GOD, THE CARING ONE: THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD ACCORDING TO CALVIN’S PSALMS COMMENTARY
Herman J. Selderhuis

I. An Existential Theme

One of the aspects of Calvin’s theology that has been researched most thoroughly relates to his observations concerning the providence of God.1 It is no wonder that since the Psalms treat the way God deals with his people, this matter surfaces in Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms more frequently than any other theme. Calvin designates God’s providence as “one of the most important principles of heaven’s philosophy.”2 According to Calvin, one will only believe that God cares for this world if one acknowledges Him as the Creator. In this article we will let Calvin speak for himself rather comprehensively in order to elucidate how his reflections on God’s providence in particular determined Calvinistic spirituality.

Here (even more than in the case of other themes) one can appreciate that Calvin interpreted the Bible within the context of his own time and with an eye towards his and his readers’ circumstances. Calvin knows from personal experience how many dangers threaten one’s life. The account of these in his Institutes appears in a memorable paragraph that forms a subdivision of the chapter dealing with providence. These very


2 Psa 49:1, 2 (CO 31, 481).
same convictions resonate in his commentary on the Psalms.⁵ Calvin knows how vulnerable life is: “Our lives are exposed to a thousand deaths. It hangs by a thin thread of silk and presents nothing more than a breath that passes away suddenly…”⁶ He was certainly acquainted with the dangers of traveling, he was familiar with the plight of a refugee, he knew the fear of being endangered by compatriots and fellow citizens, and from daily experience he was acquainted with mourning, disease and pain.⁷ Calvin repeatedly refers in autobiographical terms to “our fears.”⁸ At the same time he realizes that he is preaching, teaching and writing to those who had experienced by and large the same things.

For Calvin there are only two possibilities. World affairs are either determined by the wheel of fortune, or by the hidden providence of God,⁹ even though God’s providence can sometimes be so hidden that it seems as if chance rules.¹⁰

The term “providence” is otherwise inadequately suited to articulate what Calvin intends to say. The notion may sound static, but the issue in question is rather dynamic. The word “providence” is often associated with a detailed designed plan, engineered even before the creation of the world, that inevitably and immutably will come to consummation. Calvin, however, speaks of providence as the continuing intervention of God in world affairs. The sky does not coincidentally become overcast, a raindrop does not merely fall from the clouds and a gale does not start blowing at random. All these things are set in motion by a secret resolution of God.¹¹ He gathers together the winds so that the ocean swells and rages. Mariners can tell from present weather conditions that a storm is approaching, but sudden changes proceed only from the appointment of God.¹² God’s care

GOD THE CARING ONE

and guidance cover every single aspect of life.¹³ Bearing in mind these explanatory notes, I will keep using the word “providence” due to its widespread acceptance.

II. Calvin contra Epicurus and Aristotle

Fundamental to Calvin’s view of the providence of God is his intense rejection of the opinion that God would be idle (otiosus). God does not merely sit in heaven looking down upon the earth to observe what we are doing.¹⁴ Calvin calls the belief that God is otiosus a disease under which most people labor.¹⁵ He therefore reacts strongly against those who would imprison God in heaven and pretend as if He merely sat there inactive.¹⁶ Calvin, like Luther, Zwingli and Bucer (inter alia) had done before him, designates this group of people as “Epicureans.”¹⁷

The teaching of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), introduced anew by a number of humanists, held that the gods do not interfere with matters on earth because their ultimate contentment lies in the fact that they do not have to meddle with all those mortal affairs.¹⁸ But a god who lives in a state of idleness and makes light of everything in this world is inconceivable on Calvin’s view. You can offer no greater affront to God than to imprison Him in heaven because that, in essence, implies that you have buried Him. What kind of life would God’s life be, Calvin asks, if He neither saw nor took care of

