

Calvin, Rabelais, and the platonic tradition: cognition of god and the self in renaissance and modernity

Abstract

In Sociology of Religion the massive shift towards secularisation, especially in historically Protestant countries of Europe, or these with Protestant influence, has been found to comprise two shifts: one towards the loss of religion, the other towards highly individualistic esoteric spirituality. The 'individualisation of faith', brought about by Protestantism, proclaimed especially by John Calvin, as 'master theoretician', is regarded to be a feature of both. Yet, presently, Protestantism and Western Esotericism, define themselves as opposites. At the beginning of this development, in the 16th century Renaissance culture, Platonism, (understood as spiritual philosophy) had a formative influence on both. In this essay, I will look at the origins of this development, at Calvin's introduction to his theoretical exposition of Christian faith, the 'Institutes', and at Francois Rabelais' references to 'divination' – the means of finding out the will of God – as a foremost literary representative of the spiritual tradition that was to become Western Esotericism. I will show, that both are close in their sharing of the Platonic motif that the knowledge of God and of the Self are interconnected – despite their differing reception of it. Thus, 'common ground' is identified, that may help to understand the present dynamics between both, in the context of Modernity.

Keywords: secularisation, religion, development, Calvin, Rabelais

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Introduction

The Platonic figure of thought, in John Calvin's first words of his systematic presentation of the Reformed Christian faith – *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, – combines two epistemic pathways: the cognition of God, and of the Self. He defines them as interrelated, and mutually conditioning. This can be read, from the perspective of Protestant theology, and from the universalistic, pantheistic religious philosophy, that emerged as Western Esotericism in Modernity. Both are marked by religious individualism. They differ on the issue of 'divination' - i.e. 'finding out God's 'ideas', philosophically, as Plato proposed, by introspection, or also by exploration of the 'soul' and by symbolic means, as his successors proposed.¹ This is of interest to the perspective of Sociology of Religion. With the combination of cognition of God by such means, and of the Self, a figure of thought is presented, that is highly influential, from its rediscovery in Renaissance Humanism, up to Modernity, and post-secular religious-philosophical thought. This conception is marked by 'religious individualism'.

The 'religious individualism' of both Protestantism, and of Western Esotericism, determines their social forms of organisation. Protestantism's rejection of 'natural theology' extends to divination – including its social forms of practice. It is, therefore interesting, to find, that Calvin begins his systematic exposition of the Protestant faith with a recourse to 'natural theology' as a basis, that is not rejected in principle. (In the history of the Platonic tradition, this includes divination.) The mutually defining difference on this issue, of pathways of epistemic access to the transcendent, the Divine, or to God, is thus not as marked, as it came to be later, with Calvin presenting and discussing it seriously.

In this essay, the initial closeness of both movements shall be taken into view, by considering Calvin's fundamental statement in the context of French Renaissance reception of the Platonic tradition,

as exemplified by François Rabelais, with regard to divination. This may allow to understand Calvinism and Esotericism as connected, and distinguished, by different adoptions of this Platonic figure, and thus, as related branches of thought, that define themselves mostly as mutually exclusive, with few attempts at synthesis. This may contribute to understand the dynamics of religious shift in the post-secular context of present, historically Protestant, societies.

On secularisation and individualism

Secularisation is a world-wide process, going on for 200 years in Europe, and setting in in other realms of the world. This finding is confirmed by a research project led by Jörg Stolz (Institute of Social Sciences of Religions, Univ. Lausanne) in collaboration with Conrad Hackett (Pew research centre).² (They presented their findings at the recent conference "Religions in Dialogue" of the International Society of Sociology of Religion, in Taipei.) They noted that there are marked differences in this process. (The realms of Islam and of Eastern Orthodox Christian appear to be less affected, with reversals being observed.). It is also noted, that this does not mean a shift to atheistic naturalism in many cases, but towards less structured forms of spirituality and transcendent beliefs. This is confirmed empirically for the historically almost uniformly Lutheran countries of Scandinavia.³ A similar pattern has been observed for other (historically) predominantly Protestant countries in Europe.⁴ The shift from Protestantism to more this vaguely defined 'spirituality' may be related to core issues, already be present in the Reformation.

²Stolz Jörg, Hackett Conrad. "Is the Secular Transition a Worldwide Phenomenon? Evidence from Cohort Analysis in 106 Countries" [Presentation in the panel: Religiosity: Analysis of International and National Quantitative Surveys, 6th July, 2023, 11:30] In: *Religions in Dialogue – Transformations, Diversity and Materiality. 37th Biennial ISSR Conference. 2023*;147.

