

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BREVITAS ET FACILITAS:

A STUDY OF A VITAL ASPECT IN THE THEOLOGICAL
HERMENEUTICS OF JOHN CALVIN

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
A. Purpose	5
B. Calvin's Motivation	13
C. The Definition of <i>Brevitas et Facilitas</i>	17
D. Recent Studies of Calvin's Hermeneutics	25
E. Method	35
2. CALVIN AS AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE	39
A. Calvin's Training	40
B. The Influences on Calvin's Hermeneutics	67
1. Chrysostom	67
2. Valla	73
3. Budé	76
4. Erasmus	80
3. CALVIN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE FATHERS AND MEDIEVAL INTERPRETATION	89
A. Origen	90
B. Ambrose	97
C. Jerome	100
D. Augustine	103
E. The Roman Catholics	107
F. The Jews	113

4. CALVIN AND THE REFORMATION	122
A. Luther	123
B. Zwingli	141
C. Melanchthon	145
D. Bucer	148
E. Bullinger	152
F. The Anabaptists	154
G. The Libertines	162
5. THE DEVELOPMENT, THE SOURCES, AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE IDEAL OF <i>BREVIITAS ET FACILITAS</i>	165
A. The Development of the Ideal of <i>Brevitas et Facilitas</i>	165
B. The Sources of the Ideal of <i>Brevitas et Facilitas</i>	169
1. Rhetoric	170
a. Socrates and Plato	172
b. Aristotle	176
c. Cicero	182
d. Quintilian	190
2. Scripture	195
C. The Employment of <i>Brevitas et Facilitas</i> in Calvin's Writings	201
1. Calvin's <i>Institutes</i>	201
2. Calvin's Treatises	212
3. Calvin's Sermons	213
4. Calvin's Commentaries	217
6. THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN CALVIN'S HERMENEUTICS	218
A. The Role of the Holy Spirit	219

1. The Necessity of the Illumination of the Holy Spirit	222
2. The Word and the Holy Spirit in Calvin	228
3. The Illumination of the Holy Spirit	234
4. The Relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Ideal of <i>Brevitas et Facilitas</i>	243
B. <i>Scriptura Sui Ipsius Interpres</i>	249
1. <i>Sola Scriptura</i>	250
2. Luther's Method	254
3. The Relationship of the Principle <i>Scriptura Sui Ipsius Interpres</i> to the Ideal of <i>Brevitas et Facilitas</i>	260
7. THE IDEAL OF <i>BREVITAS ET FACILITAS</i>	274
A. Brevity	274
B. Reduction	277
C. Retention	286
D. Respect for the Context	288
E. Simplicity	290
F. Suitability	293
G. Freedom	298
H. Avoidance of Ambiguity	302
I. Avoidance of Forced Interpretation	306
J. Avoidance of Conjecture	312
8. CONCLUSION	316
SUMMARY (English)	324
OPSOMMING (Afrikaans)	327
BIBLIOGRAPHY	330

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*Brevitas et Facilitas: A Study of a Vital Aspect
in the Theological Hermeneutics of John Calvin*

ABBREVIATIONS

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- BM *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*
- CO *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*
- Inst *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
- LW American Edition of Luther's Works
- OS *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*
- WA *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*

A. INTRODUCTION

The history of Christian theology is the history of the interpretation of Scripture generation after generation. In certain cases, all Christian truths are the result of the vindication of those who give to us great pains to interpret the word of God, especially over against the deficiency or wrong interpretation of the heretics. G. A. Wetherar says the following:

The historical development of theological truth is often opposing truth rises periodically confront each other dependent on a criterion in terms of which these cases can be evaluated. In Protestant thinking Holy Scripture constitutes this criterion. This implies that exegesis is basically a hermeneutical discipline of which the primary aim is a historical, systematic and practical interpretation of the Biblical text as basic source and permanent foundation of Christian faith in God.¹

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Abstract

This article is the summary of my dissertation completed by the guidance of Prof. CJ Wethmar of the University of Pretoria. Calvin presented his own distinctive method of the hermeneutics of Scripture in his *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. It is called the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin was not satisfied with both Malanchthon's *loci* method and Bucer's prolixity commentary. He took the *via media* approach. Calvin's method was influenced by rhetoric of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian and Chrysostom. Calvin, however, confirmed that his own principle came from Scripture itself. I deal with Calvin's view that the clarity of Scripture was related to the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. After analysing Calvin's writing, I discovered ten component elements of the method of *brevitas et facilitas*.

A. INTRODUCTION

The history of Christian theology is the record of the interpretation of Scripture generation after generation.¹ In a certain sense, all Christian truths are the result of the vindication of those who have taken great pains to interpret the Word of God responsibly over against the deficient or one-sided interpretation of the heretics. C. J. Wethmar says the following:

The dialogical development of theological truth in which opposing truth claims periodically confront each other is dependent on a criterion in terms of which these claims can be evaluated. In Protestant thinking Holy Scripture constitutes this criterion. This implies that theology is basically a hermeneutical discipline of which the primary aim is a historical, systematic and practical interpretation of the Biblical text as basic source and permanent foundation of Christian faith in God.²

Sound theologizing is, therefore, intimately related to a

legitimate understanding of Scripture.³

The hermeneutical methodology employed by Calvin in gleaning the true meaning of a text has given rise to considerable contemporary debate. Calvin, like other Reformers, used the so-called historical-grammatical method in the interpretation of Scripture. Although Calvin showed similarity with the other Reformers' hermeneutics in following this approach, he had a distinctive approach to Scriptural interpretation which other Reformers did not follow in all details. It included the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central dimension of his hermeneutics, principles Calvin employed in his exegetical writings throughout his whole life.⁴ These principles as the center of Calvin's hermeneutics, did not appear as clearly in the exegetical writings of other Reformers like Luther, Melanchthon, and Bucer. With regard to the nature of Calvin's hermeneutics, many scholars recognize that the hallmarks of Calvin's hermeneutical approach are the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Even though they have regarded this method as the distinguishing feature of Calvin's hermeneutics, they have not investigated Calvin's exegetical writings from the perspective of these principles, and have not fathomed how Calvin practically and consistently implemented the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central dimension of his hermeneutics. They have not adequately demonstrated how Calvin's principles of *brevitas et facilitas* are rooted in the rhetorical method of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, and also not that these hermeneutical principles are embedded in the basic motives of his theology. After having analysed Calvin's exegetical writings, I discovered ten component elements of the method of *brevitas et*

facilitas. According to my judgment, these elements of the method of *brevitas et facilitas* have not yet been exhaustively described.

My purpose is to establish the fact that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the hallmark of Calvin's hermeneutics originated in his views on Holy Scripture, especially the principle *Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

Calvin's motivation for employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his writings, including the *Commentary on Romans*, was not that he tried to challenge Melanchthon, Bullinger, and Bucer, but rather that he sought to promote the public good of the church. In seeking to do good, Calvin wanted to provide the best interpretation (*optimam interpretationem*) that his simple readers could understand easily, without much loss of time.

Calvin stated that in his *Commentary on Romans* Melanchthon "attained his object by illustrating the principal points: being occupied with these primary things, he passed by many things which deserve attention; and it was not his purpose to prevent others to examine them."⁵ Here he pointed out the problem of Melanchthon's *loci* method in which he discussed such passages as particularly required observation.⁶ With this method he only dealt with important texts from the perspective of doctrine. Thus Melanchthon's work did not satisfy Calvin because Melanchthon did not explain every passage. Calvin also stated that in his *Commentary on Romans* Bucer was too diffuse for men in business to read, and too profound to be understood by such as were simple and not capable of much application: "for whatever be the subject

which he handles, so many things are suggested to him through the incredible fecundity of his mind, in which he excels, that he knows not when to stop."⁷ Calvin argued that Bucer handled every point so extensively that it could not be read in a short time. This *prolixis commentariis*, according to Calvin, was Bucer's hermeneutical method.⁸ He, therefore, determined to treat things so briefly, that without unnecessary loss of time, his readers might understand his work easily.⁹ This is the reason why Calvin employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin's method developed as the result of the application of a *via media* approach between Melancthon's *loci* method and Bucer's method which Calvin evaluated "as too cumbersome for the average pastor to be able to wade through the swamp of passages."¹⁰

1. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings*, Saint Louis, 1959, 5. See also Gerhard Ebeling, *Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift*, Tübingen, 1947.

2. C J Wethmar, "Ecclesiology and Theological Education: A South African Reformed Perspective," 13. Unpublished Paper, Congress of the International Reformed Theological Institute held in Stellenbosch on June 12, 1997.

