

Calvin's Christology from Geneva to Belgium:  
The Importance of Calvin's Institutes for Understanding  
the XIX and XXXV Articles of the Belgic Confession of Faith

Written by J. Alberto Paredes

Submitted to:

Prof. Derek W. H. Thomas, Ph.D.

In May 2019

In Attendance of Those Requirements For

The HT731 Theology of John Calvin Course

As the Assigned Research Paper

At the Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC.

Calvin's Christology from Geneva to Belgium:  
The Importance of Calvin's Institutes for Understanding  
the XIX and XXXV Articles of the Belgic Confession of Faith

The study of the person of Christ has been a central topic in the theological discourse for centuries. This area of study on theology, known as *Christology*,<sup>1</sup> gives us some aid for us to answer the question made by Jesus himself to his disciples on Caesarea Philippi: ... *who do you say I am?*<sup>2</sup> Even then, people differed about the reality of his nature. On the very instant someone begins to utter any response to this question, they are confessing what we have come to call a *creed*.<sup>3</sup>

After Christ's resurrection, and centuries later, it was no more his divinity which was a subject of debate, but his human nature. Thus, some written documents begun to rise from the earliest stages of the church to state what Christendom ought to believe in this regard.<sup>4</sup> When reading these documents, one is able to see a development in regard to the theological language used, especially in the way this question is answered. Also, once the Christian church asserts both a divine and a human nature, distinct from each other, yet, coexisting together into the person of Christ, they need to formulate statements which give a cogent account about the relationships of these natures.

The Belgic Confession of Faith, written by Guido de Brès in 1559,<sup>5</sup> in its XIX and XXXV articles, is perhaps the 16<sup>th</sup>'s century confession that postulates these issues in the clearest way.<sup>6</sup> Yet, due to the concise nature of confessions, it does not expound on those. However, there might be a way

---

<sup>1</sup> Donald K. McKim, "Christology," *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 48.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 16:15.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The History of Creeds*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1878), 5.

<sup>4</sup> An example of this might be the Nicene Creed as a response of the Arian heresy. See, J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Edition. (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 237.

<sup>5</sup> James T. Dennison, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume II, 1552-1566* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 424.

<sup>6</sup> See *Addendum I*.

to gain a better and deeper understanding of these two articles. About that of which de Brès makes clear assertions, John Calvin makes profound statements in his Institutes. Thus, it is my purpose to expose in this paper, how is it that the technical language used by Calvin in his Institutes in regard to the Communication of Properties along with the concept known as *Extra calvinisticum*, can be found in the mentioned Articles of the Belgic Confession, and in doing so, demonstrate the importance of Calvin's work for enhancing our comprehension of these Belgic articles. If this task is correctly managed, by the time the articles at stake are first presented, the thesis will be almost immediately proven.

#### *Understanding Terms, Communicatio idiomatum and Extra Calvinisticum*

Let us then begin our task by defining what it is meant by Communication of Properties and *Extra calvinisticum*. When theologians respond to the question: How do the two natures of Christ relate to each other in regard of their properties and faculties? They are formulating statements that have to do with the *Communicatio idiomatum*, also called *Communicatio proprietatum* or Communication of Properties. In short, these terms refer to the way in which the properties, or *idiomata*, of each nature are communicated to or interchanged in the unity of the person.<sup>7</sup>

To obtain a better grasp of what all these means, let us consider some passages in Calvin's Institutes.

*“On the other hand, we ought not to understand the statement that “the Word was made flesh” [John 1:14] in the sense that the Word was turned into flesh or confusedly mingled with flesh. Rather, it means that, because he chose for himself the virgin's womb as a temple in which to dwell, he who was the Son of God became the Son of man—not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For we affirm his divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute one Christ.”*<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 69.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 482.

In this passage, Calvin does nothing more than to affirm that which the church has considered orthodoxy for centuries. This is that Christ is both truly man, and truly God. These natures are united with each other, yet there is no confusion of substance, human nature remains human, while divine nature remains divine. It must also be clearly stated that, since the incarnation and thereafter, in the person of the Son, there are only two natures which remain two and, despite all unity which truly exists among them, there is no fusion of natures as to create a third one different in kind, nor it can be said that any of these natures overcomes the other in such a way that the “lesser”<sup>9</sup> nature ceases to be.

For explaining this, which he calls a “very great mystery,”<sup>10</sup> Calvin moves on to take the example of the human nature, which is composed by both a body and a soul and expands on how these two relate to each other. Then he points out that this is the very way in which Scripture speaks about Christ.

