

**The Collected Works of John
Calvin:
Psychopannychia, Institutes of the
Christian Religion, Commentaries
and others
Illustrated**

The Books

Psychopannychia (1534)

Translated by Henry Beveridge, 1851

**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE FOR
PSYCHOPANNYCHIA; OR, THE SOUL'S
IMAGINARY SLEEP.**

THE TITLE OF PSYCHOPANNYCHIA derived from Greek words which signify “the sleep of the soul;” the object of the Tract being to show, partly from reason, but more especially from Scripture, that there is no such sleep. It was published in 1534, when CALVIN was twenty-five years of age, and is, consequently, with the exception of the Commentary on the Clementia of Seneca, published in 1532, the earliest of all his writings,

and two years earlier than the Institutes, the first known edition of which appeared in 1536. It thus possesses, especially to those who delight to trace the progress of a master mind, an interest additional to that which its merit gives it.

The figment which it refutes is said by CALVIN to be of Arabian origin, but was first brought prominently into notice by some of the wildest fanatics among the ANABAPTISTS, for whom everything new and monstrous appears to have had an irresistible attraction. In more modern times, attempts have been made to give it a philosophical shape, as a necessary corollary from the dogma of Materialism advocated by Priestley and others.

It would seem that the figment, wild and irrational though it is, had made considerable progress at an early period of the Reformation, and counted numerous converts, not merely among the fanatics who had revived it, but in more respectable quarters, where better things might have been expected.

One is puzzled to understand why it should have been received with so much favor; for the idea which it suggests, so far from being attractive, is naturally revolting. It was probably welcomed, not so much for its own sake, as for the great assistance which it was supposed capable of giving in THE POISH CONTROVERSY. Were it once established that the soul falls asleep at death, and will not awake to consciousness

till again united to the body at the resurrection, THE POPE would forthwith be excluded from the larger half of his domain, and deprived of the most lucrative branches of his trade! There would neither be SAINTS to whom divine honors could be paid, nor PURGATORY out of which poor souls might be delivered with more or less expedition, according to the number of well-paid masses that were said for them!

If the cordial reception given to the dogma was owing to the collateral benefit thus supposed to be derived from it, it only adds another to the many instances in which blind man would arrogantly give lessons to his Maker, and arrange the world on a better plan than His infinite wisdom has devised. Because it would furnish a triumphant refutation of Popish legends and fictions - the soul must be made to perish with the body, and a common ruin overtake both!

It would appear that the subject had attracted attention in England, for we find that the TRACT was translated in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The title-page is as follows: - "A Treatise of the Immortality of the Soul, by which it is proved that souls after the departure of the bodies are awake and do live: against those that think they do sleep. By JOHN CALVIN. Translated out of French by Tho. Stocker." It was "Imprinted by John Day. London, 1581."

In the PSYCHOPANNYCHIA, CALVIN, knowing the kind of people he had to deal with,

accommodates himself to their capacities; and instead of entering largely into speculative disquisitions which the subject seems to suggest, and to which the metaphysical cast of his own mind must have strongly inclined him, dwells chiefly on **THE SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENT** - carefully examining all the passages which the advocates of the dogma had adduced as favorable to their view, and adducing others by which it is completely overthrown. If by the adoption of this plan, the **TRACT** loses somewhat in point of philosophical exactness, it gains much in richness of scriptural illustration; and proves that, even at this early period, in writing his first theological publication, **CALVIN** gave promise of the almost unrivaled excellence to which he ultimately trained as a **COMMENTATOR**.

Henry Beveridge May 1851.

PREFACE BY JOHN CALVIN TO A FRIEND.