3. C. J. Wethmar, "Homologie en hermeneutiek," *HTS* vol 44 (1988), 540, describes an indissoluble connection between doctrine and interpretation as follows: "Doctrine is the form which the understanding of Holy Scripture adopts when interpreted in the light of the presuppositions of a particular horizon of understanding." Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics*, Edinburgh, 1995, 6, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *A Guide Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Donald K. McKim, Grand Rapids, 1986, 111-141.

4. This method first appeared in the dedicatory preface in the *Commentary on Romans* of John Calvin in Strasbourg, November 18, 1539. Later Calvin continued to employ this method in his exegetical writings. In 1564 in his farewell letter to the ministers of Geneva Calvin showed that he kept faithfully to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the interpretation of

Scripture: "As to my doctrine, I have taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power. I have not falsified a single passage of the Scriptures, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge; and though I might have introduced subtle senses, had I studied subtlety, I cast that temptation under my feet and always aimed at simplicity." ("Calvin's Farewell to the Ministers of Geneva, On Friday, 28th April, 1564," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, eds. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, vol. 7, eds. Jules Bonnet and trans. Marcus Robert Gilchrist, Grand Rapids, 1983, 375.

5. "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

6. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," *WTJ* 47 (1985), 4.

7. "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

8. CO 10.404.

9. CO 10.405.

10. Richard C. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," 6.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The hermeneutical methodology employed by Calvin in gleaning the true meaning of a text has given rise to considerable contemporary debate. Calvin, like other Reformers, used the so-called historical-grammatical method in the interpretation of Scripture. Although Calvin showed similarity with the other Reformers' hermeneutics in following this approach, he had a distinctive approach to Scriptural interpretation which other Reformers did not follow in all details. It included the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central dimension of his hermeneutics, principles Calvin employed in his exegetical writings throughout his whole life. These principles as the center of Calvin's hermeneutics, did not appear clearly in the exegetical writings of other Reformers like Luther, Melanchthon, and Bucer. With regard to the nature of Calvin's hermeneutics, many scholars recognize that the hallmarks of Calvin's hermeneutical approach are the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Even though they have regarded this method as the distinguishing feature of Calvin's hermeneutics, they have not

investigated Calvin's exegetical writings from the perspective of these principles, and have not fathomed how Calvin practically and consistently implemented the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central dimension of his hermeneutics. They have not revealed how Calvin handled the text of Scripture with these principles. They have not adequately demonstrated how Calvin's principles of *brevitas et facilitas* are rooted in the rhetorical method of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, and also not that these hermeneutical principles are embedded in the basic motives of his theology. After analyzing Calvin's exegetical writings, I have discovered ten component elements of the method of *brevitas et facilitas*.

The purpose of my dissertation is not to explore all the principles Calvin used in his writings, but to establish the fact that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the hallmark of Calvin's theological hermeneutics originated in his views on Holy Scripture, especially the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

Against the authority of the Roman Catholic church and its method of Scriptural interpretation, Calvin, like Luther, stressed the principles of *sola Scriptura* and *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. His theology played an important role in the development of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. In order for his readers to understand the intention of the author of Scripture and the true meaning of the text easily and clearly, Calvin employed this distinctive principle in his own hermeneutics, which was different from that employed by the other Reformers. Calvin stated that the other Reformers failed in employing the hermeneutical principles that convey the simple and brief meaning of the text of Scripture to their readers.

Calvin clearly suggested the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as a basic dimension of his theological hermeneutics in the dedicatory preface in his *Commentary on the Epistle of*

Paul the Apostle to the Romans. There he agreed with his old friend Simon Grynæus on the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin was completely confident of the superiority of this method. He insisted on it as the only hermeneutical method which helped the readers understand Scripture. In other words, Calvin presented his readers with the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as distinctive principles for the interpretation of Scripture.

In order to obtain a clear understanding of Calvin's hermeneutics, I intend to study the historical, theological, rhetorical, and hermeneutical dimensions of the issues at stake. In investigating the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, I utilize Calvin's commentaries, his sermons and his letters, his theological treatises, and his *Institutes*.

The purpose of chapter 2 is to study the background of Calvin's hermeneutics. It includes how Calvin prepared himself to be a faithful interpreter of Scripture. I shall deal with what factors had influence on Calvin's hermeneutics. In chapters 3 and 4, I survey the history of hermeneutics from Calvin's own perspective. My emphasis will be on Calvin's attitude toward other interpreters. In chapter 5, I examine the development, the source, and the employment of the principle of *brevitas et facilitas*. In order to ascertain the origin of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, I compare this method with the rhetorical skill described with the same term. I argue that Calvin regarded the nature of Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Chapter 6 examines two theological presuppositions in Calvin's hermeneutics: firstly the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture, and secondly the principle *sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. As far as the Reformers' doctrine of Scripture is concerned, I deal with the fact that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* are closely related to the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture which offered the Reformers the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. In

chapter 7, I identify and describe ten component elements as the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

II. THE SOURCE OF THE IDEAL OF *BREVITAS ET FACILITAS*

For Calvin Scripture was not complicated, but simple. Scripture was simply the eloquent speech of the Holy Spirit for his simple people. Therefore, to vitiate the simplicity of Scripture was to destroy the whole of Scripture. For Calvin the simplicity of Scripture was immediately connected with his hermeneutical method. This supplied Calvin with the foundation for the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as his hermeneutical ideal. Calvin believed that Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel employed a simple and easy style in order for ordinary people to understand God's Word more easily. This made him believe that the style of Scripture had its orientation in *brevitas et facilitas*. Consequently Calvin, influenced by rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian in his ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, confirmed that the authors of Scripture demonstrated this ideal. Calvin made this ideal a part of his own hermeneutical method. The clarity of Scripture offered the Reformers the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. Calvin confirmed that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* derived from the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

III. THE ELEMENTS OF THE IDEAL OF *BREVITAS ET FACILITAS*

My investigation delineated several elements in the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* Calvin employed in his writings. Brevity meant to interpret the passage concisely. In order to make the interpretation of the text brief, Calvin avoided any disputation, argument, or controversy. He also avoided the repetition of the same interpretation of various passages, and often suggested that the readers consult his other

commentaries and the *Institutes* as well as other interpreters' writings.

Calvin, if possible, did not change the original text, but rather tried to retain it. Since he felt that inserting things into the original text was not natural and simple, Calvin dared to reject Erasmus' insertion of words, prepositions, etc. Calvin had reasons for preferring retention to insertion. First, he thought that inserting something into the original text for purposes of interpretation forced the meaning of the text. Calvin always disliked the ambiguity caused by inserting words. The result of insertion was that the readers became confused and inept at understanding the genuine meaning of a passage.

Calvin limited the scope of his interpretation to the issues related to a particular passage of Scripture. He tried not to depart from the center of the text, nor to wander outside the key subject of the text. Whenever he felt that he handled an issue not directly related to the text, Calvin tried to return to the relevant text. This showed that he attempted not to interpret Scripture in a subjective fashion.

Calvin thought that the true meaning of the text was the suitable, obvious, and simple one rather than the twisted or ambiguous one. Over against 'torturing' Scripture, Calvin stressed that the true interpretation should be obvious and natural, not allegorical.

He refuted the use of conjecture in the interpretation of the text because it was not based on solid and sound argument, but rather started from imagination. On this point Calvin often criticized Erasmus for frivolous conjecture. Calvin thought that the purpose of simplicity was to let the readers easily understand the mind of the author.

The principle of simplicity was a reaction against ambiguity, perversion, and conjecture. He thought that the plain and simple sense of the words of Scripture agreed well with the author's mind. For him to remove ambiguity meant to

seek the natural and suitable meaning of the text. According to Calvin, the criterion of suitability was related to the intention of the author and the context of the present text.

One of the distinctive features of Calvin's hermeneutics was that he did not force the readers to accept his view but gave them freedom to choose the interpretation which they preferred. This shows that he recognized the imperfection of his own interpretation, and that, as an interpreter, he was humble.

Calvin criticized Christian interpreters for twisting the meaning of the text away from its simple sense. Calvin tried not to twist the meaning of the text, but rather with these principles to interpret it literally, simply, and clearly. Thus employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, he broke with the allegorical and scholastic interpretation of preceding centuries. He warned that an interpreter should not pervert the words of Scripture by means of his own opinions and his own doctrines and experiences. Calvin emphasized the necessary objectivity in Scriptural interpretation, against subjective methods of interpretation.

Although Calvin used the theological interpretation of the text, unlike the Fathers, he was not dominated by doctrinal interpretations. Calvin recognized significant doctrines in the text, and sometimes explained subjects relating to doctrine. He, however, passed over the interpretation of doctrines which was not directly related to the passage. As the result of that, he did not get involved in meaningless arguments with other interpreters. He only attempted to interpret the true meaning of the text without exhausting his readers.