*If anything like this very great mystery can be found in human affairs, the most apposite parallel seems to be that of man, whom we see to consist of two substances. Yet neither is so mingled with the other as not to retain its own distinctive nature. For the soul is not the body, and the body is not the soul. Therefore, some things are said exclusively of the soul that can in no wise apply to the body; and of the body, again, that in no way fit the soul; of the whole man, that cannot refer—except inappropriately—to either soul or body separately. Finally, the characteristics of the mind are [sometimes] transferred to the body, and those of the body to the soul. Yet he who consists of these parts is one man, not many. Such expressions signify both that there is one person in man composed of two elements joined together, and that there are two diverse underlying natures that make up this person. Thus, also, the Scriptures speak of Christ: they sometimes attribute to him what must be referred solely to his humanity, sometimes what belongs uniquely to his divinity; and sometimes what embraces both natures but fits neither alone. And they so earnestly express this union of the two natures that is in Christ as sometimes to interchange them. This figure of speech is called by the ancient writers “the communicating of properties.”*

*These things would be quite unconvincing if many and oft-recurring phrases of Scripture did not prove none of them to have been humanly devised. What Christ said about himself—“Before*

---

<sup>9</sup> By the term *lesser* I am referring to the human nature and not, of course, the divine. Since it has been asserted that we worship Christ for his divinity, and not for his humanity, and it is true that no human being can truthfully equate himself with the divinity since either of those would end up in idolatry, and adding the fact that that which creates is ontologically greater in essence than that which is created, it seems that the term *lesser* in reference to humanity in comparison to divinity is well applied.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 482.

*Abraham was, I am” [John 8:58]—was far removed from his humanity. [...] [S]ince he clearly distinguishes the day of his manifestation from his eternal essence, and expressly commends his own authority as excelling Abraham’s in antiquity, there is no doubt that he is claiming for himself what is proper to his divinity. Paul declares him to be “the first-born of all creation ... who was before all things and in whom all things hold together” [Col. 1:15, 17]. Also, he says that he was “glorious in his Father’s presence before the world was made” [John 17:5 p.]; and that he is working together with his Father [John 5:17]. These qualities are utterly alien to man. Therefore they and their like apply exclusively to his divinity.*

*But he is called “the servant of the Father” [Isa. 42:1, and other passages]; he is said to have “increased in age and wisdom ... with God and men” [Luke 2:52], and not to “seek his own glory” [John 8:50]; “not to know the Last Day” [Mark 13:32; cf. Matt. 24:36]; not to “speak by himself” [John 14:10], and not to “do his own will” [John 6:38 p.]; he is said to have been “seen and handled” [Luke 24:39]. All these refer solely to Christ’s humanity. In so far as he is God, he cannot increase in anything, and does all things for his own sake; nothing is hidden from him; he does all things according to the decision of his will, and can be neither seen nor handled. Yet he does not ascribe these qualities solely to his human nature, but takes them upon himself as being in harmony with the person of the Mediator.*

*But the communicating of characteristics or properties consists in what Paul says: “God purchased the church with his blood” [Acts 20:28 p.][...]. Surely God does not have blood, [...]But since Christ, who was true God and also true man, was crucified and shed his blood for us, the things that he carried out in his human nature are transferred improperly, although not without reason, to his divinity [...] Again, when Christ, still living on earth, said: “No one has ascended into heaven but the Son of man who was in heaven” [John 3:13 p.], surely then, as man, in the flesh that he had taken upon himself, he was not in heaven. But because the selfsame one was both God and man, for the sake of the union of both natures he gave to the one what belonged to the other.<sup>11</sup>*

On these lines, it is Calvin’s purpose to show how is it that, in the first place, there has to be a Communication of properties if we are to take what the Bible says as true, and secondly, what kind of communication of properties those this natures are engaged in. Now, even when Calvin has clearly stated that these two natures exists and communicate with one-another in an *improper*, or let us say, only in a nominal sense,<sup>12</sup> we must go even further to explore one particularly important manifestation of this doctrine: The *Extra calvinisticum*.

---

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 482–484.

<sup>12</sup> Do not confound with Ockham’s *nominalism*.

At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Book 2 of the Institutes, Calvin speaks about the way in which Christ's divine nature is not constrained or limited to Jesus' human body. This sometimes is overlooked since is not only at the very end of this chapter, but that it is spoken in the middle of a rather lengthy response to Manichees, Marcionites and other heretics. For the purpose of this paper, special words and phrases will be emphasized.

