how could it be loved, since in commanding it terrifies us, because we all fail in keeping it? Certainly, if we separate the law from the hope of pardon, and from the Spirit of Christ, so far from *tasting it to be sweet as honey*, we will rather find in it a bitterness which kills our wretched souls.³⁸

Concerning Psalm 119:103, Calvin waxes lyrical—and at the same time gives us another discourse concerning the apostle Paul's contrast between the law and the gospel. This exposition must be cited in full.

The Psalmist again repeats what he had previously stated in different words, that he was so powerfully *attracted by the sweetness of the Divine Law*, as to have no desire after any other delight. It is possible that a man may be affected with reverence towards the Law of God; but no one will cheerfully follow it, save *he who has tasted this sweetness*. God requires from us no slavish service: he will have us to come to him cheerfully, and this is the very reason why the prophet *commends the sweetness of God's word* so often in this psalm. If it is demanded in what sense he declares that he took such sweet delight in God's Law, which, according to the testimony of Paul, (1 Corinthians 3:9) does nothing else but strike fear into men, the solution is easy: The prophet does not speak of the dead letter which kills those who read it, but he comprehends the whole doctrine of the Law, the chief part of which is the free covenant of salvation. When Paul contrasts the Law with the Gospel, he speaks only of the commandments and threatening. Now if God were only to command, and to denounce the curse, the whole of his communication would, undoubtedly, be deadly. But the prophet is not here opposing the Law to the Gospel; and, therefore, he could affirm that the grace of adoption, which is offered in *the Law, was sweeter to him than honey*; that is to say, that no delight was to him equal to this. What I have previously said must be remembered, that the Law of God will be unsavory to us, or, at least, that it will never be *so sweet to us*, as to withdraw us from the pleasures of the flesh, until we have struggled manfully against our own nature, in order to subdue the carnal affections which prevail within us.³⁹

³⁸Comm. Psalm 19:10.

³⁹Comm. Psalm 119:103. "The doctrine of the law could not be *so sweet and attractive* from its commanding what is right did it not at the same time exhibit the free favor of God," Comm. Psalm 119:168.

It is also very interesting to see how Calvin introduces his discussion of the Ten Commandments in the *Institutes*. Whereas Luther made much of the first commandment, Calvin emphasizes the significance of the preface to the Decalogue: “I am the LORD your God who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2). Calvin sees three things in this preface. First is God’s right to demand our obedience because he is the Lord. “He claims for himself the power and right of authority in order to constrain the chosen people by the necessity of obeying him.” However, second, and this, as we have seen, is God’s special way of procuring our faith and obedience, God “holds out the promise of grace to *draw them by its sweetness* to a zeal for holiness.” The third thing Calvin sees in this preface is that here God “recounts his benefits to the Jews that he may convict them of ingratitude should they not respond to his kindness.”⁴⁰ In short, “the commencement of a good life consists in God’s attracting us to him by its sweetness.”⁴¹

Sweet Consolation in the Midst of Adversity and Persecution

Many of Calvin’s references to sweetness have a pastoral dimension. Calvin lived the life of an exile and knew persecution, attacks, and harassment of all kinds. This may account for his frequent references to God’s mitigating or alleviating the trials and sorrows Christians’ experiences by the sweetness of his grace and love.

Romans 8:31 and following was a passage of great encouragement for Calvin. In reference to verse 33—“Who will bring any charge against God’s elect?”—Calvin writes: “The first and chief consolation of the godly in adversity is to be persuaded for certain of the fatherly kindness of God. From this comes both the certainty of their salvation and the calm security of soul *by which adversities are sweetened*, or, at least the bitterness of sorrow is mitigated.”⁴²

In Romans 5:5, Paul writes that “suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” Calvin picks up the phrase “shed abroad” [“poured,” NRSV] into our hearts. He comments that “the revelation of divine love towards us is so

⁴⁰*Institutes* 2.8.13. Calvin says much the same thing in the next section, but here he relates this matter to the covenant promise. Referring again to the preface to the Decalogue, Calvin says: “God first shows himself to be the one who has the right to command and to whom obedience is due. Then, in order not to seem to constrain men by necessity alone, *he also attracts them with sweetness* by declaring himself God of the church. For underlying this expression is a mutual correspondence contained in the promise: ‘I will be their God and they shall be my people’ [Jer. 31:33],” *Institutes* 2.8.14.