LONG AGO, **WHEN** certain pious persons invited, and even urged me, to publish something for the purpose of repressing the extravagance of those who, alike ignorantly and tumultuously, maintain that **THE SOUL DIES OR SLEEPS**, I could not be induced by all their urgency, so averse did I feel to engage in that kind of dispute. At that time, indeed, I was not without excuse, partly because I hoped that that absurd dogma would soon vanish of its own accord, or at least be

confined to a few triflers; partly because I did not think it expedient to engage with a party whose camp and weapons and stratagems I was scarcely acquainted with. For, as yet, nothing had reached me except murmurs and hoarse sounds, so that, to engage with those who had not yet come forth into the arena, seemed to be nothing better than blindly striking the air. The result, however, has been different from what I hoped. These babblers have so actively exerted themselves, that they have already drawn thousands into their insanity. And even the error itself has, I see, been aggravated. At first, some only vaguely alleged THAT THE SOUL SLEEPS, without defining what they wished to be understood by "sleep." Afterwards arose those yucokonoi, who murder Souls, though without inflicting a wound. The error of the former, indeed, was not to be borne; but I think that the madness of the latter ought to be severely repressed. Both are unsupported by reason and judgment; but it is not so easy to persuade others of this without openly refuting their vanity, and exposing it, so to speak, to their face. This is only to be done by exhibiting it as it appears in their writings. They are said to circulate their follies in a kind of Tracts, which I have never happened to see. I have only received some notes from a friend, who had taken down what he had cursorily heard from their lips, or collected by some other means.

Although one reason for my not writing has been partially removed by these notes, the other still remains.

However, while the men by whispers, and a garrulity for which they are remarkable, stealthily insinuate themselves, and ensnare no fewer in their error than the circulation of printed books could enable them to do, I feel that I could not well defend myself from the charge of being a traitor to the Truth were I, in such urgent circumstances, to keep back and remain silent! And, while I trust that my labor will be of the greatest use to the more unskillful and less experienced, and not without some use also to the moderately instructed who have given some slight attention to the subject, I will not hesitate to give a reason of my faith to all the good - not such a reason, perhaps, as may fully equip them both for defense and for carrying the war into the enemies' camp, but such a one as will not leave them altogether unarmed. Had the importunity of these men in circulating their dreams among the vulgar allowed me, I would willingly have declined a contest of this nature, in which the fruit gained is not equal to the labor expended, this being one of the cases to which the Apostle's exhortation to be soberly wise particularly applies. But though we long for this soberness, they will not allow us to employ it. Still, my endeavor will be to treat the subject with moderation, and keep it within due bounds.

IOANNES CALVINVS.



I wish some other method of cutting away the evil, which makes far too much progress, had been devised, so as to prevent it from gaining ground daily, and eating in like a cancer. Nor does it now appear for the first time; for we read that it originated with some Arabs, who maintained that “The soul dies with the body, and that both rise again at the Day of Judgment.” (Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. 6 c. 36; Aug. lib. de Haeres. c. 83, dist. 16; John 2:) Some time after, John, Bishop of Rome, broached it, and was forced to recant by the Theological Faculty of Paris. (Gerson in Sermone Pasch. priore.) It lay smoldering for some ages, but has lately begun to send forth sparks, being stirred up by some dregs of

Anabaptists. These, spread abroad far and wide, have kindled torches - and would that they were soon extinguished by that voluntary rain which the Lord hath set apart for his inheritance!

I will plead the cause without hatred to any man, without personal affront to any man, in short, without any bitterness of invective, so that no one shall be able to complain of being hurt, or even slightly offended. And yet, in the present day, persons may be seen giving full scope to a carping, biting, scoffing temper, who, if you were only to lay a finger on them, would make a lamentable outcry that “the Unity of the Church is rent in pieces, and Charity violated!” To such let this be our answer: *First*, That we acknowledge no Unity except in Christ; no Charity of which He is not the bond; and that, therefore, the chief point in preserving Charity is to maintain Faith sacred and entire. *Secondly*, That this Discussion may proceed without any violation of charity, provided the ears with which they listen correspond with the tongue which I employ.

To you, Honored Sir, I have, thought it right to dedicate this small Tract on many accounts, but on one account especially, - because I see that, amid those tumults of vain opinions with which giddy spirits disturb the peace of the Church, you stand firm and complete in prudence and moderation.

ORLEANS, 1534.

TO THE READER.