*This is mere impudence! For even if **the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person**, we do not imagine that he was **confined** therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God **descended** from heaven in such a way that, **without leaving heaven**, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; **yet he continuously filled the world** even as he had done from the beginning!<sup>13</sup>*

This idea that, because these two natures remain distinct from one-another, it does not follow that what is predicated from one must be predicated for the other, derives into the argument Calvin has written above. If the human nature of Christ and his divine nature are united in such a way that properties are not necessarily predicated from one to the other, then, we can assert that Christ's human nature is limited to a physical body, while, at the same time, maintain that his divine nature is not. Also, this means that we can hold both the facts that Christ's divine nature is omnipresent, while his human nature is not. In other words, as Edmonson states it, the natures of Christ remain distinct so that his divine nature retains its infinity and his human nature its finitude.<sup>14</sup> This, perhaps complex, concept is what has become known historically as the *Extra calvinisticum*.

This *Extra* concept has deep implications in Christology, but also in the way we understand the Lord's Supper. Since Calvinists are able to make a distinction between natures without losing the unity in the person of Christ, they can assert that Christ is indeed present at the Lord's Table, while maintain that the elements remain earthly bread, and earthly wine, and do not change in their substance,<sup>15</sup> nor

---

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 481.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 210–215.

<sup>15</sup> This view, held by the Roman Catholic church, is known as *transubstantiatio* or *transubstantiation*. See, Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 368.

carry another human essence hidden in, on or under them.<sup>16</sup> In fact, this idea of communication of properties reappears further in Calvin's Institutes while addressing the issue of how are we to understand the Lord's Supper.

*In this Sacrament we have such full witness of all these things that we must certainly consider them as if Christ here present were himself set before our eyes and touched by our hands. For his word cannot lie or deceive us: "Take, eat, drink: this is my body, which is given for you; this is my blood, which is shed for forgiveness of sins" [Matt. 26:26–28, conflated with 1 Cor. 11:24; cf. Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20].<sup>17</sup>*

*Now, although we concede to them what they [Consubstantialists,] chatter about the invisible presence, yet that immeasurableness will still not be proved, without which they will try in vain to enclose Christ under bread. Unless the body of Christ can be everywhere at once, without limitation of place, it will not be credible that he lies hidden under the bread in the Supper. To meet this necessity, they have introduced the monstrous notion of ubiquity.<sup>18</sup>*

*But greatly mistaken are those who conceive no presence of flesh in the Supper unless it lies in the bread. For thus they leave nothing to the secret working of the Spirit, which unites Christ himself to us. To them Christ does not seem present unless he comes down to us. As though, if he should lift us to himself, we should not just as much enjoy his presence! The question is therefore only of the manner, for they place Christ in the bread, while we do not think it lawful for us to drag him from heaven. Let our readers decide which one is more correct. Only away with that calumny that Christ is removed from his Supper unless he lies hidden under the covering of bread! For since this mystery is heavenly, there is no need to draw Christ to earth that he may be joined to us.<sup>19</sup>*

In this way, Calvin's view of Christology and communication of properties affects directly his understanding of the supper, and of what happens therein. By maintaining this *Extra* dimension, Calvin affirms that it is not necessary from Christ to bodily leave his place at the right hand of God, but it is the Spirit who lifts us up to him by faith. As Wallace accurately writes, in heaven, the body of Christ retains all his human properties unimpaired. The body of Christ in heaven is still flesh, without having attributes of divinity so transform it that his true nature as flesh is destroyed. Therefore, it is

---

<sup>16</sup> This view, held by the Lutheran church, is known as *consubstantatio* or *consubstantiation*. See, *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1362.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1401.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1403.

necessary that the Spirit lift us up to him. Calvin does not expect us to fully understand this, he says, but if we are to begin to understand the sacrament, we must believe it.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, however vital this *Extra* doctrine is to Calvinists and Reformed theology in general, we should not expect to come across it in early Reformed writings. And this includes the Belgic Confession. So, even when they might adhere to this doctrine, they might not present it literally as the *Extra*, and the reason is simple. Lutherans, which opposed to this doctrine, thought (and still, for the most part, think) that the communication of properties must be a real one and not only a nominal one. And, therefore, that that which is predicated from one nature can be predicated for the other.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Lutherans came with the term ‘*Extra calvinisticum*’ in a negative manner.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, they responded with the phrase *Logos non extra carnem*,<sup>23</sup> “The Word is not outside the flesh.” Hence, the term *Extra* was not one that Calvinists often liked to use.

#### *Evidences of Calvin’s Institutes as a Model and Basis for de Brès’ Belgic Confession*

Now that we understand the concepts exposed above, let us move forward to explore the possibility of Calvin’s Institutes as *the* model after which the Belgic Confession was written. This is no easy task insofar we will not be able to see any quotation in de Brès’ confession giving credit to Calvin. This is due to two major factors, the first, by its own nature, confessions do not cite anything but Scripture. But even if this was not the case, authors on those days did not footnote sources to acknowledge contemporary writers.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, unfortunately, it cannot be as simple as that. We need

---

<sup>20</sup> Ronald S Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 205–206.