⁴¹Comm. Psalm 119:15. “We must, therefore, cheerfully embrace the law of God, and that, too, in such a manner, that the love of it, *with all its sweetness*, may overcome all the allurements of the flesh; otherwise, mere attention to it will be unavailing,” Comm. Psalm 112:1.

⁴²Comm. Romans 8:33.

plentiful that it fills our hearts,” and “being shed abroad through every part of us, it not only mitigates our sorrow in adversity, but *like sweet seasoning (quasi suave condimentum)* gives a loveliness to our tribulations.”⁴³

In the Christian life, there are inevitably disappointments, misery, and grief. In various ways, says Calvin, God relieves and assures the saints and comforts them with the assurance of his presence and grace. Calvin testifies to this often. In particular, he identifies with the psalmists when they experience God’s rebuke or discipline. When David, for example, in Psalm 6:1, cries out “O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath,” Calvin does not understand this as being God’s permanent attitude toward David—or any believer who experiences God’s displeasure. “God is indeed said to be angry with sinners whenever he inflicts punishment upon them,” observes Calvin, “but not in the proper or strict sense, inasmuch as he not only *mingles it with some of the sweetness of his grace* to mitigate their sorrow, but he also shows himself favorable to them in moderating their punishment and in mercifully drawing back his hand.”⁴⁴

A more explicit illustration of this point is found in Psalm 30:5: “For his [God’s] anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” Calvin comments: “Wherever men turn themselves, a labyrinth of evils surrounds them. But however much God may terrify and humble his faithful servants, with manifold signs of his displeasure, he always sprinkles them with the *sweetness of his favor* to moderate and assuage their grief.”⁴⁵

Calvin sees a parallel here in 2 Corinthians 4:17: “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory”; and then returns to his reflections on Psalm 30:5 with this statement: “In the meantime, it is to be observed that God never inflicts such heavy and continued chastisements on his people without frequently mitigating them and *sweetening their bitterness with some consolation*.”⁴⁶

That consolation is above all an experience of God’s grace even in the midst of the most difficult times. For we must “lean, even in the midst of our sufferings to perceive the grace of God and let it suffice us when anything severe is to be endured to have *our cup mingled with some portion of sweetness* lest we should be ungrateful to God, who in this manner declares that he is present with us.”⁴⁷

⁴³Comm. Romans 5:5.

⁴⁴Comm. Psalm 6:1. “For the bitterness of *reproof is easily sweetened* as soon as we begin to taste its profitableness to us,” Comm. 2 Cor. 7:13.

⁴⁵Comm. Psalm 30:5.

⁴⁶Ibid. Cf. Calvin’s comments on Psalm 34:18: “It is a *doctrine full of the sweetest consolation*” that God does not depart from us even when we are overwhelmed by a succession of miseries and, as it were, almost deprived of life.”

⁴⁷Comm. Genesis 39:1.

This also applies to our prayer life, particularly when we are disappointed because of seemingly unanswered prayers. In his discussion of prayer in the *Institutes*, he deals with this issue. His counsel is that when the Lord does not seem to respond to our requests we must rely on the Word—and be patient. “For the Lord proves his people by no light trials and does not softly exercise them, but often drives them to extremity, and allows them, so driven, to lie a long time in the mire before *he gives them any taste of sweetness.*”⁴⁸

A “rule of prayer,” Calvin says elsewhere, is that even when we are unaware of God’s mercy we can trust with the psalmist that God’s mercy (“steadfast love,” [NRSV]) will “be upon us.” This passage (Psalm 33:22) “*gives us another very sweet consolation, namely, that we have no reason to fear that God will fail to continue his mercy towards us without intermission to the end if it.*”⁴⁹

The sharpest form of adversity, however, is experienced when we are called upon to bear the cross, which, for Calvin, is at the heart of the Christian life.⁵⁰ Here, a key text for Calvin is 2 Timothy 2:11: “If we have died with him, we will also live with him.” “Who could not fail to be stirred by this exhortation,” Calvin asks, “that we ought not to be borne down by our afflictions, since we shall have such a happy deliverance from them. The same thought *abates and sweetens all the bitterness of the cross*, since neither pains nor torments nor reproaches nor death should dismay us, seeing that we share them with Christ, and especially since all these things are forerunners of our triumph.”⁵¹