³Ketola Kimmo. "Wo are the 'Spiritual but Not Religious' in the Nordic Countries?". In: *Ibidem*. 148 p.

⁴European Commission. *Eurobarometer - Social values, Science and Technology. Fieldwork: January - February 2005. Special Eurobarometer 225, Directorate General [97] Press and Communication. 2005*. 9 p.

¹Chiaradonna Riccardo, Lecerf Adrien. "Iamblichus". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. In: Edward N Zalta, editor. 2019.

A common feature of both is their ‘individualism’. It is perceived as a hallmark of their ‘modernity’.⁵ Theologically, it is based in the Protestant doctrine of ‘salvation by faith’⁶ – and not primarily through the means of salvation of the Church. In Esotericism, with its Platonic model of individual ascent to the divine, it is at the core of the spiritual philosophy. The sociologist and anthropologist Louis Dumont regards the roots of this individualism to lie in the personal relation of faith at the core of Christianity: “Dumont termine son exposé avec un épilogue sur Calvin, qu’il considère comme le représentant du stade terminal du processus de rapprochement du ciel et de la terre par le christianisme (...) : l’individu est maintenant dans le monde, et la valeur individualiste règne sans restriction ni limitation. Nous avons devant nous l’individu-dans-le-monde.”⁷

On the basis of the Reformation’s spiritual individualism, Dumont regards the orientation towards inner-worldly piety and sanctification as contributing to process of sociological individualisation. This, he states, has culminated in Calvinism.

In view of this religious individualism, it may be argued that the Protestant reliance on the (individual) faith – sustained and guided by the Word of God, (through the ministry of the Church) – and the pathway of mystical and intellectual illumination, of Plato, converge. The individualistic religious and spiritual culture, that characterises historically Protestant countries, also in their shift towards forms of spiritualism and esotericism, may have a common origin here. The theological and philosophical issue here, is thus also of sociological concern.

Western Esotericism can be viewed as a further development hereof. Sociologically, Esotericism – lacking the Christian forms of community and organisation that balance this individualism – has weak and transient forms of community, and collective organisation, with no stable and encompassing forms of social structures, as basis and medium for common action or social representation. The adherents of this (spectrum of) spirituality have almost no communal forms of organisation, action or representation. Despite this sociological weakness, it is powerful, as an alternative of spiritual philosophy and thought – that lives by spiritual practices, borrowed often from other religions. Apparently, it addresses perceived deficits of Protestant doctrine. Therefore, it is interesting to look at the point where Protestant and Spiritualist-Esotericist doctrines were close, and parted ways, in the time of the Renaissance and Reformation. The eminent junction is identifiable in the writings of John Calvin, as eminent theologian of Protestantism.

The ‘alternative spirituality’ has roots in a world-view that can be traced to the renewed Platonism and the Hermeticism, from the Renaissance times on. This branch of religious-philosophical thought represents a distinct tradition that flourished repeatedly, in the meantime, with some 20 – 20% of adherents, presently, in many European societies.

The common roots and formative milieu of Calvinism and esotericism in French Renaissance Platonism

Both, the Reformation and Esotericism, formed in an academic culture that was imbued with Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas. Several

Reformers and Theosophists belonged to the same academic and cultural milieu of Humanism, with varying degrees of adherence to Platonism, and the Platonic tradition.⁸ John Calvin and François Rabelais are eminent here.

In the course of the Reformation, attitudes to Plato become a watershed. Whereas some of the early reformers sympathised with Plato, the Platonic and Neo-Platonism traditions did not prevail in the Reformation. They shifted to the mystical and theosophic circles, to come to the fore later, as outlined. By comparison, the development went differently in the Eastern Orthodox Church, where the Neo-Platonism was integrated constructively, in the Renaissance.⁹ (The individual mysticism of Hesychasm, which is perceived as a hallmark of Orthodoxy, and contributes to its ‘aura’ in Modernity, is rooted here.)

John Calvin’s Platonism: the assertion that the knowledge of god and self-knowledge are interdependent

In the first book Calvin lays out the epistemological foundations of his whole system: “CHAPTER 1. The Knowledge of God and of ourselves mutually connected – Nature of the Connection 1. Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves; nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone.”¹⁰

In this passage, Calvin alludes to Plato’s *Republic*. (This is supported by his allusion St. Paul’s reference to popular Stoic (and Middle Platonist) philosophy, recorded by St. Luke in *Acts* 17:28f, of ‘being in God’ and of ‘being of God’s kind’ – and thereby to the approach of connecting to Greek philosophy in the exposition of the Christian faith.) The motif of finding one’s true identity in God, is Platonic. The motif of ‘ascent to the divine light’, laid out in Plato’s *Parable of the Cave*,¹¹ is applied to the cognition of the world, of God, and of the self, in one movement.