ON AGAIN READING this DISCUSSION, I observe that, in the heat of argument, some rather severe and harsh expressions have escaped me, which may, perhaps, give offense to delicate ears; and as I know that there are some good men into whose minds some part of this dogma has been instilled, either from excessive credulity or ignorance of Scripture, with which at the time they were not armed so as to be able to resist, I am unwilling to give them offense so far as they will allow me, since they are neither perverse nor malicious in their error. I wish, therefore, to warn such beforehand not to take anything said as an affront to themselves, but to understand that, whenever I use some freedom of speech, I am referring to the nefarious herd of Anabaptists, from whose fountain this noxious stream did, as I observed, first flow, and against whom nothing I have said equals their deserts. If I am to have a future fight with them, I am determined they shall find me, if not a very skillful, yet certainly a firm, and as I dare promise, by God's grace, an invincible defender of the Truth. And yet against them I have not given immoderate vent to my bile, having constantly refrained from all pertness and petulance of speech; tempering my pen so as to be fitter for teaching than forcing, and yet able to draw such as are unwilling to be led. It was certainly much more my intention to bring all back into the right way, than to

provoke them to anger.

All who are to read I exhort and beseech by the Name of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they bring an impartial judgment and a mind prepared as it were to be the seat of truth. I am aware of the power which novelty has to tickle the ears of certain persons: but we ought to reflect that “Truth has only one voice” - that which proceeds from the lips of our Lord. To Him alone ought we to open our ears when the doctrine of Salvation is in question, while to all others we should keep them shut. His word, I say, is not new, but that which was from the beginning, is, and always shall be. And as those err who, when the word of God, which had been laid aside through perverse custom or sloth, is brought to light, charge it with novelty; so they err, in the other direction, who are like reeds driven by the wind, nay, nod and bend at the slightest breeze! When we speak of learning Christ, do we mean that we are to lend an ear, without regard to the word of God, to any doctrine even though true? If you receive it as from man, will you not embrace falsehood with the same facility? For what has man of his own save vanity?

Such was not the conduct of those who, when they had received the word, searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11) - a noble example, if we would imitate it; but we, I know not from what sloth, or rather contempt, receive the word of God in such a way that when we have learned three syllables,

we immediately swell up with an opinion of wisdom, and think ourselves rich men and kings! Hence, you see so many who, unlearned themselves, keep tragically bawling out about the ignorance of the age! But what can you do? They are called, and would wish to be thought Christians, because they have got a slight knowledge of some commonplaces; and as they would be ashamed to be ignorant of anything, they with the greatest confidence, as if from a tripod, give forth decisions upon all things. Hence so many schisms, so many errors, so many stumbling blocks to our faith, through which the name and word of God are blasphemed among the ungodly. At length, (this is the head of the evil!) while they proceed obstinately to defend whatever they have once rashly babbled, they begin to consult the oracles of God, in order that they may there find support to their errors. Then, good God! what do they not pervert, what do they not adulterate and corrupt, that they may, I do not say bend, but distort it to their own view? As was truly said by the poet, "Fury supplies armor."

Is this the way of learning - to roll the Scriptures over and over, and twist them about in search of something that may minister to our lust, or to force them into subjection to our sense? Nothing can be more absurd than this, O pernicious pest! O tares certainly sown by an enemy's hand, for the purpose of rendering the true seed useless! And do we still wonder at the many sects among those who had at first given in their adherence to

the gospel and the reviving word? I, for my part, am terrified by the dreadful denunciation,

“The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matthew 21:43.)

Here, however, I desist from my complaints: for I should write a large volume were I to declaim in just terms on the perversity of this age. Let us, brethren, warned by so many examples, at length, though late, become wise. Let us always hang on our Lord’s lips, and neither add to His wisdom nor mix up with it anything of our own, lest like leaven it corrupt the whole mass, and make even the very salt which is within us to be without savor. Let us show ourselves to be such disciples as our Lord wishes to have - poor, empty, and void of self-wisdom: eager to learn but knowing nothing, and even wishing to know nothing but what He has taught; shunning everything of foreign growth as the deadliest poison.

I would here obviate the objections of those who will blame my present undertaking, charging me with stirring up fierce contests about nothing, and making trifling differences the source of violent dissensions: for there are not wanting some who so reproach me. My answer is, that when Divine Truth is avowedly attacked, we must not tolerate the adulteration of one single *iota* of it. It is certainly no trivial matter to see God’s light extinguished by the devil’s darkness; and besides, this

matter is of greater moment than many suppose. Nor is it true as they allege that he who does not acquiesce in the errors of others, shows deadly hate by dissenting from them. I have censured the curiosity of those who would agitate questions which are truly nothing else than mere tortures to the intellect. But after they have stirred this *camarina*, their temerity must be repressed, lest it should prevail over the truth. Whether I have succeeded in this I know not: it was certainly my wish, and I have done the best I could. If others can do better, let them come forward for the public good!