“The only consolation which mitigates and even *sweetens the bitterness of the cross* is the conviction that we are happy in the midst of our miseries, for our patience is blessed by the Lord and will soon be followed by a happy result.”⁵² However, “*nothing sweeter can be imagined for soothing the bitterness of persecution than hearing that the Son of God suffers, not only along with us, but in us.*”⁵³

The Sweetness of Other Doctrines

There is hardly a doctrine in which Calvin does not find some ground for extolling God’s sweetness. In reference to infant baptism, for example, “*how sweet it is to godly minds to be assured not only by word, but by sight, that they obtain so much favor with the heavenly Father that their offspring are within his care.*”⁵⁴

⁴⁸*Institutes* 3.20.52.

⁴⁹Comm. Psalm 33:22.

⁵⁰See the *Institutes* 3.8: “Bearing the Cross, a Part of Self-Denial.”

⁵¹Comm. 2 Timothy 2:11.

⁵²Comm. Matthew 5:2.

⁵³Comm. Acts 22:7. This passage is about Paul’s being encountered by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

⁵⁴*Institutes* 4.16.32.

The Lord's Supper also offers us wonderfully sweet benefits. The "sacred bread of the Lord's Supper," for example, "is *spiritual food, as sweet and delicate [suavem et delicatum]* as it is healthful for pious worshipers of God, who in tasting it, feel that Christ is their life."⁵⁵ In contrast to the "spectacle" of the Roman Mass as practiced in Calvin's time, he asks, "all who are in the least affected by a zeal for piety whether they do not clearly see how much more brightly God's glory shines here [in the Protestant celebration] and *how much richer sweetness of spiritual consolation* comes to believers than in those lifeless and theatrical trifles."⁵⁶

We should also "receive with prompt faith [*the lovely and sweet teaching*] of God's free offer of eternal life in Christ."⁵⁷ Here we have a very limited understanding of what heaven will be like, but "in the sight of it there *will be such pleasantness, such sweetness* in the knowledge of it alone, without the use of it, that the happiness will far surpass all the amenities that we now enjoy."⁵⁸ On that glorious day,

The Lord will receive his faithful people into the peace of his Kingdom, "will wipe every tear from their eyes" [Rev. 7:17; cf. Isa. 25:8], will clothe them with "a robe of glory . . . and rejoicing" [Eccles. 6:31 EV], will *feed them with the unspeakable sweetness of his delights*, will elevate them in sublime fellowship—in fine, will deign to make them sharers in his happiness.⁵⁹

Yet even here and now we enjoy some measure of spiritual blessedness so that "*any taste of that sweetness* ought to kindle a fervent desire in us" for what God has prepared for us.⁶⁰

Although the center of Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life as outlined in book 3 of the *Institutes* is the bearing of the cross and the meditation on the future life, it should not be forgotten that Calvin did not denigrate the good things of this life. He was no ascetic and obviously enjoyed good literature, good music, good food and wine, and above all, the beauties of nature. This is made explicit in the last chapter of what was earlier called *The Golden Booklet of the Christian Life*.⁶¹ In the 1559 *Institutes*, it is chapter 10 and has the title, "How We Must Use the Present Life and Its Helps."

⁵⁵*Institutes* 4.17.40.

⁵⁶*Institutes* 4.17.43.

⁵⁷Comm. 1 John 5:11.

⁵⁸*Institutes* 3.25.11.

⁵⁹*Institutes* 3.9.6.

⁶⁰*Institutes* 3.25.10.

⁶¹The title of a version of his treatment of the Christian life in the 1539 *Institutes*. In the final 1559 edition this constitutes chapters 4-10 of book 3. This earlier version was published separately under the title *The Golden Booklet of the Christian Life* and was translated into several languages. An English version was published by Baker in 1953 and was reprinted several times.