Calvin – like other fellow humanists – was familiar with Plato. Marsilio Ficino had translated Plato’s dialogues into Latin, likewise Plotinus’ *Enneads*, and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, by 1465, commissioned and financed by Cosimo de Medici in Florence.¹² Neoplatonism, that emphasises the spiritual aspect of perception of the divine, was thus, likely also in Calvin’s horizon. The motif is affirmed, for intellectual and intuitive, mystical perception, by Plotinus (3rd century C. E.), in his famous report of a mystical experience: “Often have I woken up out of the body to myself, and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that even then most of all I belonged to the better part; (...) Then after that rest in the divine, when I have come down from Intellect to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even when it is in the body.”¹³

⁸Vorländer, Karl. *Geschichte der Philosophie*. 1903.

⁹Von Ivanka Endre. *Plato Christianus – Die Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter*. Einsiedeln: 1964. 589 p.

¹⁰Calvin John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Beveridge Henry, editors. Eerdmans Publ; 1958. 38 p.

¹¹Plato. *Politeia*, Book VII. 106 [Plato, *Politeia (Republic)*]. Jowett Benjamin, editor. *The Dialogues of Plato (428/27 – 348/47 BCE) – Politeia*.

¹²Hankins James. *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*. Leiden; 1990. 300 p.

¹³Plotinus. *Enneads* IV.8.1. Translation: Armstrong Arthur Hilary, editor.

⁵Dumont Louis. “A Modified View of our Origins: The Christian Beginnings of Modern Individualism”. In: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* New Delhi: Sage Publ. 1983;1–27.

⁶Heidelberg Catechism. *Catechism, or Christian Instruction, according to the Usages of the Churches and Schools of the Electoral Palatinate*, Heidelberg: 1536.

⁷Korsakoff. “Louis Dumont - Le genèse chrétienne de l’individualisme. Reflexions”. 2020.

Calvin resorts to such mystical experiences, with reference to the prophets, as sources of the experience of God. He remains sceptical, however, about the faculties of ‘natural cognition of God’, and thus of ‘natural theology’. After introducing the motif of the disturbed faculties of cognition of God – and of true desire to do so, by the original fall and sin – Calvin picks up the motif again, that the knowledge of God and of oneself are interdependent, at the turn to the next section:

1. “Who, in fact, does not thus rest, as long as he is unknown to himself; that is, as long as he is contented with his own endowments, and unconscious or unmindful of his misery? Every person, therefore, on coming to the knowledge of himself, is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find him.
2. On the other hand, it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.”¹⁴

At his point, Calvin re-affirms the Platonic view, that there is an intrinsic endowment in a human being to be led to the cognition of God. However, he then emphasises, that this natural faculty – that he does not dispute in principle – is disturbed the ‘original sin’, the ‘Fall in Paradise’.

According to Reformation theology, the ‘original sin’ harmed the natural faculties of cognition of God – and of attuning one’s will to God – to such an extent, that the pathway of ‘natural theology’ and ‘innate cognition of God’ is not considered to provide a viable access to God. Therefore, he argues, the divine revelation – as manifested in the Holy Scripture, is the sole reliable pathway to the cognition of God, and of the self. It is of interest here, because, while Calvin sets out with a Platonic argument of natural cognition of God and the self, he does not pursue it further.

Calvin concludes this introduction, by stating, aware of his task as a theologian: “But though the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie, due arrangement requires that we treat of the former in the first place, and then descend to the latter.”¹⁵

He then proceeds with a systematic presentation of the Christian doctrine. This introduction, with its implicit anthropology, and its outlines of a religious-philosophical epistemology, has received much scholarly attention. An overview is given by Nico Vorster.¹⁶ He affirms the consensus of theological scholars, that “The anthropological import of Calvin’s view is that human identity is intricately connected to our understanding of God. In fact our knowledge of God is foundational for our personal identity and self-understanding.”¹⁷

Vorster reviews theological interpretations of this fundamental section of Calvin’s doctrine, that unfold the mutually conditioning perspectives as to be resolved in a Christian life of ‘divinisation’ and in union with Christ, based on the doctrine of the two - divine and human - natures of Christ.¹⁸ However, neither he, nor the authors he reviews, take the epistemic processes implied in this statement sufficiently into account, as regards the pathways of cognition implied herein.