BASEL, 1536.

PSYCHOPANNYCHIA.

IN FOLLOWING OUT this Discussion, I will not labor the matter much, but endeavor to explain myself with the greatest simplicity and clearness. In every Discussion, indeed, it is of the greatest consequence that the subject be clearly seen by the writer, and laid distinctly before his readers; lest either he wander beyond his bounds, and lose himself in mere loquacity, or they, ignorant of the ground, go astray from not knowing the road. This is particularly necessary to be observed when the subject is matter of controversy, since there we do not merely propose to teach, but have to do with an opponent who (such is man's temper) certainly will not, if he can help it, allow himself to be vanquished,

nor will confess defeat so long as he can sport and make a diversion by cavilling rejoinders and tergiversation. The best method of pressing an enemy and holding him fast so that he cannot escape, is to exhibit the controverted point, and explain it so distinctly and clearly, that you can bring him at once as it were to close quarters.

Our controversy, then, relapses to The Human Soul. Some, while admitting it to have a real existence, imagine that it sleeps in a state of insensibility from Death to The Judgment-day, when it will awake from its sleep; while others will sooner admit anything than its real existence, maintaining that it is merely a vital power which is derived from arterial spirit on the action of the lungs, and being unable to exist without body, perishes along with the body, and vanishes away and becomes evanescent till the period when the whole man shall be raised again. We, on the other hand, maintain both that it is a substance, and after the death of the body truly lives, being endued both with sense and understanding. Both these points we undertake to prove by clear passages of Scripture. Here let human wisdom give place; for though it thinks much about the soul it perceives no certainty with regard to it. Here, too, let Philosophers give place, since on almost all subjects their regular practice is to put neither end nor measure to their dissensions, while on this subject in particular they quarrel, so that you will scarcely find two of them agreed

on any single point! Plato, in some passages, talks nobly of the faculties of the soul; and Aristotle, in discoursing of it, has surpassed all in acuteness. But what the soul is, and whence it is, it is vain to ask at them, or indeed at the whole body of Sages, though they certainly thought more purely and wisely on the subject than some amongst ourselves, who boast that they are the disciples of Christ.

But before proceeding farther, we must cut off all handle for logomachy, which might be furnished by our giving the name of “soul” and “spirit” indiscriminately to that which is the subject of controversy, and yet sometimes speaking of the two as different. By Scripture usage different meanings are given to these terms; and most people, without attending to this difference, take up the first meaning which occurs to them, keep fast hold of it, and pertinaciously maintain it. Others, having seen “soul” sometimes used for “life,” hold this to be invariably the case, and will not allow themselves to be convinced of the contrary. If met with the passage from David,

“Their soul will be blessed in life,” (Psalm 49:19) they will interpret, that their life is blessed in life. In like manner, if the passage from Samuel be produced, “By thy life, and by thy soul’s life,” (2 Samuel 11:11,) they will say, that there is no meaning in these terms. We know that “soul” is very often used for *life* in such passages as the following, “My soul is in my hands,” -

“Why do I tear my flesh with my teeth, and carry my soul in my hands?” - “Is not the soul more than meat,” - “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.” (Psalm 119:109; Job 13:14; Matthew 6:25; Luke 12:20.) There are other similar passages which these soulslayers always have in their mouth. There is no ground, however, for their great self-complacency, since they ought to observe that *soul* is there used metonymically for *life*, because the soul is the cause of life, and life depends on the soul - a figure which boys learn even from their rudiments. It is impossible not to wonder at the presumption of these men, who have so high an opinion of themselves, and would fain be thought wise by others, though they require to be taught the use of figures and the first elements of speech. In this sense it was said that “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David” - the soul of Sychem (Shechem) “clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob;” and Luke says, that “the multitude of the believers was of one heart and soul.” (1 Samuel 18:1; Genesis 34:3; Acts 4:32.) Who sees not that there is much force in such Hebraisms as the following? “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” - “My soul doth magnify the Lord,” - “Say to my soul, I am thy salvation.” (Psalm 103:1; 104:1; Luke 1:46.) An indescribable something more is expressed than if it were said without addition, Bless the Lord; I magnify the Lord, Say to me, I am thy salvation!