In this delightful little chapter, he points out that God “renders many things attractive to us apart from their necessary use,” such as fine clothing and delicious food. His appreciation of nature comes out in the rhetorical question: “Has the Lord clothed the flowers with the great beauty that greets our eyes, *the sweetness of smell* that is wafted upon our nostrils, and yet will it be unlawful for our eyes to be affected by the beauty of our sense of smell by *the sweetness of that odor?*”⁶²

In his discussion of the creation story in Genesis 2, Calvin waxes eloquent about the beauties of Eden prior to the Fall, which was blessed with “not only an abundant supply of food, but with it was added *sweetness for the gratification of the palate.*” Also, in the created order there was “such *sweetness and variety* that Adam and Eve had no reason to want more.”⁶³

Ultimately, however, this world and all its glories will pass away. What gives us assurance of salvation here and now and a firm hope for the life to come is the fact we have been “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). “We shall never be clearly persuaded . . . that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know “*the very sweet fruit*” of God’s eternal election.”⁶⁴

If one examines all of Calvin’s references to sweet and sweetness in his writings—and this has been only a sampling—one thing stands out: Calvin loves to use these words to magnify and extol the goodness and grace of God. Also noteworthy is the fact that Calvin refers not only to the knowledge of the sweetness of God’s love,⁶⁵ his beneficence and goodness,⁶⁶ but often speaks of *tasting* that sweetness or *feeling* it. For example, those who are justified by faith have *tasted the sweetness of grace.*⁶⁷ And, “the remembrance” of God’s blessings *must be sweet to us* and fill our hearts with joy, or rather ravish us with love to him, after he has caused us to *taste* his goodness.⁶⁸ Also, the pious *feel* more deeply that God is good and *enjoy the sweetness of his paternal indulgence.*⁶⁹

⁶²*Institutes* 3.10.2. Although Calvin earlier affirms that delicious food is to be enjoyed, he also warns against getting carried away with this enjoyment. Some people are so “stupefied” by “the smell of the kitchen or the sweetness of its odors that they are unable to smell anything spiritual,” *Institutes* 3.10.3.

⁶³Comm. Genesis 2:9.

⁶⁴*Institutes* 3.21.1.

⁶⁵*Institutes* 3.20.28.

⁶⁶“So, invited by *the great sweetness of his beneficence and goodness*, let us study to love and serve him with all our heart,” *Institutes* 1.14.22.

⁶⁷*Institutes* 3.13.5. Even the patriarchs “*tasted . . . the promises, as though fully satisfied with their sweetness,*” Comm. Hebrews 11:13. Cf. Comm. Hebrews 6:4; *Institutes* 3.25.11.

⁶⁸Comm. Psalm 5:11.

⁶⁹Comm. Genesis 3:19. Cf. *Institutes* 1.14.22.

Conclusion

What have we learned from this survey of the Genevan Reformer whose theology can in some ways be described as a theology of sweetness? First, it reveals a style, though not unique, which does not fit into the usual types of theological argumentation. We have here neither scholastic logic nor humanist-rhetorical appeal, although at times it resembles the latter. Just as the apostle Paul appeals to his readers “by the mercies of God” (Rom. 12:1), Calvin appeals to his readers by the sweetness of the God who in Jesus Christ is “utterly kind, sweet, generous, and merciful.”⁷⁰ The majestic God of Calvin does not overpower us by his sovereign will but gently allures and captivates us by his grace.

Second, we have a kinder, gentler Calvin than even his admirers would have recognized. Granted, there is also the Calvin who taught double predestination and oversaw a rigorous discipline in the city of Geneva, but this portrayal of Calvin as a theologian of sweetness presents Calvin in quite a different light. This is a theologian who speaks from the heart to the heart, one who tastes and feels the goodness and grace of God. This delight, this joy in the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ speaks of a heart aflame, captivated by the sweetness of God’s goodness and grace and dedicated to offering himself as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to the glory of God.

⁷⁰Comm. Acts 13:11.

Can the Prayers of Jesus Be Understood Christologically?

A Review Essay

Dean B. Deppe

Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts by David Crump. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999. Pp xviii + 295. \$26.99.

The Christian community will be well served by this Baker republication of a 1992 dissertation by J. C. B. Mohr in Germany. Engaging, exemplary in its methodology, exegetically rich, yet controversial—I recommend this volume to every student of the New Testament. In particular, I would distribute this book to students who are writing a dissertation as a model example of outlining the exegetical options and dialoguing with the history of scholarship. *Thoughtful, thorough, and interesting*—these are the words that describe this study.

