

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Randall C. Zachman. Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin

Scott N. Kindred-Barnes

Volume 33, numéro 2, printemps 2010

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1106590ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v33i2.15304>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

CRRS, Victoria University

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Kindred-Barnes, S. (2010). Compte rendu de [Randall C. Zachman. Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 33(2), 151–153. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v33i2.15304>

moral destruction of male reason through interaction with prostitutes. Storey concludes that the character of space was negotiated by the process of gifting (and selling) furniture, the activities that it hosted, and the varied interests of prostitutes (co-ed entertaining, sex, prayer), but was not overtly erotic or feminine.

Helpfully, Storey provides a clear guide to her sources. Many historians have been challenged by the intricate world of judicial documentation and the process of early modern justice itself. But with clarity and excellent footnotes Storey traces a sure path through the Roman archives. Anyone new to the world of early modern policing or the judicial system will find the information provided in the Introduction helpful. Moreover, throughout the volume Storey takes care to discuss the phraseology used by her subjects. Analyzing the particular language that prostitutes employed to describe their work, their identities, and their relationships with clients makes the situation and personalities more immediate and compelling. Finally, an extensive bibliography rounds out the volume.

The scholarly world needs more studies like *Carnal Commerce* that present so wide a panorama but digest the historical experience so clearly and concisely.

JENNIFER MARIA DESILVA, *Eastern Connecticut State University*

**Randall C. Zachman.**

*Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin.*

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Pp. v, 548.

Among Reformation historians and theologians it is commonly assumed that John Calvin's commitment to the essential invisibility of God had him deny that God could be represented in any kind of image. Randall C. Zachman has made some important qualifications to this assumption. He argues that Calvin insisted throughout his theological career that the invisible God does become partially visible in what he called the "living icons or images of God." For Calvin the self-manifestation of God, which occurs in a vast array of mirrors, signs, symbols, and living images, could be witnessed both in the works of God in the universe and in the works of God in Israel and the Christian Church. Calvin scholars such as T. H. L. Parker, Edward Dowey, B. A. Gerrish, and Thomas

Davis have sought to establish some interdependence between manifestation and proclamation in Calvin's theology. Zachman pushes such scholarly claims further by maintaining that the interdependence between the Word and work of God is central to Calvin's theological thinking.

Zachman employs an elaborate methodology that requires preliminary explanation as the book's thematic layout is complicated by its correlation to Calvin's own view of historical development. He is interested in how Calvin's understanding of the living icons of God developed throughout his career. His careful use and contextualization of Calvin's Latin treatises and his focus on the biblical commentaries as his major sources attest to this. However, he is also aware of Calvin's own understanding of the way the living images of God develop throughout history, beginning with creation and then progressing through the symbols of the Law to the symbols of the Gospel. Following Paul and Irenaeus, Calvin argued that humanity develops over history from infancy to adulthood and that the economy of divine self-manifestation correspondingly changes to accommodate the maturity of humanity in a given era. Since Calvin himself stressed the importance of carefully discerning the symbols that God institutes in the period to which they were specifically adapted, Zachman thematically organizes his book according to Calvin's own timeline of sacred history, beginning with creation and progressing through to the subsequent stages of the Biblical story. Hence, he begins the book with three chapters that deal specifically with Calvin's treatment of the living images of God the Creator and progresses in subsequent chapters to trace the theme of the living images of God the Redeemer as manifested to the patriarchs, in the Law, to the people of Israel, to the prophets, and to the Church of Christ.

In the course of the fourteen chapters of Zachman's book, readers are introduced to Calvin's treatment of the self-manifestation of God to the patriarchs and prophets, and to his understanding of symbols and types of Christ in the Law as well as the theme of God's presence among Israel. Although Calvin held that Christ manifests himself to humankind in both the Law and the Gospel, he nonetheless developed nine models by which to distinguish the two from one another. Zachman explores these nine models in detail, demonstrating how each inferred that the Gospel differs from the Law only in clarity of manifestation.

Themes such as the symbols and types of Christ in the Law and the symbols of God's presence to Israel are also very important to this study. Dealing

with the former theme, Zachman explores at length Calvin's treatment of the self-manifestation of Christ in the images, symbols, and types of the Law such as circumcision, the Passover, the Sabbath, and many others. In treating the latter theme, Zachman traces Calvin's understanding of the symbols of God's presence that are created by the works of God and then employed by God during the Exodus and subsequent Biblical events, culminating in the symbols of God's presence in the temple and the city of Jerusalem. For Calvin the physical symbols of the Law were temporal and represented in corporeal ways the spiritual blessings of God in Christ. This meant that the earthly promises of the Law, such as the granting of the land of Canaan to the Israelites, never confined their hopes to the land, but were understood as a symbol of God's love and favour towards them, which in effect sought to elevate their hearts from the earthly symbol to God. However, Calvin's desire to avoid the dangers of humanly manufactured idols had him grow more and more critical of false images of God's presence, eventually leading him in the final edition of the *Institutes* to privilege the Word of God as the sole means by which God reveals Godself to humanity. Such a position, argues Zachman, is difficult to reconcile with Calvin's otherwise ubiquitous insistence that God's presence was manifested in both Word and image prior to the Incarnation.

Overall, Zachman has provided an insightful analysis of Calvin's theology, placing in context the reformer's elaborate understanding of manifestation and proclamation, and interpreting a wide range of sources carefully. One suspects, however, that the inconsistency in Calvin mentioned above justifies why many notable theologians such as Thomas F. Torrance have argued that Calvin emphasized the priority of hearing the Word over the living images of God. What is more, despite the author's right-minded ecumenical intentions, Zachman pushes the implications of his study too far when concluding that Calvin, in holding together the revelation of God in the truth of the Word with the manifestation of the goodness of God in the beauty of God's works, somehow anticipates the work of the twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Regardless, this study will no doubt renew scholarly discussion on how Calvin reconciled his theology of the Word with what he called "the living icons or images of God."

SCOTT N. KINDRED-BARNES, Trinity College, University of Toronto