<sup>21</sup> David G Peters, “The ‘Extra Calvinisticum’ and Calvin’s Eucharistic Theology,” n.d., Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Digital Library, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/3632>.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen J Palmer, “The Son of God Beyond the Flesh: A Historical and Theological Study of the Extra Calvinisticum,” *Trinity Journal* 37, no. 2 (2016): 292.

<sup>23</sup> Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 116–117.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Gordon, *Calvin*, (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2011), 107.

to work our way towards building a case to establish a causal relation between the Institutes and the Belgic Confession.

In the first place, even when it is true that de Brès could have read the Institutes by himself and inspire thereof for his confession, it is more plausible to sustain a relation among the works when there was a relationship between the authors.<sup>25</sup> Thus, we might want to look for any kind of evidence that can suggest that the authors of both works knew each other. In the introduction to the first volume of his commentary on the Belgic Confession, Engelsma asserts, rather boldly, since he does not provide any citation, that de Brès studied under Calvin for three years at Strausburg while he was in one of his periods of exile.<sup>26</sup> However, before rejecting this claim altogether, let us analyze some other evidence.

Strauss, on this same attempt, affirms several important historical factors which points to a not only existing, but significant relationship. On the first place, he comments that on 10 January 1562, Belgium authorities reported that they had found de Brès secret quarters. In it they found 200 copies of the *Confession de Foy*,<sup>27</sup> as well as numerous other books, among others, books by Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger and Calvin. He also comments that in 1556 De Brès had to flee to Frankfurt place in which he could have met Calvin personally. Then, he adds, before returning to his country of birth in 1559, he continued his studies in Lausanne and Geneva with Beza and Calvin, and quotes Dankbaar on stating that de Brès attended sermons, lectures on the Bible and public lessons by Calvin. It is known, he continues, that de Brès had a high opinion of Calvin as theological teacher, and that he probably exchanged letters with him as early as 1556. The basis for this assumption is a letter from

---

<sup>25</sup> S. A. Strauss, "John Calvin and the Belgic Confession," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 27, no. 4 (June 11, 1993): 503.

<sup>26</sup> David J. Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary*, 1st edition., vol. 1 (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Pub. Association, 2018), 2.

<sup>27</sup> The original name in French of the document known today as *The Belgic Confession* was *Confession de Foy: Faicte D'un Commun Accord par les Fideles qui Conuerfent és Pays Bas, leſquels Defirent Viure Felon la Pureté de L'Euangile de Nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ*. See, Guido de Brès, "Confession de Foy: Faicte D'un Commvn Accord par les Fideles qui Conuerfent és Pays Bas, leſquels Defirent Viure Felon la Pureté de L'Euangile de Nofre Seigneur Iefus Chrifft," *Bibliothèque de Genève (GLN)*, last modified M. D. LXVI (1566), accessed May 1, 2019, [https://www.e-rara.ch/gep\\_g/4453555](https://www.e-rara.ch/gep_g/4453555).

Calvin to De Brès. Finally, it is maintained that already in 1559, shortly after his return to the Netherlands, De Brès started collecting several creeds on which the supporters of the Reformation agreed. An acquaintance of his, Saravia, is said to have shown a draft creed to Calvin in Geneva in 1559. Calvin's advice to De Brès was rather to accept the *Confessio Gallicana* than to draw up a separate creed for the Netherlands.<sup>28</sup> Initially De Brès obeyed his teacher's wishes, but two years later he considered the time as ripe to publish his own confession.<sup>29</sup>

Other authors such as Van Bruggen,<sup>30</sup> Bouwman,<sup>31</sup> Van Halsema,<sup>32</sup> Denninson<sup>33</sup> and Cochrane<sup>34</sup> maintains that Calvin and Brès knew each other, and that Guido studied under Calvin.

---

<sup>28</sup> This might have been the case due to a personal concern of Calvin regarding keeping the Reformed church united. With more confessions appearing, this task might have resulted difficult. Little did he know that this confession which he approved, yet, wished to remain unpublished, was to become one of the Three Forms of Unity of the Netherlands' Reformed Church. See, Gordon, *Calvin*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Strauss, "John Calvin and the Belgic Confession," 503–504.

<sup>30</sup> J. Van Bruggen, *The Church Says Amen: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession* (Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2003), 15–19.