David Crump begins with a perceptive introduction to the subject of prayer in Luke-Acts. Competently treating material from various language traditions, he reviews the work of Ott, Harris, Monloubou, and Feldkamper as well as several unpublished doctoral dissertations. He then turns to the prayer texts in Luke-Acts, paying close attention to Lukan vocabulary, style, and redactional emphases. Crump demonstrates an excellent competence in textual criticism (cf. the analysis of Luke 22:43-44 and 23:34 on pages 117-21, 79-85), in organizing and analyzing the history of interpretation (cf. the exegesis of Acts 7:55-56 on pages 179-89), and in diligent researching demonstrated in the meticulous footnoting as well as the thousand-member bibliography. The word that describes the book best, however, is *creative*. Crump produces many new, stimulating exegetical insights that deserve more discussion in the academic community. Sadly, however, I find that I disagree with most of his theses.

Prayer In the Gospel of Luke

Scholars have consistently called attention to Luke's emphasis upon the praying Jesus. Usually the purpose for such prayers is interpreted paradigmatically (cf. Harris, Monloubou, and, to a lesser, extent Ott in Crump's summaries, pp. 5-8). Luke is utilizing Jesus' example to call the church to pray. Because Harris' unpublished dissertation was popularized by Stephen Smalley's article ("The Spirit, Kingdom, and Prayer in Luke-Acts," *NovT* 15 [1973]: 59-71), a second revelatory purpose has been recognized. Luke conceives of prayer as an important means by which God guides the course of

redemptive history. Jesus prays at the milestones in his ministry, namely at his baptism (3:21), choice of the twelve (6:12), Peter's confession (9:18), the transfiguration (9:28), before teaching the "Our Father" (11:1), at the last supper to strengthen the disciples' faith (22:32), before his arrest in Gethsemane (22:41-44), and on the cross (23:34,46). Crump agrees that these purposes for prayer are in the back of Luke's mind (cf. pp. 176-77, 239 with some qualifications), but Luke's foremost purpose is christological. Crump insists that "Luke conceives of the prayers of Jesus as a catalyst for the reception of divinely bestowed insight into the person and character of Christ" (p. 44). "Through prayer they come to see his status as messiah" (p. 177).

Specifically, Crump discovers four prayer sections in Luke where Jesus' prayers produce christological insights into his true identity: Peter's confession, the Transfiguration, the crucifixion narrative, and the journey to Emmaus resurrection appearance (p. 21). Whereas Harris contends that Jesus' prayer in Luke 9:18 must be for himself because he is the one praying (cf. Crump, p. 23), Crump insists that the tying together of, "Jesus was praying alone," and, "the disciples were with him," as well as an emphasis upon seeing and hearing in each prayer notice (pp. 34-41) entails that Jesus was praying for the disciples. Peter's christological insight is an answer to Jesus' prayer. If Luke wanted to call attention to intercessory prayer, however, would he not have been more specific about the content of these prayers? Each of these prayer texts simply mention that Jesus prays, without conveying the content; whereas on other occasions when intercession is involved, the content is specified (22:32 for Simon's faith; 22:42 concerning the cup of suffering ahead for Jesus). Jesus is merely described as praying before the momentous times of his career. Furthermore, the coupling of disciples and Jesus does not necessarily entail that Jesus is praying for his disciples; the exemplary nature of Jesus' prayers could be the emphasis. In fact, Luke needs to introduce the disciples at this point to ask them a question, and the presence of the disciples at this point in the narrative is taken over from Mark. Although Crump does not mention the omission of the Petrine misunderstanding of Jesus' passion prediction at Luke 9:22-23, this could imply that Luke was emphasizing that Jesus' prayer for Peter's understanding of his identity was answered. However, I find it much more likely that Luke's regular pattern of treating the disciples in a positive light as witnesses from John's baptism to the ascension (Acts 1:21-22) is the reason for the omission. Crump is careful to avoid any theological hypothesis that would claim that through this prayer Jesus received new insight with regard to his christological identity. He concludes, "Jesus' prayer does not, in this instance, relate to his reception of any new insight from God; rather, it is concerned with the disciples" (p. 34). Yet, could not Jesus have received an insight into the timing of the revelation of his messianic identity to his disciples through this prayer? Luke's remarks are just too general to arrive at any settled conclusion.