These emerge more clearly, if one looks at the Latin and the French original of the *Institutes*. Calvin’s repeated affirmation, that the cognition of God and of the Self are mutually interdependent, does not only cover objective knowledge, as of features and facts, but it also outlines two epistemic pathways, of attaining such ‘wisdom’. The Latin original text shows this more clearly: “I. [31] *Tota fere sapientiae nostrae summa, quae vera demum ac solida sapientia censeri debeat, duabus partibus constat, Dei cognitione et nostri.*”¹⁹ The key word of ‘cognitio’ means the process of cognition too, not only its results – in ‘knowledge’ - as in the standard English translation by Henry Beveridge, quoted above.

The French version has the emphasis on the process of cognition even more clearly: “I. *Toute la somme presque de nostre sagesse, laquelle, à tout conter, merite d’estre reputée vraye et entiere sagesse, est située en deux parties: c’est qu’en cognoissant Dieu, chacun de nous aussi se cognoisse.*”²⁰ The wording “en coignoissant” denotes the process of attaining cognition, not primarily the results. The emphasis is thus on the two epistemic pathways and points of departure.

The neglect of the epistemic processes, implied in either perspective, may, in part be due to Calvin himself, who did not elaborate them further. He proceeded with revelations by the prophets, and the Holy Scripture, with its testimony of Jesus Christ, as sufficient basis. The pathways of ‘natural theology’, as regards the cognition of God, and of ‘spiritual anthropology’, as regards the perspective of self-cognition, remain largely aside. They are taken into view, but function rather as affirmative basis for the focus on Biblical revelation, and inspiration of the Church.

The pathway of divination: Rabelais’ presentation of divination and the exploration of the self

A ‘contextual reading’ of both pathways – from the knowledge of the Divine to the understanding of oneself, as a person, and from here, by innate faculties, to an intuitive and intellectual understanding of God, - should take note of the understanding of Plato and the Platonic tradition, in the horizon of the French Renaissance. It is strongly spiritual and religious. It extends to the horizons of Neoplatonism and of the Hermetic tradition. This emerges clearly in the work of François Rabelais. His interest in Platonism, and his knowledge of the Hermetic literature, with its reports on divination, are documented. Rabelais’ reference to the Corpus Hermeticum is based on Ficino’s work.²¹ Rabelais’ books on the adventures of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*²² are classics of literature. He studied at the same institutions as Calvin, steeped in the classics, including the Greek, like Calvin, and in the service of the Roman Catholic Church, despite his (viciously satirical) critiques of her deficits – and those of her followers – that he shared with Calvin. This has sometimes been mistaken, as indication of an alleged atheism of Rabelais, which has been refuted, in recognition of his several statements of faith and theology, in his tales of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.²³ It needs to be stated, that Calvin cut the ties of affectionate exchange of letters with Rabelais, after he learnt that he

¹⁹Calvin Ioannes. *Institutio christianae religionis*. In: Barth Niesel, editor. 1926. 52 p.

²⁰Calvin Jean. *Institution de la religion chrestienne*. 1560.

²¹Lefranc Abel. « Le Platonisme et la littérature en France à l’époque de la Renaissance (1500-1550) ». In : *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France* ; 1896;1–44.

²²Rabelais François. *Les Cinq livres des faits et dits de Gargantua et Pantagruel*, 1532 – 1556. English edition: Urquhart of Cromarty, Thomas and Motteux, Peter Antony (transl.), *Francis Rabelais Five Books of the Lives, Heroic Deeds, and Sayings of Gargantua and his Son Pantagruel*. Book III, 1693. Republ. by: Project Gutenberg, (Asscher, Sue and Widger, David)/ 2004. 2021.

²³Penny SJ. *La conception de Dieu dans l’oeuvre de Rabelais : quelques aspects de la pensée religieuse rabelaisienne*. Canterbury: 1964.

Plotinus in seven volumes. London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1984. 397 p.

¹⁴Calvin John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 1559.

¹⁵Calvin John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 1559.

¹⁶Voster Nico. *The Brightest Mirror of God’s Works: John Calvin’s Theological Anthropology*. 2019.

¹⁷Ibidem. 7 p.