The fact that Calvin interpreted the text by means of the intention of the author of Scripture makes us recognize him as one of the great interpreters in the history of Protestant interpretation. One of the purposes of his hermeneutics was to help the readers understand the mind of the author of

Scripture easily and briefly. In order to accomplish this goal, Calvin employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. For Calvin to interpret the true meaning of the text was to understand the words of the author or the intention of the author. Calvin identified the genuine meaning of the text with the intention of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin's practical purpose with the interpretation of texts was to edify the people of God. Calvin challenged an interpreter to consider the Christian life and the church's edification, without falling into theoretical argument. He always interpreted the meaning of the passage practically for the readers to understand easily and briefly. Especially the interpretation used in Calvin's *Sermons on Job* proved the practical application to the Christian life.

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¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, in *Studies in the Reformer's Exegetical Writings*, Companion Volume to Luther's Works (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 6. Versafer cited as in. See also Gernero, *Die Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Schrift* (München: J.C.B. Mohr, 1977).

² C. J. Wehner, "Ecclesiology and Theological Education: A South African Reformed Perspective," p. 14, unpublished paper, Congress of the International Reformed Theological Institute held in Stellenbosch on June 12, 1977.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The history of Christian theology is the record of the interpretation of Scripture generation after generation.¹ In a certain sense, all Christian truths are the result of the vindication of those who have taken great pains to interpret the Word of God responsibly over against the deficient or one-sided interpretation of the heretics. C. J. Wethmar says the following:

The dialogical development of theological truth in which opposing truth claims periodically confront each other is dependent on a criterion in terms of which these claims can be evaluated. In Protestant thinking Holy Scripture constitutes this criterion. This implies that theology is basically a hermeneutical discipline of which the primary aim is a historical, systematic and practical interpretation of the Biblical text as basic source and permanent foundation of Christian faith in God.²

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¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings*, Companion Volume to *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 5. Hereafter cited as LW. See also Gerhard Ebeling, *Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1947).

² C. J. Wethmar, "Ecclesiology and Theological Education: A South African Reformed Perspective," p. 13. Unpublished Paper, Congress of the International Reformed Theological Institute held in Stellenbosch on June 12, 1997.

legitimate understanding of Scripture.³ In the light of the prominent role of the interpretation of Scripture it would be worthwhile to investigate how John Calvin, one of the most influential theologians since Augustine, interpreted Scripture and what hermeneutical principles he employed. These hermeneutical principles, as I shall have occasion to demonstrate later on, are related to the basic insights of his theology.⁴

³ C. J. Wethmar, "Homologie en hermeneutiek," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 44 (1988): 540, describes an indissoluble connection between doctrine and interpretation as follows: "Doctrine is the form which the understanding of Holy Scripture adopts when interpreted in the light of the presuppositions of a particular horizon of understanding." Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 6, also says, "Hence the making and testing of the doctrinal formulations in the Church involves critical inquiry into their conformity to the content of divine revelation and careful interpretation of the Holy Scriptures through which that divine revelation is mediated. That is the relevance of hermeneutics to theological activity and the relevance of theology to hermeneutical activity." For the study of legitimate hermeneutics, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *A Guide Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 111-141.

⁴ See chapter 6 below. For the study of Calvin's view on the relationship between hermeneutics and theology, see Felicity Edwards, "The Relation between Biblical Hermeneutics and the Formulation of Dogmatic Theology: An Investigation in the Methodology of John Calvin" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1968). Edwards' research is the first dissertation concerned with the methodological relationship in Calvin's work between biblical hermeneutics and theological formulation. He says: "Motivated by the Romanist claim to indisputable authoritative interpretation of Scripture and Luther's unrelenting denial of this, Calvin understood his basic theological task as the study and interpretation of Scripture in such a way as to show that it is really about and by what method it is to be interpreted" (Ibid., p. 4). Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 49, says: "Nowhere is Calvin's thought more profound than when he reflects on the relation

Calvin, as a scriptural theologian,⁵ believed that the work of interpreting, teaching, and preaching Scripture was his calling in the church among the people of God. In spite of being aware of the fact that Calvin as an interpreter devoted himself intensely to the pursuit of that aim, many scholars have not shown sufficient interest in John Calvin as one of the most brilliant interpreters of Scripture in the history of Christianity. Despite this lack of satisfying investigations from the perspective of Calvin's hermeneutics, many scholars have consulted Calvin's commentaries extensively. For example, K. Barth testified that in consulting Calvin's commentaries, he had found pleasure in Calvin's distinctive combination of historical and pneumatic exegesis, and that Calvin's work had provided an external model for his study *Der Römerbrief* and a firm foundation for its content.⁶ In fact Calvin's

between biblical exegesis and theology. Of course he made no distinction between Biblical Theology and dogmatics. . . . Thomas Aquinas wrote a Summa to encompass the whole of Christian teaching into which structure the Bible provided building blocks. In striking contrast Calvin reversed the process! The role of theology was to aid in interpreting the Bible."

⁵ P. C. Potgieter, "Calvin as Scriptural Theologian," in *Calvinus Reformer: His Contribution to Theology, Church, and Society*. ed. Institute for Reformational Studies (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for CHE, 1982), p. 127. Here he says, "Calvin's love of God found its deepest expression in his love of God's Word. Holy Scripture was his life's companion more than anything or even anybody else. Above all, he wanted to be a scriptural theologian." Hereafter cited as *Calvinus Reformer*.

⁶ Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), p. 531. Here Barth writes on Calvin's influence on his commentary on Romans: "Ich bin, so oft ich die Calvinkommentare zum eigenen Gebrauch zu Rate gezogen habe, immer froh gewesen über diese eigentümliche Verbindung von historischer und pneumatischer Exegese, auch

commentaries, like the *Institutes*, have been one of the most important contributions to Christian scholarship. G. E. Wright also says that Calvin's commentaries "must surely be ranked among the chief monuments of Christian scholarship",⁷ and that the more we study his commentaries, the more astonished we become "at their scholarship, lucid profundity, and freshness of insight."⁸ The respect which scholars have for the value of Calvin's commentaries makes us aware of the significance of Calvin's hermeneutics and should lead us on to an investigation of his remarkable hermeneutical methodology. B. B. Warfield describes John Calvin as a great interpreter of Scripture and a pioneer of modern hermeneutics:

Calvin was, however, a born exegete, and adds to his technical equipment of philological knowledge and trained skill in the interpretation of texts a clear and penetrating intelligence, remarkable intellectual sympathy, incorruptible honesty, unusual historical perception, and an incomparable insight into the progress of thought, while the whole is illuminated by his profound religious comprehension. His expositions of Scripture were accordingly a wholly new phenomenon, and introduced a new exegesis - the modern exegesis. He stands out in the history of biblical study as, what Diestel, for example, proclaims him, 'the creator of

dann, wenn ich mor nachher erlaubte, meine eigenen Wege zu gehen. Sie ist mir auch bei meiner eigenen Arbeit speziell am Römerbrief nicht nur äußerlich vorbildlich, sondern auch nach ihrem Gehalt der sichere Boden gewesen."

⁷ G. Ernest Wright, "The Christian Interpreter as a Biblical Critic: The Relevance of Valid Criticism," *Interpretation* 1 (1947): 133.

⁸ *Ibid.*

genuine exegesis'.⁹

A. Purpose

The hermeneutical methodology employed by Calvin in gleaning the true meaning of a text has given rise to considerable contemporary debate. Calvin, like other Reformers, used the so-called historical-grammatical method in the interpretation of Scripture. Although Calvin showed similarity with the other Reformers' hermeneutics in following this approach, he had a distinctive approach to Scriptural interpretation which other Reformers did not follow in all details. It included the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central dimension of his hermeneutics, principles Calvin employed in his exegetical writings throughout his whole life.¹⁰ These principles, as the center of Calvin's

⁹ B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Graig (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), p. 9. Cf. A. T. Robertson, "Calvin as an Interpreter of Scripture," *The Review and Expositor* 6 (1909): 577-8; Ronald S. Wallace, "Calvin the Expositor," *Christianity Today* 18 (1964): 8-10.

¹⁰ This method first appeared in the dedicatory preface in the *Commentary on Romans* of John Calvin in Strasbourg, November 18, 1539. Later Calvin continued to employ this method in his exegetical writings. In 1564 in his farewell letter to the ministers of Geneva Calvin showed that he kept faithfully to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the interpretation of Scripture: "As to my doctrine, I have taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power. I have not falsified a single passage of the Scriptures, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge; and though I might have introduced subtle senses, had I studied subtlety, I cast that temptation under my feet and always aimed at

hermeneutics, did not appear clearly in the exegetical writings of other Reformers like Luther, Melancthon, and Bucer. With regard to the nature of Calvin's hermeneutics, many scholars like August F. Tholuck,¹¹ F. W. Gotch,¹² Frederic W. Farrar,¹³ Philip Schaff,¹⁴ J. Baumgartner,¹⁵ Irwin Hoch De Long,¹⁶ James Orr,¹⁷ H. R. Mackintosh,¹⁸ K. Barth,¹⁹

simplicity." ("Calvin's Farewell to the Ministers of Geneva, On Friday, 28th April, 1564," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, eds. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, vol. 7, eds. Jules Bonnet and trans. Marcus Robert Gilchrist, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, p. 375).