Again, at the Transfiguration in Luke 9:28-29, Crump is overexegeting the text. If Jesus were praying for his disciples, why would Luke have included the

remark that Peter did not know what he was saying in recommending that three tabernacles be constructed on the mountain? This exegetical detail argues against an answered intercessory prayer on the part of Jesus. Luke 9 is certainly christological in that the author has skillfully brought together Herod's searching out the identity of Jesus (9:9) with the questions of the disciples (9:19) when the author substitutes the summary statement of 9:10-11 for the material in the Great Omission (Mark 6:45-8:26). Yet, the text does not support such intricate distinctions in Luke's general statements about Jesus' praying. Likewise with Luke 10:21-22. Certainly Jesus is "thanking God for illuminating the disciple's spiritual vision" (p. 56), but because this statement immediately follows the mission journey of the 72, it could also call attention to a new stage of the ministry of Jesus when an extended band of disciples proclaim the kingdom. Thus, the prayer would be an indication of God's sovereign control over salvation history rather than being an intercessory prayer for christological insight.

In the crucifixion narrative, Crump contends that a "direct connection should be drawn between these two prayers (i.e., 23:34 "Father forgive" and 23:46 "Father into your hands," [my clarification]) and the subsequent confessions made by repentant sinners" (p. 86). He divides the structure of the crucifixion narrative into two parts, each beginning with a prayer of Jesus (23:34, 46). Yet, Grundmann's fourfold multiplication of a three-part structure (vv. 33-34, 35-43, 44-46, 47-49) fits the passage better because it allows each of the three sayings of Jesus a paragraph, followed by the responses of the various audiences to the crucifixion. Crump perceptively discerns (p. 78) that the repentant thief disassociates himself from the other mocking criminal, and the centurion separates himself from the action of the rest of the Roman soldiers only after Jesus prays. The prayers, however, do not control the interpretation of the crucifixion as he maintains.

Finally, Crump understands the breaking of the bread in Luke 24:30 as synonymous with pronouncing a prayer of thanksgiving (p. 105). Thus, he rejects a eucharistic understanding and proclaims that Jesus' intercessory prayer opened the minds of the two men from Emmaus. Certainly Jesus was praying before supper, but the vocabulary employed, "he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them (*λαβὼν τὸν ἄρτον εὐλόγησεν καὶ κλάσας ἐπέδίδου αὐτοῖς*), is too similar to the last supper narrative in 22:19 (*λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς*) to eliminate a eucharistic understanding of the text. Furthermore, within the resurrection narratives themselves, eating (24:41-43) is a common theme demonstrating, I believe, that the Second Coming was expected at a time when the church would be participating in the Eucharist or love feast.

Crump, however, is not willing to assign a christological meaning to Jesus' prayer at his baptism (3:21), his choice of twelve disciples (6:12), or in his hour of trial on the Mount of Olives (22:41; cf. chapter 5). Yet, the sleeping of the disciples as Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives is very similar to the sleeping of the

disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Furthermore, the voice from heaven ties together the Baptism and the Transfiguration. Finally, the choice of twelve disciples as the new Israel could be interpreted christologically and assigned to Jesus' intercessory prayer. I do not discern sufficient criteria to distinguish these two categories of prayers in the gospel of Luke.

I would prefer to understand Luke's use of prayer as an indication of divine necessity (for supportive literature see, for instance, note 5, p. 636 of Mark Reasoner's article, "The Theme of Acts: Institutional History or Divine Necessity In History?" *JBL* 118 [1999]). Luke employs prayer in a similar manner to miracles, visions, angelic appearances, the Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of prophecy, and specific vocabulary such as *δέι* (it is necessary), *ἡ βουλη τοῦ θεου* (the plan of God), *ἐκλεγόμεαι* (choose), *προχειρίζω* (select beforehand), and *προορίζω* (ordain beforehand) to indicate God's sovereign control and preordination over all that is happening. In this way, Luke's purpose for writing the two volumes is accomplished, "that you might know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4). Therefore, the prayers should be interpreted theocentrically rather than christologically. Divine election and heavenly oversight is demonstrated through Jesus' prayers at the crucial turning points of his ministry.