³ Inst. I.17.10.
⁴ Psa 31:5 (CO 31, 302).
⁵ For the dangers of traveling in Calvin’s times, see also Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, De eeuw van de familie Platter (1499-1628) (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1996).
⁶ Inter alia Psa 3:2 (CO 31, 53).
⁷ “Neque enim imaginanda est nobis fortunae rota, quae temere omnia volvendo miscet. . . nempe occulta Dei providentia impelli,” Psa 73:18 (CO 31, 683); “. . . arcana providentia . . .”, Psa 5:5 (CO 31, 68).
⁸ “. . . sed arcano suo consilio moderetur quae videntur maxime fortuita...”, Psa 135:6 (CO 32, 359).
⁹ Psa 149:7 (CO 32, 434).
¹⁰ Psa 107:23 (CO 32, 141).
¹¹ “. . . nempe quae singulis vitae nostrae partes praesenti virtute moderatur,” Psa 75:9 (CO 31, 704).
¹² Psa 10:14 (CO 31, 117).
¹³ “. . . morbo communiter laborantium cuncti mortales. . .”, Psa 10:12 (CO 31, 115).
¹⁴ Psa 139:1 (CO 32, 377).
everything. God cannot simply do nothing, although Calvin admits that the temptation to believe that God remains seated at ease in heaven indeed intensifies when one becomes aware of the apparently mundane ways of the world. Correlating with this image of the ever-active God is Calvin’s depiction of heaven. Heaven is not the place where God indulges in leisure, but rather the seat of government from which He exercises His reign over earthly affairs. Heaven is not a palace, but a parliament.

Simultaneously, Calvin fears the image of a god who functions merely as “first unmoved mover,” as can be seen from his exposition of Psalm 127:3, where the birth of children is mentioned. He rejects the idea that God in the beginning equipped man with a certain ability of reproduction and that consequently children are begotten by a “secret instinct of nature.” He likewise opposes the opinion held by some believers that God does not descend from heaven for each individual inception of new life. Solomon’s description of children as a heritage from the Lord bears witness to the fact that God is directly involved in the origin of each new human being. Having children is not the fruit of chance, nor is it entirely due to natural ability, but instead it is an honor which God bestows upon people. Hence God’s care discloses itself in child-birth. Even before a child’s birth it could have died a hundred times, and directly after it is brought into the world all kinds of threats and anxieties descend upon it, when it cannot even lift a finger to help itself. Calvin therefore warns of two risks: the Epicurean thought that God does not concern Himself with this earth, and the Aristotelian belief that God is merely the primary cause.

III. Praesentia realis

Calvin entitles the providence of God “the true theology.” That alone is the genuine doctrine of God in which we do not envisage Him as Epicurus did, viz., as an unoccupied

and self-contained god without any concern for mankind. This “absurd idea” nevertheless obtained widespread currency among many. This is also a theology that bears consequences. By it the existence of God is indeed not denied, but it pretends that God is shut up in heaven in order that on earth one can act and omit as he likes without being punished. This thought that God has no concern whatsoever for the world smoothes all piety. The doctrine of God subsequently determines ethical decisions, and this is yet another reason why Calvin fears this Epicurean thought. Even though man does not deny the existence of God, it is nonetheless true that whoever renounces God’s care for this world has in fact abolished Him. God’s being, however, is characterized in particular by the fact that He is not directed to Himself, but that in love He is directed to the other. Therefore He has to engage himself with his creation.

For these reasons, every version of God’s providence in which He beforehand only knows the course of events is foreign to Calvin. This also counts for the idea that there is only some prefabricated plan that God now has put into effect. The events in nature do not merely proceed according to particular laws that God impressed upon them in the beginning only to stand idly by as these events unfold. After He had created all things, God did not entirely entrust the world to a course on its own in terms of fixed physical laws, but instead He watches over His creatures, and absolutely nothing takes place without his continuous intervention. Here Calvin speaks of a praesens arbitrium, an active presence and continuous involvement of God. It is not the bare concept of a plan coming to its end, but it is the nearness of

---


24 “... imo Deum coelo inclusum fingentes, quasi nihil sibi esset cum eo negotii, sese ad spem impunitatis confirmam,” Psa 10:5 (CO 31, 112).