¹¹ August F. Tholuck, "The Merits of Calvin as an Interpreter of the Holy Scriptures," *The Biblical Repository* 2 (1832): 550. Cf. August F. Tholuck, "Die Verdienste Calvins als Ausleger der Heiligen Schrift," in *Vermischte Schriften gröstentheils apologetischen Inhalts* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes 1939).

¹² F. W. Gotch, "Calvin as a Commentator," *The Journal of Sacred Literature* 3 (1849): 227.

¹³ Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 344. Here he mentions that Calvin fulfilled his own ideal in an exposition "brief, facile, luminous, full of rare sagacity, and entire good faith."

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), p. 525. Here Schaff insists that Calvin "already lays down his views of the best method of interpretation, namely, comprehensive brevity, transparent clearness, and strict adherence to the spirit and letter of the author." Cf. Philip Schaff, "Calvin as a Commentator," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 3 (1892): 462.

¹⁵ J. Baumgartner, *Calvin Hébraïsant et interprète de l'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1889), p. 30.

¹⁶ Irwin Hoch De Long, "Calvin as an Interpreter of the Bible," *Reformed Church Review* 13 (1909): 172-177.

Ford Lewis Batttles,²⁰ E. P. Groenewald,²¹ Dieter Schellong,²²
H. J. Kraus,²³ W. V. Puffenberger,²⁴ Rudolphe Peter,²⁵ A.

¹⁷ James Orr, "Calvin's Attitude towards and Exegesis of the Scriptures," in *Calvin Memorial Addresses: Delivered before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1909), p. 98.

¹⁸ H. R. Mackintosh, "John Calvin: Expositor and Dogmatist," *The Review and Expositor* 7 (1910): 186, says as follows: "Calvin excelled in the art of clear and perspicuous writing. His *Institutes* is perfectly lucid, and not only lucid, but vivacious. The book, in short, was a novelty in literature - a theological treatise which laymen could understand with ease. Calvin set out with the definite purpose to instruct the people, and the width and rapidity with which the volume circulated prove how successfully he had attained his end. . . . The simplicity and comprehensibility of his work show that obscurity in literature is due not so much to the nature of the subject as to the incompetence of the writer."

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins*, p. 531. Here Barth suggests that against Bucer's prolix exegesis Calvin held up *brevitas et facilitas* as the method of his hermeneutics; He says; "Die Auslegertugend, die Calvin selbst als Ziel vorschwebte, nannte er «*perspicua brevitatis*». Genensatz zu Butzer: «Kum hat er einen Stoff ergriffen, so strömt die unglaubliche Fruchtbarkeit seines Geistes eine solche Fülle aus, daß er sich nicht mehr halten kann und kein Ende findet.» Warum *brevitas*? Charakter Calvins? Verhältnis von Exegese zum System. Grenzen fließend. *Institutio* ein Gefüge von Exegesen. Exegese als Stück der Wahrheitsbegründung bedarf dieser Kürze."

²⁰ Ford Lewis Battles, "Introduction," in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), pp. lxix-lxx. Hereafter cited as *Inst.*

²¹ E. P. Groenewald, "Calvyn en die Heilige Skrif," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 5.3 (1964): 132.

²² Dieter Schellong, *Calvins Auslegung der synoptischen Evangelien* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1969), pp. 13-15.

²³ Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles" in *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 12-13, and "Calvins exegetische Prinzipien," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 79 (1968): 329-

Berkeley Mickelsen,²⁶ T. H. L. Parker,²⁷ John H. Leith,²⁸ John Robert Walchenbach,²⁹ Richard Stauffer,³⁰ Jack B. Rogers and

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²⁴ William Vernon Puffenberger, "The Word of God and Hermeneutics in the Theologies of Karl Barth and Gerhard Ebeling" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1968), p. 145.

²⁵ Rudolphe Peter, "Rhétorique et prédication selon Calvin," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 55 (1975): 250-72.

²⁶ A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 40.

²⁷ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 86-7. He says, "Calvin is completely convinced of the superiority of the method he himself used. This method is characterized by two qualities, clarity and brevity."

²⁸ John H. Leith, "John Calvin-Theologian of the Bible," in *Interpretation* 25 (1971), 337. Leith mentions that Calvin enunciated this principle with the writing of his first commentary (Romans), and never deviated from it, and that simplicity and brevity were characteristic of Calvin's total life style.

²⁹ John Robert Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburg, 1974), p. 159, insists that Calvin was consistent in using this method: "Calvin wrote the Dedicatory Preface to the Romans commentary in 1539, having formulated his basic methodological principles, if we may trust *ante triennium* as accurate, three years earlier, in 1536. Twenty-one years later, in 1557, he still holds firmly to his basic principles, for in his Preface to the *Commentary on the Psalms*, written in the last mentioned year, he affirms. . . . Here we not only see that Calvin has rigidly maintained his earlier established methodology, but discover confirmation for our understanding of what Calvin meant by *brevitas* and *facilitas*."

³⁰ Richard Stauffer, *Interprètes de la Bible* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1980), p. 172.

D. McKim,³¹ L. Floor,³² J. L. M. Haire,³³ R. Gamble,³⁴ Pamela
J. Scalise,³⁵ E. A. McKee,³⁶ C. Schwöbel,³⁷ B. S. Childs,³⁸

³¹ Donald K. McKim, ed., "Calvin's View of Scripture," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 66, says, "There were two guiding principles Calvin sought to follow in his exegetical work. The first was *brevitas*. . . . Calvin's second principle was *facilitas*." See also, Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, Publisher, 1979), p. 115; Jack B. Rogers, "The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible in the Reformed Tradition," in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p. 56.

³² L. Floor, "The Hermeneutics of Calvin," in *Calvinus Reformator*, p. 188, says, "The first principle in exegesis is the principle of clarity and brevity. Calvin called this *perspicua brevitatis*. Why? Because the Scriptures are also clear and precise. For that reason our exegesis also has to be like that."

³³ J. L. M. Haire, "John Calvin as an Expositor," *Irish Biblical Studies* 4 (1982): 5.

³⁴ R. Gamble, "*Brevitas et Facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 1-17, shows that many scholars like Parker, Battles, Kraus, Haroutonian, Schaff, Fuhrman, Walchenbach, and Jülicher agree basically that the hallmarks of Calvin's exegetical methodology are *brevitas et facilitas* (p. 3); and "Exposition and Method in Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 153-165.

³⁵ Pamela J. Scalise, "The Reformers as Biblical Scholars," *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989): 27.

³⁶ Elsie Anne McKee, "Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.* ed. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 169.

³⁷ C. Schwöbel, "Calvin," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 100.

and Moisés Silva³⁹ recognize that the hallmarks of Calvin's hermeneutical approach are the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Even though they have regarded this method as the distinguishing feature of Calvin's hermeneutics, they have not investigated Calvin's exegetical writings from the perspective of these principles, and have not fathomed how Calvin practically and consistently implemented the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central dimension of his hermeneutics.⁴⁰ They have not revealed how Calvin handled the text of Scripture with these principles. They have not adequately demonstrated how Calvin's principles of *brevitas et facilitas* are rooted in the rhetorical method of Aristotle,

³⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, p. 47, says: "In his well-known epistle to Simon Grynaeus which now introduces his Romans commentary, Calvin sets out with great precision to describe his exegetical approach. The chief excellency of a biblical commentator lies in lucid brevity. He then explains why he objects to the *loci* method of Melancthon and the prolixity of Bucer. It is insufficient to focus on certain doctrinal issues or to be distracted with long excursus. Rather, the expositor is to strive for the 'natural', 'genuine', or literal sense of the text, a deep conviction which spared him from Luther's long struggle in overcoming the inherited tradition of the four-fold sense of scripture, Calvin identified the literal sense with the author's intention, which accounted for his stress on the need for careful literary, historical and philological analysis of each biblical writer."

³⁹ Moisés Silva, "The Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics," in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, eds. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), pp. 251-269.

⁴⁰ No substantial study has yet been published on the methodology of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central principle of Calvin's hermeneutics.