Sometimes the word “soul” is used merely for a

living man, as when sixty souls are said to have gone down into Egypt.. (Exodus 1:5.) Again, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” - “The soul which turneth aside to wizards and soothsayers shall die the death,” etc. (Ezekiel 28:4; Leviticus 20:6.) Sometimes also it is called the *breath* which men inhale and respire, and in which the vital motion of the body resides. In this sense I understand the following passages, “Anxiety seizes me though my whole soul is still in me,”- “His soul is in him,” - “Let the soul of the child return within him.” (2 Samuel 1:9; Acts 20:10; 1 Kings 17:21.) Nay, in the very same sense in which we say, in ordinary language, that the soul is “breathed out” and “expires,” Scripture speaks of the soul “departing,” as when it is said of Rachel, “And when her soul was departing (for she died) she called the name of the child Benoni” (Genesis 35:18.)



We know that spirit is *literally* “breath” and “wind,” and for this reason is frequently called *pnoh.n* by the Greeks. We know that it is used by Isaiah for a thing vain and worthless, “We have conceived and brought forth spirit,” or “wind.” (Isaiah 26:18.) It is very often taken for what is *regenerated* in us by the Spirit of God. For when Paul says that “the spirit lusteth against the flesh,” (Galatians 5:17,) he does not mean that the soul fights with the flesh, or reason with desire; but that the soul itself, in as far as it is governed by the Spirit of God, wrestles with itself, though in as far as it is still devoid of the Spirit of God, it is subject to its lusts. We know that when the two terms are joined, “soul” means *will*, and “spirit” means *intellect*. Isaiah thus speaks,

“My soul hath longed for thee in the night, but I

will also wake to thee in my spirit, within me” (Isaiah 26:9.)

And when Paul prays that the Thessalonians may be entire in spirit, and soul, and body, so that they may be without blame at the coming of Jesus Christ, (1 Thessalonians 5:23,) his meaning is, that they may think and will all things rightly, and may not use their members as instruments of unrighteousness. To the same effect the Apostle elsewhere says, that the word of God is quick and piercing, like a two-edged sword, reaching to the division of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12.) In this last passage, however, some understand by “spirit” that reasoning and willing essence of which we now dispute; and by “soul,” the vital motion and senses which philosophers call superior and inferior, i.e., ovrmai. kai. aivsqh,seij. But since in numerous passages both parties hold it to mean the immortal essence which is the cause of life in man, let them not raise disputes about mere names, but attend to the thing itself, by whatever name distinguished. How real it is let us now show.

And we will begin with man’s creation, wherein we shall see of what nature he was made at first. The Sacred History tells us (Genesis 1:26) of the purpose of God, before man was created, to make him “*after his own image and likeness.*” These expressions cannot possibly be understood of his body, in which, though the

wonderful work of God appears more than in all other creatures, his image nowhere shines forth. (Ambros. lib. 6, hex. August. ca: de Trinit. et alibi.) For who is it that speaks thus, "Let us make man in our own image and likeness?" God himself, who is a Spirit, and cannot be represented by any bodily shape. But as a bodily image, which exhibits the external face, ought to express to the life all the traits and features, that thus the statue or picture may give an idea of all that may be seen in the original, so this image of God must, by its likeness, implant some knowledge of God in our minds. I hear that some triflers say that the image of God refers to the dominion which was given to man over the brutes, and that in this respect man has some resemblance to God, whose dominion is over all. Into this mistake even Chrysostom fell when he was carried away in the heat of debate against the insane Anthropomorphites. But Scripture does not allow its meaning to be thus evaded: for Moses, to prevent any one from placing this image in the flesh of man, first narrates that the body was formed out of clay, and makes no mention of the image of God; thereafter, he says, that "the breath of life" was; introduced into this clay body, making the image of God not to become effulgent in man till he was complete in all his parts. What then, it will be asked, do you think that that breath of life is the image of God? No, indeed, although I might say so with many, and perhaps not improperly. (Hilar. in Psalm 63; Aug. Lib. de Spiritu et