<sup>31</sup> Clarence Bouwman, *The Overflowing Riches of My God: Revisiting the Belgic Confession* (Winnipeg, Man.: Premier Pub., 2008), 19.

<sup>32</sup> Thea B. Van Halsema, *Three Men Came To Heidelberg and Glorious Heretic: The Story of Guido de Bres* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 106–108.

<sup>33</sup> Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol. II*, 424.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century. Edited, with Historical Introductions* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1966), 185–186.

However, Gootjes, seems more skeptical with the evidence, and while conceding that it is strong, yet he asserts that it is not indubitably compelling.<sup>35</sup> However, he does grant that the Belgic confession was highly influenced by Calvin.<sup>36</sup>

Moving on with evidences, let us now assess the fact that the institutes played a major role in the appearance of the Belgic Confession. This can be proved both directly and indirectly. Indirectly, Gootjes asserts that what was the Belgic Confession is model after the Gallican (or, French) Confession, which was written using Calvin's draft. When the comparison is made between the first article of both confessions, the resemblance is outstanding.

Gallican Confession:

*Art. 1: We believe and confess that there is but one God, who is one sole and simple essence, spiritual, eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite, incomprehensible, ineffable, omnipotent; who is all-wise, all-good, all-just, and all-merciful.*<sup>37</sup>

French Text:

*Art. 1: Nous croyons et confessons qu'il y a un seul Dieu, qui est une seule et simple essence, spirituelle, éternelle, invisible, immuable, infinie, incompréhensible, ineffable, qui peut toutes choses, qui est toute sage, toute bonne, toute juste, et toute miséricordieuse.*<sup>38</sup>

Belgic Confession:

*Art. 1: We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.*<sup>39</sup>

French Text:

*Art. 1: Nous croyons tous de cœur et confessons de bouche, qu'il y a une seule et simple essence spirituelle, laquelle nous appelons Dieu éternel, incompréhensible, invisible, immuable, infini; lequel est tout puissant, tout sage, juste, et bon, et source très-abondante de tous biens.*<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Nicolaas Hendrik Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources*, Texts and studies in Reformation and post-Reformation thought (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 60–62.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>37</sup> "Creeds of Christendom, Volume III. The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches. - Christian Classics Ethereal Library," accessed May 16, 2019, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.vii.html>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

There is more. Due to its basis in a document authored by the same man who wrote the Institutes, there are special similarities in both documents worthy to be mentioned. For instance, the order and arrangement in the Belgic Confession is exactly that of Calvin's Institutes.<sup>41</sup> Of course, this is something that the Belgic Confession shares also with the Gallican Confession. However, there are two other characteristics which the Institutes and the Belgic Confession share, that the Gallican does not, those placing a direct relation among these documents.

In the first place, both the Institutes and the Belgic Confession initiates with a preface to the King.<sup>42</sup> This is something that we see in the Institutes but that not many confessions use to do. Secondly, both Strauss<sup>43</sup> and Gootjes<sup>44</sup> acknowledge the resemblance in the theology and the literature features regarding to two subjects. The two natures of Christ, *Article XIX*, and the Lord's Supper, *Article XXXV*.

Before presenting those articles, this might be a good time to remember what was proposed at the beginning of this paper: to reveal how is it that the technical language used by Calvin in his Institutes in regard to the Communication of Properties along with the concept known as *Extra calvinisticum*, can be found in the mentioned Articles of the Belgic Confession, and in doing so, demonstrate the importance of Calvin's work for enhancing our comprehension of these Belgic articles.

Let us then read the two articles, comparing them to some of the language found in the institutes.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Strauss, "John Calvin and the Belgic Confession," 507.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 506.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Gootjes, *TBC: History and Sources*, 59.

<sup>45</sup> For this exercise, Belgic Confession excerpts in English will be taken from: "Creeds of Christendom, Volume III. The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches. - Christian Classics Ethereal Library." Calvin's Institutes in English from, Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

If the same exercise wants to be done in French, I recommend the use of the following texts, For Belgic Confession in French see, de Brès, "Confession de Foy."

For Calvin's Institutes in French see, Jean Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrétienne Livre Second*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1955).