Cicero, and Quintilian, and also not that these hermeneutical principles are embedded in the basic motives of his theology. This limitation of recent scholars has motivated me to examine the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* throughout. After having analysed Calvin's exegetical writings, I discovered ten component elements of the method of *brevitas et facilitas*. According to my judgment, these elements of the method of *brevitas et facilitas* have not yet been exhaustively described. I shall deal with these principles in chapter 7.

My purpose is to establish the fact that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the hallmark of Calvin's hermeneutics originated in his views on Holy Scripture, especially the principle *Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

In addition to this aim I would like to demonstrate that according to Calvin the task of the interpretation of Scripture as well as of theology⁴¹ was not simply to develop

⁴¹ A. D. Pont, "Opening Address: The Message of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*," in *John Calvin's Institutes His Opus Magum: Proceedings of the Second South African Congress for Calvin Research*, ed. Institute for Reformational Studies (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for CHE, 1986), p. 6. On Calvin's purpose of theology A. D. Pont points out correctly: "Calvin's teaching is the expounding of the message of the Bible, excepting all human speculation. . . . Throughout his work Calvin never practice theology as a self-contained science, something complete in itself which can be practised in academic seclusion or isolation. At all times Calvin's theology stands in the service of faith with the express purpose of sustaining the life of the church and of the individual in the church." John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 26-27. Here he writes as follows: "Calvin's avowed interest in theology was practical. Moreover, he regarded theology as a

practical science. The original purpose of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was to provide a handbook which would

into an ivory tower theory, but to serve the edification of the church⁴² and to help his readers in the practical context of their lives.⁴³ For example, Calvin's sermons on Job were intensely practical. He showed how practical the passages were by using such formulations as: "Let us practice this doctrine," "Let us learn here that," and "This doctrine is

be an aid to piety. The true task of theology was not to give an answer to speculative questions, but to contribute to the edification of Christians. The conduct of the Christian, not verbal assent to doctrine and ceremony, is the decisive test of religious convictions."

⁴² Benjamin W. Farley, "Recurring Hermeneutical Principles in Calvin's Sermons, Polemical Treatises and Correspondence," in *Calvin as Exegete*. Unpublished paper presented at the meeting of Ninth Colloquium on Calvin & Calvin Studies, ed., Peter De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1995), p. 76-77. Here on Calvin's interest in edification Farley writes us as follows: "Thus, we see Calvin using the principle of Scripture's capacity to interpret Scripture, in conjunction with his interest in *edification*, to determine a passage's true and contemporary meaning, so that it might be applied *profitably* to the life of the church, and especially to a republic's citizens in an effort to keep disorder to a minimum. It is a method that is highly interconnected and interwoven. And it demonstrates that, in the Reformer's zeal to *apply* God's eternal truth effectively to his time, his methodology was susceptible to his own personal, political, theological and social biases."

⁴³ K. Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins*, pp. 531-532. Thomas D. Parker, "The Interpretation of Scripture: A Comparison of Calvin and Luther on Galatians," *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 71; J. O. Leath, "Department of Exegesis: John Calvin's Method of Interpreting the New Testament," *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 78 (1929): 107. They maintain that one of the features of Calvin's hermeneutics is the practical application to Christian life. On the practical value of human life, Anthony C. Thiselton, in *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 193, says, "Calvin's concerns were broader, more objective, and related to the wider dimensions of human life, including human society."

very useful for us,"⁴⁴ In his commentaries Calvin interpreted the meaning of passages practically.⁴⁵ In the *Institutes* he attempted to do the same. Calvin argued that in the reading of Scripture we ought ceaselessly to endeavor to seek out and meditate upon those things which were made for the building up of the church.⁴⁶

B. Calvin's Motivation

Calvin's motivation for employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his writings, including the *Commentary on Romans*, was not that he tried to challenge Melancthon, Bullinger, and Bucer, but rather that he sought to promote the public good of the church.

As then it would have been, I know, a proof of the most presumptuous rivalry, to wish to contend with such men, such a thing never entered my mind; nor have I a desire to take from them the least portion of their praise. Let that favor and authority, which according to the confession of all good men they have deserved, be continued to them. . . . Of myself I venture not to say any thing, except that I thought that my labor would not be useless, and that I have undertaken it for no other reason than to promote the public good of the church

⁴⁴ *Sermons from Job*, p. 40, p. 70, p. 105, p. 118, p. 127, p. 188, pp. 222-3, p. 227.

⁴⁵ *Comm. on Rom.* 4:20, 24; 8:20, *Comm. on 1 Cor.* 5:8, *Comm. on Gal.* 3:19, 23, *Comm. on Ps.* 3:8, 4:5, 5:2, 6.

⁴⁶ *Inst.* 1.14.4, p. 164. Cf. *Inst.* 1.13.29, p. 159, *Inst.* 3.4.39. p. 669.

(*publicum Ecclesiae bonum induxisset*).⁴⁷

In seeking to do good, Calvin wanted to provide the best interpretation (*optimam interpretationem*) that his simple readers could understand easily, without much loss of time.⁴⁸

In fact Calvin clearly knew that many interpreters of the Middle Ages had twisted the real meaning of the text and indulged in an exceedingly doctrinal method of interpretation

⁴⁷ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxv. Cf. *Iohannis Calvinii Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed. T. H. L. Parker (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 2. (Hereafter cited as *Romanos*) "*Cum talibus ergo viris velle contendere, ut nimis improbae aemulationis esse confiteor, ita mihi nunquam in mentem venit, vel minimam laudis partem illis praeripere. Maneat illis salva et gratia, et authoritas, quam sunt bonorum omnium confessione promeriti. . . . De me nihil praedicare adueo, nisi quod iudicavi non inutilem fore hanc operam: ad quam suscipiendam nulla me unquam alia ratio, quam publicum Ecclesiae bonum induxisset.*"

Cf. Adrianus D. Pont, "Opening Address: The Message of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*," p. 4. He states that Calvin's goal of hermeneutics is the edification of the people of God.

⁴⁸ "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi. "But as they (Melanchthon and Bucer) often vary from one another, and thus present a difficulty to simple readers, who hesitate as to what opinion they ought to receive, I thought that it would be no vain labor, if by pointing out the best explanation, I relieved them from the trouble of forming a judgment for themselves; and especially as I determined to treat things so briefly, that without much loss of time, readers may peruse in my work what is contained in other writings, In short, I have endeavored that no one may justly complain, that there are here many things which are superfluous." Cf. *Romanos*, p. 3. "*Verum quia ili non raro inter se variant, atque ea res multam praebet difficultatem lectoribus parum acutis, dum haesitant cuius sententiae potius debeant assentiri: putavi hunc quoque laborem non poenitendum fore, si optimam interpretationem indicando, sublevarem eos a iudicandi molestia, quibus non satis firmum est a seipsis iudicium: praesertim quum ita omnia succincte perstringere instituerem, ut non magnam temporis iacturam facturi essent lectores, apud me legendo quae in aliis habentur. In summa, dedi operam nequis iure conqueratur multa hic supervacua esse.*"

because not only did they put the authority of the church over Scripture,⁴⁹ but they also tried to defend the problematic doctrines of the Roman Catholic church. Luther, Melanchthon, Bullinger, and Bucer broke with the method of the Middle Ages, and used the so-called historical-grammatical approach. In spite of their breaking with the Middle Ages' method, they did not yet succeed in showing the readers the intention of the author of Scripture clearly, and the true meaning of the text effectively and easily. Their methods did not satisfy Calvin. He, therefore, decided to use a new hermeneutical method, hoping to overcome their problems.

Calvin stated that in his *Commentary on Romans* Melanchthon "attained his object by illustrating the principal points: being occupied with these primary things, he passed by many things which deserve attention; and it was not his

⁴⁹ S. Du Toit, "Aspects of Revelation in Holy Scripture (with special reference to Genesis 1 and 2)," in *De Fructu Oris Sui. Essays in Honour of Adrianus van Selms, Pretoria Oriental Series*. eds. I. H. Eybers and Others (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), pp. 184-185. Here he properly describes the history of exegesis between the Middle Ages and the Reformation as follows: "Gradually the enactments of the church acquired such an authoritative and binding character that Scripture had to derive its authority from the church, in stead of *vice versa*. Especially the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages practically led to elimination of the living power of Scripture. The two leading Reformers Luther and Calvin wrested themselves to a very great extent from Scholasticism and battled with success against the domination position of Aristotle. Fundamental hermeneutical principles now became the following: *Sola Scriptura*, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* and *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*. The main difference between the Reformers and the Scholasticists of the late Middle Ages was that the first named came to the '*Sola Scriptura*' from quite different viewpoint, namely not from that of formal authority but from the contents of Scripture."

purpose to prevent others to examine them."⁵⁰ Here he pointed out the problem of Melancthon's *loci* method in which he discussed such passages as particularly required observation.⁵¹ With this method he only dealt with important texts from the perspective of doctrine. Thus Melancthon's work did not satisfy Calvin because Melancthon did not explain every passage. Calvin also stated that in his *Commentary on Romans* Bucer was too diffuse for men in business to read, and too profound to be understood by such as were simple and not capable of much application: "for whatever be the subject which he handles, so many things are suggested to him through the incredible fecundity of his mind, in which he excels, that he knows not when to stop."⁵² Calvin argued that Bucer handled every point so extensively that it could not be read in a short time. This *prolixis commentariis*, according to Calvin, was Bucer's hermeneutical method.⁵³ He, therefore, determined to treat things so briefly, that without

⁵⁰ "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

⁵¹ Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," 4, says on Melancthon's *loci* method as follows: "Perhaps using Rudolf Agricola's analysis as his foundation, Melancthon searched out the leading concepts of a literary document, in this case the Bible. These leading concepts, as they are assembled together, summarize the contents of the whole document and were called by Aristotle *topoi*, which was translated by Cicero as *loci*. This then was the methodology which Melancthon followed in all of his biblical commentaries."