¹⁸Ibidem. 9 p.

was the author of these often grotesque and obscene tales – that do not shy from vulgarity – perceived as extravagant, even by the licentious standards of the Renaissance.²⁴ The Roman Catholic Church also reprimanded him sharply, after he made his authorship public, from the third book on. In spite of the crudely entertaining aspects of Rabelais' work, he emerges as a highly reflected, differential intellectual whose guise of 'carnival' – that endeared him to Mikhail Bakhtin²⁵ – rather camouflages a serious thinker on human psychology, culture, society, and religious matters. Both Calvin and Rabelais read and studied Plato and the Platonic tradition.

Divination as pathway to an interdependent cognition of self and of god according to Rabelais

Rabelais tells about divination in the third book of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, that he published under his own name, with references to his philosophic sources. (The context here is seeking divination about the prospects of marriage.) In characteristic Rabelaisian fashion, the entertaining story is connected with lofty expositions of religious philosophy, and references to many authors, of Antiquity on divination, indicating his vast learning in the field of Hermeticism and the (Neo-)Platonic tradition.²⁶

*"In confirmation of which opinion of mine, the customary style of my language alloweth them the denomination of presage women. ... I give them the title of presage, for that they divinely foresee and certainly foretell future contingencies and events of things to come. (...) I would have said sibylline"*²⁷

Rabelais's mention of the Sibyls connects divination to Christian tradition,²⁸ as their oracles were understood to have presaged the coming of Jesus Christ. Rabelais also tells about divination by dreams. He refers explicitly to Plotinus and to Iamblichus, indicating knowledge of these authors of Neoplatonism, sharing their view of divination as pathway to the cognition of God and of the Self. For the latter, he emphasises that knowledge of the Self is contained in divine ordination and foreknowledge – and can be accessed through divination by dreams: *"Now ... let us bend our course another way, and try a new sort of divination. Of what kind? asked Panurge. Of a good ancient and authentic fashion, answered Pantagruel; it is by dreams. For in dreaming, such circumstances and conditions being thereto adhibited, as are clearly enough described by Hippocrates, in Lib. Peri ton enupnion, by Plato, Plotin, Iamblicus, Sinesius, Aristotle, Xenophon, Galen, Plutarch, Artemidorus, ... and others, the soul doth oftentimes foresee what is to come. (...) Even just so, when our body is at rest, that ... our soul delighteth to ... take a review of its native country, which is the heavens, where it receiveth a most notable participation of its first beginning with an imbuement from its divine source, ... God, according to the doctrine of Hermes Trismegistus, ... unto whom all things are alike present, remarketh not only what is preterit ... but withal taketh notice what is to come; then bringing a relation of those future events unto the body ... Whereupon the owner of that soul deserveth to be termed a vaticinator, or prophet. (...) such a one as by the Greeks is called onirocrit, or onirologist. (...) The sacred Scriptures testify no less..."*²⁹

By mentioning the Bishop Synesius of Cyrene, Rabelais reinforces

his engagement, to unite Pagan (Neoplatonic) and Christian views on divination and the interpretation of dreams as pathways to the cognition of God and the Self. Thus, Mariapaola Bergomi comments: [Synesius of Cyrene's] *"work 'On Dreams' concentrates ... not only on a theory of ... dreams, but also on a peculiar epistemology and a metaphysics that are also characteristic of late Platonic thinkers such as Hierocles of Alexandria, Iamblichus and Proclus, but especially Iamblichus. 'Phantasia', the imaginative faculty ... is essential in order to understand Synesius' epistemology and his belief in a cosmic communication of souls (human souls and the divine Soul)."'*³⁰

Likewise, Rabelais' mention of Artemidoros is important, for his extensive work on dreams and their interpretation.³¹ Sigmund Freud refers to him, in the introduction to his epochal *Traumdeutung* (1900), and connects his own endeavour to it.³² He states: *"It would likewise be wrong to suppose that the theory of the supernatural origin of dreams lacks followers in our own day; (...) - one meets even sagacious men averse to anything adventurous, who go so far as to base their religious belief in the existence and co-operation of superhuman forces on the inexplicableness of the dream manifestations The validity ascribed to the dream life by some schools of philosophy, e. g. the school of Schelling, is a distinct echo of the undisputed divinity of dreams in antiquity, nor is discussion closed on the subject of the mantic or prophetic power of dreams."*³³

Although Freud attempts to advance scientific interpretation of dreams, his cautious assertion as regards divination by dreams, remains valid. Carl Gustav Jung took the matter further, by including transcendental perspectives into the interpretation of dreams,³⁴ thus reviving the approach of divination (It is probably not irrelevant that he was the son of a Calvinist pastor, thus reaching out to the other 'branch' of spiritual tradition of his culture.)