Prayer in the Book of Acts

David Crump's second thesis builds upon the foundation of a christological understanding of the prayers of Jesus in the gospel. He claims that "the success of Jesus' earthly prayer ministry demonstrates the necessity of his filling the role of heavenly intercessor even after his ascension into heaven" (p. 177). "There is indeed explicit confirmation in Acts for the view implicitly expressed in Luke's gospel, namely that Jesus does continue to pray for his disciples in heaven" (p. 201). In a very stimulating discussion, Crump ties the historical recollections of Jesus as a praying person (also in Heb. 5:7-10; 7:25-28) with the doctrinal conclusions of systematic theology that confess that Jesus is at God's right hand interceding for his people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1; cf. Crump, pp. 15-19). Luke thus "created a narrative explanation and /or justification for what had previously been only a confessional statement," suggests Crump (p. 239).

However, this conclusion is erected upon the foundation of only one passage in Acts 7:55-56. Certainly Crump is correct in assuming an identification of witness and intercessor so that Jesus stands at God's right hand in the role of mediator in a higher court of law (for O.T. background see Job 16:19-22; 33:23-28). As Crump explains, "the apparent change from the prayer oriented language of 'intercession' to the legal language of 'advocacy' . . . is simply one of changing metaphors" (p. 202). Yet, what is emphasized in Acts 7 is not a praying heavenly Jesus but a praying earthly Stephen. Two prayers are upon his lips: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" and "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." These are, of course, the identical prayers that Jesus uttered on the cross, thus

emphasizing Luke's paradigmatic purpose for emphasizing prayer, rather than a christological purpose.

Furthermore, if one investigates the other references in Acts referring to the session of Christ, there are no indications of an intercessory role on the part of Jesus. In Acts 2:33, Christ's action is not intercession, but the giving of the Spirit; in 5:31 the corresponding heavenly action is "that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel." In each case they are connected with titles—"Lord and Christ" in 2:36 and "prince and savior" (ἀρχηγου και σωτηρα in 5:31, not Jesus the Intercessor.

Finally, the passages teaching Christ's heavenly intercession in the epistles are all associated with the priestly work of Christ. Hebrews 7:25 is commenting upon Psalm 110:4, "You are a priest forever." Romans 8:34 is closely associated with the sacrificial imagery of priesthood so that God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (8:32) and likewise by example, "we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (8:36). Similarly in 1 John 2:2, "Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." One would then expect to find priestly imagery if this doctrine were found in other scriptural locations because Paul, John, and Apollos all express the intercession of Christ in priestly terminology. However, as Crump admits, "Luke offers Jesus as the interceding, eschatological Prophet. It is not as Priest but as final Prophet that the Son of Man stands at God's right hand in Acts 7" (p. 198). This divergent imagery makes it difficult to associate Jesus' prayer life in Luke-Acts with the doctrinal statements of the epistles.

In addition, the title "Son of Man" is associated with Jesus the advocate in Acts 7:56. Crump admits that this specific title is never associated with intercession in the tradition (p. 235). The sermon in Acts 7 also refers to Jesus as the eschatological prophet Moses (7:37), but again (to quote Crump) there is "no explicit Jewish expectation of the final Mosaic Prophet reproducing this particular aspect (i.e., prayer life [my clarification]) of the first Moses' ministry" (p. 239). Furthermore, quoting Crump again there is a "surprising paucity of material in the pseudepigraphal literature allowing Moses any present intercessory role in heaven" (p. 214) and contrary evidence in rabbinic literature (pp. 230-231). Therefore, any deliberate reference to the intercessory work of Christ in heaven similar to the epistles is doubtful in this text. Acts 7:55-56 alludes back to Luke 22:69 so that Jesus' prophecy of the Son of Man at the right hand of God is divinely accomplished.

As stimulating and creative as David Crump's work is, I think any conclusion tying together the prayers of Jesus in Luke-Acts with the doctrine of the intercession of Christ at God's right hand (encountered in the N.T. epistles) cannot be substantiated. The revelatory and paradigmatic purposes for including Jesus at prayer seem to be more prominent in the mind of Luke.