*Belgic Confession*

*Art. XIX: The Two Natures of Christ.*

*We believe that by being thus conceived the person of the Son has been **inseparably united and joined together with human nature**, in such a way that **there are not two Sons of God**, nor two persons, **but two natures united in a single person, with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.***

*Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated, **without beginning** of days or end of life, **filling heaven and earth.***

*His human nature has not lost its properties but continues to have those of a creature- it has a beginning of days; **it is of a finite nature and retains all that belongs to a real body.** And even though he, by his resurrection, gave it immortality, **that nonetheless did not change the reality of his human nature;** for our salvation and resurrection depend also on the reality of his body.*

*But these two natures are so united together in one person that they are not even separated by his death.*

*So then, what he committed to his Father when he died was a real human spirit which left his body. But meanwhile his divine nature remained united with his human nature even when he was lying in the grave; and his deity never ceased to be in him, just as it was in him when he was a little child, though for a while it did not show itself as such.*

*These are the reasons why we confess him **to be true God and true man**-- true God in order to conquer death by his power, and true man that he might **die for us** in the weakness of his flesh.*

*Institutes*

*[For we affirm his divinity **so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired**, and yet these two natures constitute **one Christ.** (Inst. 2.14.1)]*

*[Servetus accuses us of making two Sons of God ...when we say that **the eternal Word**, before he was clothed with flesh, **was already the Son of God...** (Inst. 2.14.5)]*

*[Here is something marvelous: **the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven**, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; **yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning!** (Inst. 3.13.4)]*

*[For as we do not doubt that **Christ's body is limited by the general characteristics common to all human bodies, and is contained in heaven** (where it was once for all received) until Christ return in judgment [Acts 3:21], so we deem it utterly unlawful to draw it back under these corruptible elements or to imagine it to be present everywhere. (Inst. 4.17.12)]*

*[But since Christ, who was **true God and also true man**, was **crucified** and shed his blood **for us...** (Inst. 3.14.2)]*

Similarity of terms among these two is wonderful. Even more when, before de Brès', no confession was using the term *properties*, in regard of the relationship between the humane and the divine natures of Jesus. This was a breakthrough for Reformed confessionalism, and it set a new standard on how the person of Christ is to be addressed. Before de Brès, most confessions spoke about Christ as God and Man, yet without clarifying the relationships between these two natures.<sup>46</sup>

To close, let us now compare the language used by de Brès in his Confession which that with which Calvin addressed the matter of the Lord's Supper.

### *Belgic Confession*

#### *Art. XXXV: The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*

*We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ has **ordained** and instituted the sacrament of the **Holy Supper to nourish and sustain** those who are already born again and ingrafted **into his family: his church.***

*Now those who are born again have two lives in them. The one is physical and temporal-- they have it from the moment of their first birth, and it is common to all. **The other is spiritual and heavenly, and is given them in their second birth; it comes through the Word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ; and this life is common to God's elect only.***

*Thus, to support the physical and earthly life God has prescribed for us an appropriate earthly and material bread, which is as common to all as life itself also is. **But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life that belongs to believers he has sent a living bread that came down from heaven: namely Jesus Christ, who nourishes and maintains the spiritual life of believers when eaten-- that is, when appropriated and received spiritually by faith.***

*To **represent** to us this spiritual and heavenly bread Christ has instituted an **earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and wine as the sacrament of his blood.** He did this to testify to us that just as truly as we take and hold the sacraments in our hands and eat and drink it in our mouths, by which our life is then sustained, so truly we **receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body***

---

<sup>46</sup> See Addendum: *A Relation of the Articles in which the Deity of Christ, His Incarnation, His Humanity, the Nature of the Lord's Supper and the Communication of Properties may be Found in 16th Century Confessional Documents*

*and true blood of Christ, our only Savior. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls.*

*Now it is certain that Jesus Christ did not prescribe his sacraments for us in vain, since he works in us all he represents by these **holy signs**, although **the manner in which he does it goes beyond our understanding and is incomprehensible to us, just as the operation of God's Spirit is hidden and incomprehensible.***

*Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ's own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood-- but the manner in which we eat it is not by the mouth but **by the Spirit**, through faith.*

*In that way Jesus Christ **remains always seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven--** but he never refrains on that account to **communicate himself to us through faith.***

*This **banquet** is a spiritual table at which **Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits.** At that table he makes us **enjoy himself** as much as the merits of his suffering and death, as he **nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and relieves and renews them by the drinking of his blood.***

*Moreover, **though the sacraments and thing signified are joined together, not all receive both of them. The wicked person certainly takes the sacrament, to his condemnation, but does not receive the truth of the sacrament, just as Judas and Simon the Sorcerer both indeed received the sacrament, but not Christ, who was signified by it. He is communicated only to believers.***

*Finally, with humility and reverence we receive the holy sacrament in the gathering of God's people, as we engage together, **with thanksgiving**, in a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior, and as we thus confess our faith and Christian religion. Therefore no one should come to this table **without examining himself carefully, lest "by eating this bread and drinking this cup he eat and drink to his own judgment."***