25 Psa 121:3 (CO 32, 300).

26 “Deum itaque... abolent quicunque mundum non subiciunt eius providentiae...” Psa 10:4 (CO 31, 111).


28 “... nec quidquam nisi praesenti eius arbitrio moveri...” Psa 149:7 (CO 32, 435).
God who not only observes reality but also determines it. Nor is it some vague “universal providence” as some maintain, but rather it encompasses a “particular providence.” He who holds that God does not provide in everything despoils Him of His power and casts a shadow upon his strength.

Hence God’s care extends over the whole of creation, including each living creature. Even concerning weather conditions, it holds true that God not only created an order but He intervenes in the particulars of events. It rains not because nature forces it to do so, but because God decides to let it rain. Storms do not burst by chance, but they are scourges of God, just as it is a signal of His goodness when He moderates the excessive heat by a gentle cooling breeze.

God’s uninterrupted intervention does not signify a persisting threat or even an interruption of the physical order. Calvin calls it “the glory of our faith” that God does not abandon the order which He Himself established. Calvin illustrates this by referring to a nursing infant. A tongue that is not even able to pronounce a single word has, on account of a mysterious instinct provided by God, the skill to suckle. In fact, there is food for such a newborn to eat only because God wonderfully changes blood into milk within the mother. So we see that God’s intervening hand is hidden behind the established order. Those who reject this intervention of God and explain an event simply in terms of nature are in fact waging a war against God. Calvin admits, however, that God’s intervention is not always easily discerned, because “the dreadful disorder that devastates man’s life vehemently obscures the order of God’s providence.”

At times, though, God intervenes abruptly in the order of the creation, and, according to Calvin, this is always with a specific intention. Particular events are not signs of coincidence, but rather tokens of God’s providence “because, if the course of events were always uniform, men would merely peal forth: ‘It is nature, it is nature!’”

31 Ibid.
32 Psa 147:10 (CO 32, 429).
33 Psa 137:7 (CO 32, 360).
34 Psa 104:3 (CO 32, 85).
35 Psa 11:4 (CO 31, 123).
36 Psa 8:3 (CO 31, 89).
37 “... iactarent omnes, naturam, naturam,” Psa 113:7 (CO 32, 179).

GOD THE CARING ONE

The recurrent denial of a *deus otiosus* or a God that is far away amounts to the acknowledgement of the active *praesentia reals* of God in this world. The correspondence with Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is clear: God is present in the created reality and His presence is always an operative presence, though God is by no means a component of the created reality. Concerning God’s presence in world events, then, the extra-Calvinisticum holds good as well. Providence is so essential to Calvin that the denunciation of it equals the denial of God’s existence. Likewise, God is only worshipped appropriately when his providence is known from one’s own personal experience, because a cold knowledge of God—that is, to know Him merely as Judge or Supervisor—does not evoke true devotion.

The confession that God is non-otiosus touches upon the office of God. Instead of idly sitting around, God is diligently at work caring for those who belong to Him. The care that God provides for his faithful is so essential to his being that Calvin repeatedly maintains that it is God’s vocation to nurture. When the faithful are troubled by the enemies of the church, they can confidently trust because it is God’s office to guard the faithful against the attacks of the impious. For these reasons, God’s providence is a source of comfort:

Let us therefore observe when we are distressed and anxious (anxii), to seek comfort in God’s providence, for amidst the awesome solicitudes, we ought to be fully persuaded that it is God’s peculiar office to come to the aid of the wretched and afflicted.

When Calvin writes that it is God’s duty to care for the believing, he goes beyond his discourse on the office of God, where he relates the obligation to care with God’s nature once

39 “Neque vero sufficit frigidam de judicio Dei notitiam concipere...” Psa 10:4 (CO 31, 111).
40 “... itaque complexum Deo tribuit suos tuendi et servandi munus contra omnes iapitos qui ad oppugnandam eorum salutem insurgunt,” Psa 7:7 (CO 31, 163).
41 “... proprium eius esse munus...” Psa 10:1 (CO 31, 108).
again. It is a chore that God laid on himself, and it is true to his essence to comply with such obligations.