⁵² "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

⁵³ CO 10.404.

unnecessary loss of time, his readers might understand his work easily.⁵⁴ This is the reason why Calvin employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin's method developed as the result of the application of a *via media* approach between Melancthon's *loci* method and Bucer's method which Calvin evaluated "as too cumbersome for the average pastor to be able to wade through the swamp of passages."⁵⁵ In this way the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* appeared into the history of Christian hermeneutics.

C. The Definition of *Brevitas et Facilitas*

A few Calvin scholars have attempted to define the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Parker, for example, attempts to define the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* by investigating the dedicatory epistle in Calvin's *Commentary on Romans*. He argues that Calvin used for his commentaries fundamentally the same form that he had employed when expounding the Stoic *De Clementia*.⁵⁶ Parker gives a definition of this method in terms of the rhetorical concept of Aristotle. According to Parker, Calvin and his friend Simon Grynaeus viewed the Aristotelian conception as the best

⁵⁴ CO 10.405.

⁵⁵ Richard C. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," 6.

⁵⁶ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 86.

approach to the interpretation of Scripture. Calvin showed that he loved brevity in such formulations as: "*ego tamen dimoveri non possum ab amore compendii.*"⁵⁷ Parker illustrates the full meaning of words like *compendium*, *perspicuitas*, and *facilitas* from a philological perspective:

This method is characterized by two qualities, clarity and brevity. They are juxtaposed in his definitive statement: 'The chief virtue of the interpreter lies in clear brevity.' . . . For Calvin, however, *brevitas* and the *compendium* concern the subsequent teaching and not the preliminary understanding. The commentator must be brief in style, his statements, explanations and arguments compressed and concise. *Perspicuitas* is again a rhetorical concept, although, as we shall see, it has theological implications also. He associates it with *facilitas*, by which he intends, not smoothness of style, but rather 'simplicity' or 'what is easily understood'.⁵⁸

He connects the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* to interpretation. "*Perspicua brevitatis* should not be understood as a style of writing that will make the book more easy and pleasant to read, but as the rhetorical method by which the expositor achieves his task of revealing the mind of the writer. *Perspicua* therefore bears now the sense of 'illuminating' and *brevitas* of 'pertinence' or 'relevance'.⁵⁹ Parker's description on these principles does not show the methodological rule of Calvin's hermeneutics. His definition that these principles should reveal the intention of the author relates to the task of an interpreter.

⁵⁷ *Romanos*, ed. Parker, p. 1.

⁵⁸ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 91.

Walchenbach gives a good definition of the method of *brevitas et facilitas* from the dedicatory epistle in Calvin's *Commentary on Romans*. He argues that Calvin had discussed the best method of interpreting Scripture with his scholarly friend Grynaeus. He describes it as follows:

By the principle of *brevitas*, Calvin wishes to avoid *prolixis commentariis* which only exhaust the reader. By the principle of *facilitas*, Calvin wishes to avoid discussions of other commentators, and come as quickly as possible to the primary meaning of the text. *Facilitas* here does not mean either a "short-cut" or superficiality. It means the absence of polemic, the exclusion of protracted excursions, the purposive omission of detailed examinations from other sources. *Brevitas* and *facilitas* combine to exclude and reject discussions which may very naturally arise from the text, but which do not belong in the body of the commentary.⁶⁰

He defines this method as a shift from the unnecessary discussions of the interpreter to helping the readers understand the primary meaning of the text. From the perspective of the principle of *brevitas*, his statement is correct. His view starts from the fact that Calvin, like Chrysostom, loved a simple and straightforward interpretation. While Parker emphasizes the rhetorical method and the mind of the writer, Walchenbach regards the practical aspect of these principles as important. He, however, does not show that Calvin derived these principles from Scripture itself.

Rogers and McKim maintain that Chrysostom refused allegorical interpretation, and kept to the straightforward

⁶⁰ John Robert Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor," p. 158.

meaning of the text in its immediate context.⁶¹ They argue that Chrysostom's example lay behind Calvin's method of *brevitas et facilitas*. According to their definition, *brevitas* means that Calvin wanted to avoid lengthy commentary that would only exhaust his readers. *Facilitas* means that Calvin wished to avoid the discussions of other commentators and come as quickly as possible to the primary meaning of the texts. They conclude that the method of *brevitas et facilitas* led Calvin to oppose the Aristotelian rationalistic interpretation that was developing among some of the Reformers like Melancthon, Bullinger, and Bucer.⁶² But this view should be reconsidered by Calvin's own statements in the dedicatory epistle in the *Commentary on Romans* and in the preface of the *Commentary on the Psalms*, and the fact that Calvin was influenced by the rhetorical method of Aristotle. I shall deal with this issue in chapter 5.

On the method of *brevitas* McKim argues that Calvin's purpose was to find out the pertinence or relevance of a portion of Scripture and then to relay it in as short and succinct a manner as possible.⁶³ According to him, the method

⁶¹ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*, pp. 114-5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 115. Rogers and McKim neither define the conception of the Aristotelian rationalistic interpretation, nor offer any evidence. They do not give us their view in a way that carries conviction.

⁶³ Donald K. McKim, "Calvin's View of Scripture," p. 66.

of *facilitas* is to seek simplicity or what is easily understood.⁶⁴ Rogers and McKim follow Parker in that they connect these principles with the intention of the author and the pertinence or relevance of a portion of Scripture.

Even though many Calvin scholars define the method of *brevitas et facilitas* from their own perspectives, their definitions do not adequately reflect Calvin's real intention with respect to this method. Their deficient definitions derive from the fact that they did not survey Calvin's own statements in his dedicatory epistle to Simon Grynaeus, the preface of the *Commentary on the Psalms*, and his *Institutes*. My investigation regarding an adequate definition of the method of *brevitas et facilitas* is related to Calvin's own description of the interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin did not attempt to define the etymological meaning of *perspicua brevitatis*. Rather he simply described this method as the best method of interpreting Scripture (*praecipuam interpretis virtutem in perspicua brevitate esse positam*).⁶⁵ In his dedicatory epistle to Simon Grynaeus and the preface of the *Commentary on the Psalms* he showed this mode of expounding Scripture as follows: First, this method is related to the mind of the author (*mentem scriptoris*). An interpreter's duty, according to Calvin, is to lay open the intention of the writer whom he undertakes to explain (*hoc sit prope unicum*

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Romanos*, p. 1.

illius officium mentem scriptoris quem explicandum sumpsit patefacere).⁶⁶ The attempt to understand the mind of the author of a text is one of the principles which Calvin frequently used in the interpretation of Scripture.⁶⁷ Calvin connected *mentem scriptoris* with the intention of the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus sancti consilium*).⁶⁸ Secondly, an interpreter should not lead his readers away from the center of the text. As a result of this inadequate guidance, such readers would go astray.⁶⁹ Calvin pointed out that many interpreters made a mistake in the interpretation of a text related to doctrine because they expounded the doctrine better than the text itself. Thirdly, Calvin suggested using plainness (*facilitati studeret*), avoiding the evil of tiring his readers with prolix commentary (*prolixis commentariis*), and trying to love what is compendious (*amore compendii*). Calvin said:

Hence we expressed a hope, that from the number of those who strive at this day to advance the interest of theology by this kind of labour, some one would be found, who would study plainness, and endeavour to avoid the evil of tiring his readers with prolixity. I know at the same time that this view is not taken by all, and that those who judge otherwise have their reasons; but still I

⁶⁶ CO 10.403.

⁶⁷ Calvin continued to show the intention of the author in his *Commentary on Romans*. See *Comm. on Rom.* 4:16, 18, 19, 20, 20, 25; 5:8; 8:3, 6, 7; 10:18; 11:7; 15:4. Cf. W. de Greef, *Calvijn en het Oude Testament* (Groningen: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1984), pp. 46-7.