*In short, by the use of this holy sacrament we are moved to a fervent love of God and our neighbors.*

*Therefore we reject as desecrations of the sacraments all the muddled ideas and damnable inventions that men have added and mixed in with them. And we say that we should be content with the procedure that Christ and the apostles have taught us and speak of these things as they have spoken of them.*

*Institutes*

*[God has received us, once for all, **into his family**, to hold us not only as servants but as sons. Thereafter, to fulfill the duties of a most excellent Father concerned for his offspring, he undertakes also **to nourish us throughout the course of our life.** And not content with this alone, he has willed, by giving his pledge, to assure us of this continuing liberality. To this end, therefore, he has, through*

*the hand of his only-begotten Son, given to his church another sacrament, that is, a spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality [John 6:51]. (Inst. 4.17.1)]*

*[First, the signs are bread and wine, which represent for us the invisible food that we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ. For as in baptism, God, regenerating us, engrafts us into the society of his church and makes us his own by adoption, so we have said, that he discharges the function of a provident householder in continually supplying to us the food to sustain and preserve us in that life into which he has begotten us by his Word.*

*Now Christ is the only food of our soul, and therefore our Heavenly Father invites us to Christ, that, refreshed by partaking of him, we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality. (Inst. 4.17.1)]*

*[For this very familiar comparison penetrates into even the dullest minds: just as bread and wine sustain physical life, so are souls fed by Christ. (Inst. 4.17.1)]*

*[And so as we previously stated, from the physical things set forth in the Sacrament we are led by a sort of analogy to spiritual things. Thus, when bread is given as a symbol of Christ's body, we must at once grasp this comparison: as bread nourishes, sustains, and keeps the life of our body, so Christ's body is the only food to invigorate and enliven our soul. When we see wine set forth as a symbol of blood, we must reflect on the benefits which wine imparts to the body, and so realize that the same are spiritually imparted to us by Christ's blood. These benefits are to nourish, refresh, strengthen, and gladden. For if we sufficiently consider what value we have received from the giving of that most holy body and the shedding of that blood, we shall clearly perceive that those qualities of bread and wine are, according to such an analogy, excellently adapted to express those things when they are communicated to us. (Inst. 4.17.10)]*

*[Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space. (Inst. 4.17.10)]*

*[For as we do not doubt that Christ's body is limited by the general characteristics common to all human bodies, and is contained in heaven (where it was once for all received) until Christ return in judgment [Acts 3:21], so we deem it utterly unlawful to draw it back under these corruptible elements or to imagine it to be present everywhere. (Inst. 4.17.12)]*

*[Now, since he has only one body, of which he makes us all partakers, it is necessary that all of us also be made one body by such participation...that we cannot love Christ without loving him in the brethren; that we ought to take the same care of our brethren's bodies as we take of our own; for they are members of our body; and that, as no part of our body is touched by any feeling of pain which is*

not spread among all the rest, **so we ought not to allow a brother to be affected by any evil, without being touched with compassion for him.** Accordingly, Augustine with good reason frequently calls **this Sacrament “the bond of love.” For what sharper goad could there be to arouse mutual love among us than when Christ, giving himself to us, not only invites us by his own example to pledge and give ourselves to one another, but inasmuch as he makes himself common to all, also makes all of us one in himself.** (*Inst. 4.17.38*)

*[We see that this sacred bread of the Lord’s Supper is spiritual food, as sweet and delicate as it is healthful for pious worshipers of God, who, in tasting it, feel that Christ “is their life, whom it moves to thanksgiving, for whom it is an exhortation to mutual love among themselves. On the other hand, it is turned into a deadly poison for all those whose faith it does not nourish and strengthen, and whom it does not arouse to thanksgiving and to love.* (*Inst. 4.17.40*)

Now, perhaps my reader will not be astonished by the similarities in this regard. After all, this is nothing more than established Reformed sound doctrine. Nevertheless, let me remind him that what we have now as established Reformed doctrine, de Brès did not have. Again, I would encourage the reader to go through the major confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century paying especial attention to how these topics are approached by the authors, and then he will realize what is fascinating about the similarities found in Calvin and de Brès. The evidence might not be utterly compelling and enough to build a dogmatic case, yet, it strongly suggests that Calvin and De Brès indeed knew each other, and that the first strongly influenced the second.

Who do you say I am? De Brès’ Belgic Confession will help us give a more concise, yet accurate response to this question. It will also faithfully portray the way in which our answer will mold our view on the Lord’s Supper. However, if we are really looking to understand de Brès theology, especially in regards of the two natures of Christ and the Lord’s Supper, we first need to grasp concepts like the *Communicatio idiomatum* and the *Extra calvinisticum*. To do this, it is not only important, but almost necessary to have a copy of Calvin’s Institutes by our side.