While God has duties, He also has rights. When Calvin says that God can claim our praise and gratitude when He delivers us, one hears the judicial element in Calvin’s thinking. He who does not appreciate God’s providence in any deliverance robs Him of that right. Simultaneously there exists a clear relation between God’s office to care for us and the duty of man to execute his task on earth. This relation between the confession of God’s providence and a so-called “typical Calvinistic” work ethic is emphasized by Calvin: they who know that God nurtures us until death or even after death, “are not so distracted by fear as to cease from performing their duty.” He who knows that God cares can calmly and faithfully do his work.

IV. Providence and the Pastorate

God’s providence manifests itself in the human experiences of both prosperity and affliction, but behind God’s superintendence over his creatures, Calvin says, he always has a clear intention. Prosperity as a gesture of mercy compels those who experience God’s favor to glorify him. Calvin writes, “God feeds and maintains his people in this world with no other purpose than that they may praise him with their entire conduct in life.” Adversity, on the other hand, is described by the Reformer as a token of God’s displeasure intended to humble people before God. Beyond merely preventing distress among believers, God’s governance accomplishes the deliverance of people after they have been subdued by the cross. If He wants to display his goodness, Calvin notes, He can provide rain that irrigates the land and its vegetation, but when He wants to punish the sins of the people He can also turn the rain to hail and tempest so that the vegetation are entirely devastated.

According to Calvin, this twofold aim explains many of the apparent mysteries of human experience, such as why God does not rescue all men alike during shipwrecks. In one passage of his Psalms commentary Calvin tells the story of a mocker, an “ancient joker,” who entered a pagan temple. When this man noticed the tablets that the merchants had displayed there as memorials of their having survived various shipwrecks, he asked where the plaques were which commemorated those in similar situations who had drowned while calling upon the gods. This kind of mockery presents no threat at all to Calvin’s view of divine providence. In reality all people deserve to undergo such a judgment, but God nevertheless spares a few that he might be praised by them. Therefore, says Calvin, the real question is why men are retained at all during a shipwreck when some do drown. Calvin’s point of departure always remains the fact that all men are sinful and have no justification to complain to God if he should, for instance, just let them drown in the case of a shipwreck. His justice is revealed in the drowning, and his kindness in the deliverance. There are no contradictions in God, and therefore his clemency is never in disagreement with his justice. Those who are saved in such a case have not been spared because of their faith but because it was the purpose of God’s providence that now they should praise him. Calvin provides similar reasoning to exonerate God from the charge of injustice in predestination to eternal salvation because election is simply a part of God’s providence.

Hence through his providence God has his honor in view, because “his power and glory are not only revealed in the creation of the world but also in the guiding thereof.” Elsewhere Calvin declares that God intercedes to deliver us in order that we should celebrate his goodness.

Calvin aims to accomplish two results with his reflections on God’s providence. First, as stated, he seeks to defend God’s honor. Second, he intends to build up the believer’s trust and peace of mind since “nothing is more effective to increase our faith than the knowledge of God’s providence.” Bearing this in mind, Calvin remarks that it is a

42 “Qua prius argumentum sumptum est ab ipsius Dei natura, et quasi a proprio officio...” Psa 25:4 (CO 31, 252).
43 “... fraudari Deum iure suo, nisi hae in parte agnoscit ei providentiae...” Psa 107:22 (CO 32, 140).
44 Psa 31:5 (CO 31, 302).
45 Psa 146:1 (CO 32, 421).
46 Introduction to Psa 107 (CO 32, 135).
49 “... dicterium illud scurrus veteris...” Psa 107:6 (CO 32, 137).
50 “... qui sic est misericors ut simul tamen exerceat sua judicia,” Psa 107:6 (CO 32, 137).
51 Psa 8:1 (CO 31, 88).
52 Psa 71:22 (CO 31, 662).
53 Psa 107:42 (CO 32, 144).
hundred times more probable that the order of nature will be overturned than that God will withdraw his hand from his people.