⁶⁸ See chapter 6.

⁶⁹ CO 10.403. "*quantum ab ea lecturos abducit, tantundem a scopo suo aberrat, vel certe a suis finibus quodammodo evagatur.*"

cannot be drawn away from the love of what is compendious.⁷⁰

These are the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. It is to be plain (*facilis*), compressed (*pressos*), and concise (*concisos*). Fourthly, Calvin pointed out that one normally attempted to force others to adopt one's own rules. This point other Calvin scholars did not mention. But Calvin considered this rule significant. He said:

But as there is such a variety, found in the minds of men, that different things please different persons, let every one in this case follow his own judgment, provided that no one attempts to force others to adopt his own rules. Thus it will be, that we who approve of brevity, will not reject nor despise the labours of those who are more copious and diffused in their explanations of Scripture, and that they also in their turn will bear with us, though they may think us too compressed and concise."⁷¹

Calvin, therefore, permitted freedom to choose one of many interpretations according to the judgment of his readers.

⁷⁰ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.*, pp. xxiii-xxiv. CO 10.403. "*Itaque cupiebamus ex eorum numero, quibus in hoc laboris genere theologiam iuvare hodie propositum est, unum aliquem exstare qui et facilitati studeret, et simul daret operam ne prolixis commentariis studiosos ultra modum detineret. Quanquam autem scio sententiam hanc non apud omnes receptam esse, et eos qui non recipiunt nonnullis quoque argumentis adduci ut ita iudicent, ego tamen dimoveri non possum ab amore compendii.*" Cf. "The Author's Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Gen.*, p. liii.

⁷¹ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxiv. CO 10.403. "*Verum quum ita ferat ea quae hominum igeniis insita est varietas, ut alia aliis magis arrideant, fruatur hic sane quisque suo iudicio, modo ne quis omnes alios sub leges suas redigere velit. Ita fiet ut neque nos, quibus magis placet brevitatis, eorum labores vel respuamus vel contemnamus qui in sacris libris enarrandis copiosiores sunt ac fusiores, et illi vicissim nos ferant, etiam si putent nimis pressos ac concisos.*"

Fifthly, this method is intended to avoid any unnecessary disputation, argument, and controversy. Calvin abstained from refuting the opinions of others: "I have not only observed throughout a simple style of teaching, but in order to be removed the farther from all ostentation, I have also generally abstained from refuting the opinions of others. . . . I have never touched upon opposite opinions, unless where there was reason to fear, that by being silent respecting them, I might leave my readers in doubt and perplexity."⁷² Finally, Calvin's principles, according to my investigation, consist of elements of *brevitas et facilitas* like retention, respect for the context, suitability, avoidance of ambiguity, and avoidance of conjecture.⁷³

⁷² *Comm. on Ps*, p. xlix. Cf. *Comm. on Dan.* 9:24, p. 195. "This passage has been variously treated, and so distracted, and almost torn to pieces by the various opinions of interpreters, that it might be considered nearly useless on account of its obscurity. . . . I do not usually refer to conflicting opinion, because I take no pleasure in refuting them, and the simple method which I adopt pleases me best, namely, to expound what I think was delivered by the Spirit of God. But I cannot escape the necessity of confuting various views of the present passage."

In the interpretation of Gen. 4:24 "Cain shall be avenged sevenfold", Calvin tried to avoid criticizing the views of others. "It is not my intention to relate the ravings or the dreams of every writer, nor would I have the reader to expect this from me; here and there I allude to them, though sparingly, especially if there be any color of deception; that readers, being often admonished, may learn to take heed unto themselves. Therefore, with respect to this passage, which has been variously tortured, I will not record what one or another may have delivered, but will content myself with a true exposition of it." (*Comm. on Gen.* 4:24, pp. 221-2).

⁷³ In chapter 7 I shall deal with the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* consisting of these terms which I coined.

In the *Institutes* (1539) Calvin declared that he was to employ the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the interpretation of Scripture.⁷⁴ "If, after this road has, as it were, been paved, I shall publish any interpretation of Scripture, I shall always condense them, because I shall have no need to undertake long doctrinal discussions, and to digress into commonplaces."⁷⁵ Although Calvin treated all the complicated doctrinal issues in his *Institutes*, he tried to interpret them with these principles. In fact Calvin, according to this statement, showed these principles in the dedicatory epistle in the *Commentary on Romans*, the author's epistle dedicatory in the *Commentary on Genesis*, and the preface of the *Commentary on the Psalms*.

D. Recent Studies of Calvin's Hermeneutics

Calvin's hermeneutics has not been studied as intensively as his theology in general.⁷⁶ Neither has the primary research

⁷⁴ See chapter 5.

⁷⁵ "John Calvin to the Reader," in *Inst.* Cf. CO 2.3-4. "Itaque, hac veluti strata via, si quas posthac scripturae enarrationes edidero, quia non necesse habebō de dogmatibus longas disputationes instituere, et in locos communes evagari, eas compendio semper astringam."

⁷⁶ A few dissertations have been written on Calvin's hermeneutics. Cf. Paul Garnet, "Some Aspects of John Calvin's New Testament Exegesis as Seen in His Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans" (M.A. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1963); Dean Greer McKee, "The Contribution of John Calvin to New Testament Exegesis" (S.T.D. diss., Biblical Seminary in New York, 1931); J. P. Newport, "An Investigation of the

on his principles of *brevitas et facilitas* been given the attention it deserves.⁷⁷

After Wallace's survey on Calvin's hermeneutics,⁷⁸ Kraus made a wider and deeper study of it.⁷⁹ He summarizes Calvin's hermeneutics by formulating eight exegetical principles which can be derived from the Reformer's writings: (1) the principle of clarity and brevity; (2) the principle of seeking to determine the intention of the author; (3) the principle of

Factors Influencing John Calvin's Use of the Linguistic and Historical Principles of Biblical Exegesis" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1953); Clinton M. Ashley, "John Calvin's Utilization of the Principle of Accommodation and Its Continuing Significance for an Understanding of Biblical Language" (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972); H. H. Wolf, "Die Einheit des Bundes: Das Verhältnis vom Altem und Neuem Testament bei Calvin" (Ph.D. diss., Halle University, 1942); Paul Kertz, "Calvins Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift" (Ph.D. diss., Göttingen University, 1939); Michael Carl Armour, "Calvin's Hermeneutic and the History of Christian Exegesis" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992).

⁷⁷ Merely the following studies have been devoted to this issue: R. Gamble, "*Brevitas et Facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," and "Exposition and Method in Calvin,"; and Myung Jun Ahn, "The Methodology of *Brevitas* and *Facilitas* as the Hermeneutic Principle of John Calvin" (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1992).

⁷⁸ Ronald S. Wallace, "Calvin the Expositor," 8-10. He shows us four principles on which Calvin based his approach and method. 1. A careful grammatical and historical exegesis of the text is indispensable. 2. The study of theology is an indispensable discipline for the interpretation of Scripture. 3. In the task of interpreting Holy Scripture, the Word itself must be allowed always to control and reform all our presuppositions, theological or otherwise. 4. The true meaning of a passage will be found only as its relevance is found for the constantly urgent situation of the church in the world.

⁷⁹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," 8-18.

investigating the historical, geographical, and institutional circumstances which are determinative for the author's situation; (4) the principle of setting forth the real meaning of a statement or a passage; (5) the principle of investigating the context of a passage; (6) the principle of endeavoring to establish the extent to which exegesis could go beyond the literal biblical wording of a text; (7) the principle of interpreting a metaphorical expression, a figure of speech in which the thing signified is related to the figurative language in a manner that must be carefully worked out; (8) the principle of reading Scripture with the purpose of finding Christ in it.

Even though Kraus summarizes eight principles of Calvin's hermeneutics, he does not detail the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* from Calvin's exegetical writings. He only recognizes these principles as a significant tool of Calvin's hermeneutics.

Parker, one of the leading scholars in the field of Calvin's hermeneutics, has published important works on this subject since 1964.⁸⁰ His books provide "a considerable amount of material in comprehending the ways in which and the

Richard S. Gantley, "Current Trends in Calvinic Research, 1962-80," in *Calvinus Ecclesia Doctor*, ed. W. Neuser (Kampen: Kok, 1978), pp. 33-46, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1986), and *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*.