Thus, a continuum between spiritual and psychoanalytic perspectives and practices is established. Psychoanalysis is rooted in the anthropology of the Age of Romanticism, that was influenced both by the (Neo-)Platonic anthropologies of Idealism, and the Protestant Pietist culture of individual religiosity, and exploration of the soul, including its shades.³⁵ Divinatory practices, however, are largely frowned upon, as superstition. Psychoanalysis, has therefore had a hard time getting acceptance in Protestant milieus – with special reluctance towards Jungian 'Tiefenpsychologie', although it originated in the cultural environment of Switzerland (Zürich), where Calvinism and Esotericism overlap. (In Pietism, of the 18th and 19th century, this has however, been prepared, with its oracular forms of prayer, and lots, and its attention to dreams.) Interest in reconnecting Psychoanalysis with spiritual divination, has continued here, as the academic psychologist and traditional Xhosa diviner, Lily Rose Nomfundo Mlisa, told me, about the reception of her keynote lecture at a world congress of the Jungian Analytic Society.³⁶

³⁰Bergomi Mariapaola. "Dream Talking: Platonism and the Interpretation of Dreams in Late Antiquity". In: *Zbornik radova međunarodnoga skupa "Natales grate numeras?"*. Diana Sorić, Linda Mijić, Anita Bartulović, editors. 2022;37–58.

³¹Harris McCoy DE. *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica*. Oxford; 2012.

³²Freud Sigmund. *Die Traumdeutung*, Leipzig and Vienna. Franz Deuticke, editor. 7th ed. 1922. 2 p.

³³Freud Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Brill AA, editor. New York: MacMillan; 1913. 3 p.

³⁴Ellenberger Henri F. *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. London: Fontana Press; 1994. 725 p.

³⁵Ellenberger Henri F. *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. London: Fontana Press; 1994. 77 p.

³⁶International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP). *XXI International Congress for Analytical Psychology. Encountering the Other: Within us, between us and in the world*. 8th ed, Vienna; 2019.

²⁴Strohm Christoph. *Johannes Calvin – Leben und Werk des Reformators*. Munich; 2009. 13 p.

²⁵Bakhtin Mikhail. *Rabelais and his world*. Cambridge, MA; 1968.

²⁶Thanks be to Helize van Vuuren (NM-University of Port Elizabeth, SA) for introducing me to Rabelais.

²⁷Rabelais François. *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Book III, 6f.

²⁸Healy Patrick Joseph. "Sibylline Oracles". In: *Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1912;13.

²⁹Rabelais François. *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Book III, 13.

Conclusion

In this essay the closeness of Calvinism and of Western Esotericism, as to their common adoption of Plato's motif of the individual pathway to the cognition of God and of the Self – as interconnected – was shown. The inclusion of 'divination' as practice, as presented by Rabelais, and adopted in Western Esotericism, is included in this discussion. Its source in religious philosophy and cultural awareness of the French Renaissance were shown to be important, because the re-introduction of divination, also by dreams, is a core feature of modern Esotericism in theory and practice,³⁷ likewise the belief in an intrinsic connection between the divine and the natural, including the Self. At the junction of the Calvinist Reformation and of the Esoteric tradition, we find Calvin and Rabelais drawing on the same Platonic motif of the interrelation between the cognition of God and of the Self. We observe them drawing out different, complementary aspects of this epistemology. This is vital to an understanding of the relationship between Protestantism and Western esotericism, in a systemic perspective, from their beginnings up to the present. In a critical perspective, it may be stated, that either tradition may have forsaken or neglected the critical dialectics that are implied in it: the

³⁷Hammer Olav. Claiming Knowledge. *Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*. Leiden: Brill; 2004. 30 p.

critique of the 'empirical self' from the perspective of divine revelation – making natural religion a self-serving spirituality, as Calvin acidly remarked - and, conversely, the abandonment of spiritual experience and divination, as means of personal cognition of the divine, as Esotericism criticises, and its re-appraisal, since Romanticism. For Sociology of Religion, this may be an indicator for taking these issues into account, to understand the present shifts, as emerging from such common ground that needs to be retraced. Here the perspectives of History of Culture and Religion meet with those of systemically oriented Sociology of Religion, for an in-depth understanding of ongoing systematic shifts in the process of secularisation and spiritual reorientation.

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