Calvin is aware of the questions that may arise from this assertion. According to the Reformer it is not very difficult to acknowledge that God cares for everything that occurs in the world. The difficulty surfaces, though, the moment this doctrine is applied to concrete everyday situations. However, a believer only benefits from the confession of God’s providential care when the general confession has been put in this concrete form, which is why Calvin so fiercely speaks against those that deny the providence of God. “Those who aim at subverting the doctrine of providence even a little deprive God’s children of their true contentment and harass their souls with wretched unrest.” Here again theology proper is at stake since one’s way of living is determined by his or her image of God. He who supposes that God does not care about the earth may live his own life untroubled, but he will lose his nerve when distress comes into sight. In contrast, the one who holds on to God’s providence knows that even in the most awful anxiety and distress he is protected by God’s hand. It is a double confirmation of our faith when we know that the devil and the ungodly can only operate within the boundaries that God grants them, and not only the hands of the ungodly but also their hearts are bound to God’s rule. However, God’s children need special grace to resist the temptation of questioning God’s providence when their lives are shaken.

In addition to this knowledge of God’s providence, Calvin notes that the practical use of this doctrine must be anchored in an understanding of God’s power and mercy as well. The knowledge that God provides for everything and upholds all things by his providence remains useless unless man also appreciates that God is powerful. The mere knowledge of a powerful God is insufficient, though, because one may then become afraid of him. God’s power is as essential to his character as his clemency, and it must always be borne in mind that he is as mighty as he is merciful.

54 Psa 27:10 (CO 31, 277).
55 Psa 10:14 (CO 31, 117).
56 Psa 107:42 (CO 32, 114).
57 Psa 10:6 (CO 31, 113).
59 Introduction to Psa 73 (CO 31, 674).
60 Psa 62:12 (CO 31, 591).

The pastoral concern behind Calvin’s doctrine of God’s providence finds particularly clear expression in his exposition of Psalm 37. In this Psali David reflects on the question of why the ungodly are so often better situated than the faithful. According to Calvin it even seems sometimes that the more boldly a man despises God, the more happily he lives, while those that live with God often suffer greatly. The faithful thus see things strangely confused in this world. Does not God differentiate between the good and the wicked? This paradox, though, has a second level of irony to Calvin in that the prosperity of the ungodly is simultaneously their misfortune because they are living with the thought that their happiness is eternal when it is actually accursed. The faithful know that their calamities will come to an end through God’s intervention and that it is their prosperity that, even in the midst of such adversity, God takes care of them. Calvin depicts this as a paradox which causes our human nature to cower. Faith, however, appreciates that man experiences prosperity only when he is reconciled with God.

Calvin regards it as consolatory knowledge that God is the author of calamity (calamitatum auctorem) because he is indeed the one from whom relief can be sought, the one in whom distress can be brought to an end. The same hand which smites is the hand that can save.

Calvin warns his readers to be cautious in dealing with suffering. Satan may try to extinguish the foundation of a believer’s faith through the harsh and thoughtless verdicts of others. He who speaks of suffering without discretion plunges those that suffer into the deepest abyss.

V. Labyrinth

According to Calvin, one can only live with the paradox mentioned above when one holds to the conviction that God

61 “... videant mire confuses...,” introduction to Psa 37 (CO 31, 365).
62 “Hoc quidem paradoxon est, a quo abhorret carnis sensus,” loc.cit.
63 “... non alter nobis bene esse sine quatenus propitius est Deus...,”
Psa 37:3 (CO 31, 368).
65 Psa 41:2 (CO 31, 419).
66 “... eos demergimus infra omnes abyssos,” Psa 41:2 (CO 31, 418).
guides and rules all things. He who turns away from the biblical notion of God's providence will first stagger and then fall under the chance events and anxieties of life in a chaotic world. As Calvin expresses it, one plunges into an "abyss" of confusion without providence. 67 In the same place Calvin speaks of that "horrible labyrinth" in which man labors and from which he can not escape unless he focuses on the providence of God. 68 Slightly changing Calvin's image, it seems that he who deliberately wants to stay out of God's field of vision remains trapped in a labyrinth. 69 For Calvin, "abyss" and "labyrinth" are concepts that denote the most extreme experiences of anguish; therefore, when facing these realities, only trust in God's providence offers any comfort. 70 Providence does not do away with the experience of the abyss and the labyrinth, but it does prevent one from utterly plunging into the abyss, and it provides the way out of the labyrinth. The relationship between God, Satan and mankind strikes us as a labyrinth because our thoughts cannot ascend to the heights of God. In reality, however, we are assured by Calvin that "there is no labyrinth" 71 because for God the matter is completely transparent.