*Addendum 1: A Relation of the Articles in which the Deity of Christ, His Incarnation, His Humanity, the Nature of the Lord's Supper and the Communication of Properties may be Found in 16th Century Confessional Documents*

<b>Relation of the Articles in which the Deity of Christ, His Incarnation, His Humanity, the Nature of the Lord's Supper and the Communication of Properties may be Found in 16th Century Confessional Documents until 1561</b>							
<b>Confession</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Articles in which these Topics May be Found</b>				
			<b>Deity of Christ</b>	<b>Incarnation</b>	<b>Humanity if Christ</b>	<b>Nature of the Lord's Supper</b>	<b>Communication of Properties</b>
67 Articles	1523	Zwingli	–	–	–	XVIII unclear, pb. memorial	–
10 Theses	1528	Berne	–	–	–	IV,V unclear	–
Tetrapolitan Confession	1530	Var.	II	II	II	XVIII consubstanciation	–
First Confession of Bassel	1534	Myconius	I	IV	–	VI memorial	–
First Helvetic Confession	1536	Bullinger, Grynaeus and Myconius	11	11	11	22 memorial	–
Lausanne Articles	1536	Farrel and Viret	–	–	–	IV*	–
The Geneva Confession	1536	Calvin	–	–	–	16 calvinistic	–
Confession of English Congregation at Geneva	1556	Whittingham, pb Knox also. Approved by John Calvin	II	II	II	IV with church	–
The French Confession	1559	Calvin, pb. also Beza and Viret	XIV	XIV	XIV	XXXVI-XXXVIII calvinistic	–
The Scottish Confession of Faith	1560	Knox (Calvin Student), Winram, Spottiswood, Douglas, Row and Willock	VII	VI	VII	XXI*	–
The Belgic Confession	1561	Guido de Brès	X	XVIII	XVIII-XIX	XXXV calvinistic	XIX

This table has been made by Dr. J. Alberto Paredes, with the information provided by Arthur C. Cochrane in his edition of Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century.<sup>47</sup>

\* The Nature of the Supper is not spoken of, nevertheless, there is mention of the Lord's Supper with the treatment of the Sacraments.

<sup>47</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*.

## Works Consulted

- Bouwman, Clarence. *The Overflowing Riches of My God: Revisiting the Belgic Confession*. Winnipeg, Man.: Premier Pub., 2008.
- de Brès, Guido. “Confession de Foy: Faicte D’vn Commvn Accord par les Fideles qui Conuerfent és Pays Bas, lefquels Defirent Viure Felon la Pureté de L’Euangile de Nofre Seigneur Iefus Chrifit.” *Bibliothèque de Genève (GLN)*, M. D. LXVI 1566. [https://www.e-rara.ch/gep\\_g/4453555](https://www.e-rara.ch/gep_g/4453555).
- Calvin, Jean. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T McNeill Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- . *Institution de la Religion Chrétienne Livre Second*. Vol. 2. Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1955.
- Cochrane, Arthur C., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century. Edited, with Historical Introductions*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1966.
- Dennison, James T., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume II, 1552-1566*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008.
- Edmondson, Stephen. *Calvin’s Christology*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Engelsma, David J. *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary*. 1st edition. Vol. 1. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Pub. Association, 2018.
- Gootjes, Nicolaas Hendrik. *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources*. Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Gordon, Bruce. *Calvin*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2011.
- Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Creeds*. 3rd ed., Continuum ed. London; New York: Continuum, 2006.
- McKim, Donald K. “Christology.” *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 48.
- Muller, Richard A. *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017.
- Palmer, Stephen J. “The Son of God Beyond the Flesh: A Historical and Theological Study of the Extra Calvinisticum.” *Trinity Journal* 37.2 (2016): 290–92.
- Peters, David G. “The ‘Extra Calvinisticum’ and Calvin’s Eucharistic Theology,” n.d. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Digital Library. <http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/3632>.
- Philip, Schaff. *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The History of Creeds*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1878.
- Strauss, S. A. “John Calvin and the Belgic Confession.” *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 27.4 (1993): 501–18.
- Van Bruggen, J. *The Church Says Amen: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession*. Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2003.
- Van Halsema, Thea B. *Three Men Came To Heidelberg and Glorious Heretic: The Story of Guido de Bres*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991.
- Wallace, Ronald S. *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997.
- “Creeds of Christendom, Volume III. The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches. - Christian Classics Ethereal Library,” n.d. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.vii.html>.