

## Revelation under the Old Covenant

## I. The impossibility of direct revelation

ACCORDING to Calvin, the great barrier to the possibility of revelation taking place between God and man is the intervening gulf created on the one hand by the holiness and majesty of God and on the other hand by the sinfulness and feebleness of man.<sup>1</sup> There can be no "direct communication" between God and man. "The divine nature is infinitely exalted above the comprehension of our understanding."<sup>2</sup> So great is God's majesty that for man to be faced with the task of comprehending God as He is in Himself "this would be to measure with the palm of his hands a hundred thousand heavens and earths and worlds. For God is infinite; and when the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, how can our minds comprehend Him?"<sup>3</sup> Moreover, so destructive of all that is evil is the holiness of God that sinful man in direct contact with Him would be "brought to nothing by the incomprehensible brightness."<sup>4</sup> The glory of God, contemplated alone by man, could only fill the beholder with despair.<sup>5</sup> "If the angels are majestic in their appearance to men, how will it be when God appears in His glory? For the light of the majesty of the glory of God is not only as the brightness of the sun, but is greater than ten thousand suns."<sup>6</sup> Therefore "should God institute no medium of intercourse, and call us to a direct communication with heaven, the great distance at which we stand from Him would strike us with

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Inst. 2 : 16 : 3. *Atqui si perpetuum et irreconciliabile dissidium est inter iustitiam et iniquitatem.*

<sup>2</sup>Comm. on Ps. 86 : 8, C.R. 31 : 749.

<sup>3</sup>Comm. on Ezek. 1 : 28, C.R. 40 : 60.

<sup>4</sup>Comm. on Exod. 33 : 20, C.R. 25 : 111. *Ille incomprehensibilis fulgor in nihilum nos redigat.* Cf. Comm. on 1 Pet. 1 : 20, C.R. 55 : 226-7. *Quod si appropinquamus iustitia eius instar ignis est, qui nos penitus consumat.*

<sup>5</sup>Comm. on Heb. 4 : 16, C.R. 55 : 55.

<sup>6</sup>Serm. on Acts 1 : 9-11, C.R. 48 : 615.