Calvin offers the same conclusion when he says that the one who denies providence brings hell to earth: "for there does not exist a more awful torment than to be constantly racked with anxiety." 72 In Calvin's mind, however, hell does not designate corporal torments, but instead it implies the spiritual agonies of anxiety and doubt. 73 It is hell to be ignorant of the providential God. In contrast to this notion of hell, then, is Calvin's view of heaven—that to which faith must ascend in order to perceive things as they really are. The believer's confidence in God's providence therefore brings heaven to earth while the denial of God's providence brings the hell to earth. If we extend this to Calvin's concepts of ordo and labyrinthus, we can interpret him as asserting that the world is in tangles and that this confusion brings one into the labyrinth unless he regains the rehabilitated ordo in Christ. Calvin expresses the same thought with a distinction between light and darkness. We must climb through faith into heaven, as it were, in order to find there the light that we need for the hope of salvation amid the darkness of this world. 74 If we have that light, we subsequently see that the abyss of God's providence exceeds the depth of the abyss of the wickedness of men, and this indicates that all the crimes of the world cannot withstand God's government. 75

The attitude of one that holds on to God's providence will reflect both calmness and balance. Calvin appeals to a concept from classical philosophy which expresses this well: "We know that serenity of mind is justly reckoned the chief point of a happy life, that is, that we live serenely because we are reconciled with God, and his fatherly favor shines in our hearts." 76 Calvin derives the concept of euthumia from the Greek philosopher Democritus. Calvin sees this concept as synonymous to Seneca's notion of tranquillitas. The translation of "tranquility," though, does not sufficiently reflect what these philosophers—and therefore Calvin—really intended. For the philosophers it has to do with the experience of inward peace and balance that one can attain especially by keeping within certain bounds. 77 Calvin, however, links this classical idea of a certain way of living to the theology of the Reformation. He is of opinion that when one devoutly seeks serenity in what God has revealed in his word, one is also capable of accepting the mysteria without protest. 78 Calvin contrasts the state of complete

67 "... quasi in abyssum se demergent," Psa 37:5 (CO 31, 368).
68 "... ex horribili... labyrinthino...", loc. cit.
69 Psa 62:9 (CO 31, 589).
70 William Bouwsma, John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait (New York: Oxford, 1988), analyses Calvin in terms of these two concepts and concludes inter alia that Calvin was an anxious person. For a recent, very comprehensive critique of Bouwsma, see R. A. Muller, The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition (New York: Oxford, 2000), 79-98.
72 "Proinde qui hanc doctrinae partem etertere conantur... inferos in hoc mundo fabricant," Psa 107:42 (CO 32, 144).
73 Cf. Inst. II.16.10, where Christ's descent into hell in the Apostles' Creed is also explained in terms of the spiritual agony that Christ suffered.
74 Psa 11:4 (CO 31, 123).
75 "... nempe quantumvis magan scelerum abyssus inter homines exundet, terramque obruant, maiorl tamen esse providentiae Del abyssum, ut justo omnia dispenset ac temperet," Psa 36:6 (CO 31, 362).
76 Psa 119:165 (CO 32, 289).
77 Calvin gives this exposition of euthumia in his commentary on Seneca's De Clementia. See Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia (ed. Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 60-61. See also Sharples' Stoics, p. 93, who translates euthumia in Democritus as possessing "good spirit."
confusion on earth with the quiet state of God in heaven and then says that faith can only endure in the chaos of this world by fixing itself upon this God. The certainty that God guides such affairs offers, amidst confusion and turmoil, is "the permanent heritage of a blessed life."

This faith saves only through the hidden activity of God's Spirit. This attitude is characterized by David in Psalm 62:7 as "being silent before God." This is the *doctrina* that we endure patiently and in a restrained way all the things that actually should disturb us. Calvin here uses the word *moderate*, by which he shows that what is meant here is an attitude that requires effort. *Moderate* can be translated as "observing moderation" and "restraining;" thus it is evident that Calvin is describing an attitude of faith that calls for effort. Based on both his readers' experiences and his own, Calvin knows that there is nothing more difficult for man amid all the turbulence of this world than to merely remain calm. When no imminent danger is threatening a person, belief is no effort at all, but when your soul stumbles upon everything that occurs in the world and when your tranquility of mind is utterly disturbed, then it will be disclosed to what extent you have believed that God is mighty.

One of the perpetual struggles of the believer is that against impatience. Impatience is the consequence of an erroneous theology because God's deeds are thereby measured according to our standards of time and existence. However, it is absurd to confine God to the fixed limits of time. People who themselves pass away like a shadow must not be so audacious as to pull God from his eternity into our experience of time and subjugate him to the fluctuations of this changing world. Impatience is eliminated only when believers focus their thoughts on God's eternity.

---

79 Psa 28:5 (CO 31, 284).
80 "Haec autem vera est beatæ vitæ stabilitas, ubi persuasi sunt divinitus eam gubernari," Psa 61:8 (CO 31, 584).
81 "... arca spiritus sui consolatione fulcit, ne rebus adversis succumbant," Psa 94:12 (CO 32, 24).
82 "... quia nihil difficultius quam homines, dum circumcanguntur in mundo, manere sedatis et compositis animis, nec ullo perturbatione quattueir," Psa 37:3 (CO 31, 366).
83 Psa 46:2 (CO 31, 366).
84 "... temporum angustiis..." Psa 10:16 (CO 31, 118).
85 "... quia hoc mundo eum ab aeterno solio detractum variis mundi inclinationibus subiiciunt," Psa 55:20 (CO 31, 543).
86 "... non sine molestia et sudore carnis," Psa 37:7 (CO 31, 370).
87 "... non aliter fieri quam si Dominus nos in schola erudiat," Psa 94:12 (CO 32, 23).
89 "Iaqve vias suas in Deum devolvit qui actionum suarum eventum eius arbitrio resignans, et patienter expectans utramque fortunam, curas quibus angitur..." Psa 37:5 (CO 31, 368).
90 "... discamus patientem flere in Dei risu, ut lacrymæ nostrae sint obedientia sacrificii," Psa 37:12 (CO 31, 372).
faithful having to wait for his aid for some time. He writes, “If he does not keep the faithful for a short time in suspense, then it could not be said that it is his prerogative to save the afflicted.”

At the conclusion of his exposition of this psalm, Calvin summarizes one last time God’s intention in the disclosure of his providence, anchoring our hope and confidence in the very nature of God:

The sum of the whole is that, whatever may happen, the righteous will indeed be saved because they are in the hand of God and can never be forgotten by him. This ought to be particularly noticed, that those who are greatly afflicted may be sustained by the assurance that the salvation which they expect from God is in fallibly certain because God is eternal and governs the world by his power.92

VI. Conclusion

The providentia Dei can be regarded as the most significant theme in Calvin's commentary on the Psalms. The question that Calvin and his fellow believers ask, with an eye to preserving their faith in this God, is how the God of the Bible relates himself to the difficulties they encounter. Calvin answers this question by presenting God as continuously involved in every single aspect of world affairs. The activity of God in every part of his creation receives so much emphasis that Calvin almost makes God responsible for evil as well. But it is essential for our appreciation of this difficulty to recognize that Calvin’s emphasis emanates from his pastoral intentions, and to integrate this question into his treatment of providence as found in his Psalms commentary.

91 Psa 18:28 (CO 31, 184).