⁸⁰ T. H. L. Parker, "Calvin the Biblical Expositor," *The Churchman* 78 (1964): 23-31, "Calvin the Exegete: Change and Development," in *Calvinus Ecclesia Doctor*, ed. W. Neuser (Kampen: Kok, 1978), pp. 33-46, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1986), and *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*.

background from which Calvin's commentaries were written."⁸¹ He attempts to explore Calvin's hermeneutics including the principles of *perspicua brevitatis* (*brevitas et facilitas*) as the means by which one finds out the genuine sense.⁸² He maintains that Calvin applied to the interpretation of Scripture the Aristotelian concept of *perspicua brevitatis*.⁸³ Parker reminds us that Calvin sought to understand the mind of the author. He says:

The text of the document written by a man still remains the speech or revelation of the Spirit. It can be understood without conversion and assent but with positive rejection. By the inward illumination of the same Spirit it is believed and accepted. Yet what is believed and accepted is the plain meaning of the story or the argument, and that means, the plain sense of the text of the document. Hence, when the commentator reveals, clearly and succinctly, the mind of the writer expressed in the text, he is fulfilling almost his only duty.⁸⁴

Parker's view that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* relate to the intention of the author is correct. He, however, does not prove this relationship from Calvin's exegetical writings. Even though Parker dated back the rhetorical concept to Aristotle, he does not show how Calvin developed this Aristotelian concept from his exegetical writings.

⁸¹ Richard C. Gamble, "Current Trends in Calvin's Research, 1982-90," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Professor of Holy Scripture*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 93.

⁸² T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, pp. 85-108.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Walchenbach shows that the roots of Calvin's hermeneutics reached back to Chrysostom's method. In order to determine this influence, he investigates Calvin's *Praefatio in Chrysostomi Homilias*.⁸⁵ He describes the purpose of his dissertation as follows;

We want to know why Calvin turned to Chrysostom; on what grounds he was drawn to Chrysostom over against other Patristic exegetes; what Calvin found in Chrysostom that was favorable or unfavorable; what methods of interpretation Calvin employed as he entered Chrysostomic material in the commentaries; how Chrysostom understood this or that word, and Calvin made use of Chrysostom's interpretations; what text of Chrysostom, Calvin used.⁸⁶

He concludes that as Chrysostom emphasized the simple sense of Scripture, Calvin wrote his exegetical writings "according to principles which would contribute to but one goal, the unfolding of the mind of Biblical authors to *universum populum*."⁸⁷ One of the significant contributions of his dissertation is the insight that although Chrysostom was deficient in doctrine, Chrysostom's method had an influence on Calvin's ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.⁸⁸ Although Walchenbach shows that Chrysostom's simple method influenced Calvin's principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, he does not realize the difference between Chrysostom's method and

⁸⁵ CO 9.831-838.

⁸⁶ John Robert Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor," p. 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

Calvin's ideal.⁸⁹ The latter was rooted in the basic motives of Calvin's theology while in Chrysostom's case it was merely a matter of style. In fact Calvin was convinced that Scripture in communicating the message of salvation and faith prompted the implementation of these principles.

Ganoczy and Scheld's *Die Hermeneutik Calvins*⁹⁰ is one of the most important contributions to the study of Calvin's hermeneutics. They deal with the history of hermeneutics before Calvin, compare him with other Reformers, and investigate the important features of Calvin's hermeneutics. They state their view on Calvin's hermeneutics from the perspective of the Roman Catholic church. Since they research the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* from the perspective of the history of interpretation, they do not discover the organizing elements of this ideal from Calvin's exegetical writings.

Gamble is the first scholar that makes a thorough investigation of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as Calvin's hermeneutical ideal. Of course many scholars have recognized this ideal. They, however, have not examined it deeply. Gamble first argues that most scholars recognize the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as one of the hallmarks of

⁸⁹ In chapter 5 I shall deal with the difference between Chrysostom's method and Calvin's principles.

⁹⁰ Alexandre Ganoczy and Stefan Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins: Geistesgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen und Grundzüge* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983).

Calvin's exegetical methodology.⁹¹ Gamble shows that, according to Calvin, Melanchthon failed to write enough while Bucer was too verbose for men in business to read, and too profound to be easily understood by the readers.⁹² Calvin, therefore, suggested the proper hermeneutical method. That included the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.⁹³ Gamble accepts that John Chrysostom was one of the influences on Calvin's methodology,⁹⁴ but rejects the view that rhetoric formed the basic element of this influence.⁹⁵ Rather he insists that the Scriptures themselves provide us with a model for Calvin's hermeneutics.⁹⁶ He concludes that the ultimate presupposition of this hermeneutic is the clear brevity of the Scriptures. Scripture is in its meaning concise. Gamble confirms that Calvin's hermeneutical method is the one that corresponds to the nature and basic message of Scripture.⁹⁷ What Gamble discovered in this regard from the perspective of rhetoric, Chrysostom's influence on Calvin's method, and Scripture itself leads us to see the various angles of these

⁹¹ Richard C. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward An Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," 3.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-12.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 13-15.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

principles. But he does not investigate how the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* actually functioned as the hermeneutical means in Calvin's exegetical writings. It is in this regard that I hope to take the research on the role of *brevitas et facilitas* in Calvin's works a step further by describing the component elements of these principles. This will be done in chapter 7 of this dissertation.

Torrance argues that Calvin's hermeneutics was influenced by Luther as well as by his own studies of law and the humanities.⁹⁸ Insisting also on John Major's influence on Calvin's hermeneutics, Torrance recognizes Calvin as a great interpreter, laying the basis for the modern science of interpretation and exposition.

It was in his unique combination of the descriptive and explicatory approaches in inquiry, and his insight into the way in which the material method of investigation, unfolding understanding under the determination of the given, works with and helps to perfect the formal method of interpretation in which every technical tool of language and thought is applied to the subject-matter in order to make it as perspicuous as possible, that he laid the basis for the modern science of interpretation and exposition.⁹⁹

Torrance shows that Calvin appeared to owe much to Luther's doctrine of the mighty, living, active Word of God.¹⁰⁰ He argues that Calvin's whole approach to Scripture and its interpretation falls within the reorientation that

⁹⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press: 1988).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

came about through Luther's rediscovery of the Word in which God communicates Himself in all His grace and power to the believer.¹⁰¹ He insists that Calvin's hermeneutics was influenced by a few rhetoricians. He deals with the sources of the rhetorical background of Calvin's writings as follows:

His appreciation for Cicero, Quintilian and Seneca, for example, deeply affected Calvin's style of thought and speech, his mode of arguing and putting a case, his handling of written evidence, and his treatment of ancient documents, and behind all it affected his use of language in relation to logic and of dialectic in relation to action.¹⁰²

But Torrance does not state how their influence on Calvin made him develop the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, neither does he indicate how Calvin employed these principles.

Baxter develops profound insights into Calvin's hermeneutics of the Old Testament.¹⁰³ First he mentions that Calvin's own approach to and understanding of the Old Testament were formed by his confrontation with the Anabaptists and the Roman Catholics and his perception of their 'Judaizing' of the Old Testament. He argues that Calvin's fundamental hermeneutical goal was to read the Old Testament with the aim of finding Christ. He goes on to say

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 101-2.

¹⁰³ Anthony G. Baxter, "John Calvin's Use and Hermeneutics of the Old Testament" (Ph.D. diss., University of Sheffield, 1987). For an excellent study on Calvin's hermeneutics of the Old Testament, see W. de Greef, *Calvijn en het Oude Testament* (Groningen: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1984), and Peter Opitz, *Calvins theologische Hermeneutik* (Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1994), pp. 7-40.

that Calvin repudiated allegory, and adhered to the literal meaning of the Old Testament by using a grammatical-historical method. He deals with interesting themes like accommodation, typology, and Christological typology. Baxter, however, does not deal with the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* at all.

Puckett, like A. G. Baxter, examines Calvin's hermeneutics of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁴ He deals with two presuppositions of Calvin's interpretation: the dual authorship of Scripture and the unity of Scripture. He reminds us that, according to Calvin, Scripture is written by both the Holy Spirit and the human writers, and that his starting point of theological interpretation was the correct understanding of these two sides. By emphasizing the unity of Scripture, Calvin overcame the discontinuity of the two testaments. Finally Puckett investigates Calvin's exegetical *via media* in which he employed typology and Prophecy, and rejected allegory.¹⁰⁵ He concludes that the illumination by the Holy Spirit and philological expertise are both needed by the interpreter of Scripture. He states,

But they are not necessary in the same way. The exegete needs illumination in order to understand the meaning of the Old Testament as a whole - that is, as a witness to Jesus Christ. Apart from such illumination, any other understanding of the Old Testament is empty and useless. However, while this illumination guarantees that the interpreter will understand the message of the Old Testament as a whole, it in no way guarantees that he

¹⁰⁴ David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-113.

will understand the meaning of any specific text.¹⁰⁶

Puckett deals with the general principles of Calvin's hermeneutics from his Old Testament commentaries. But he does not examine the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

Many Calvin scholars have attempted to describe the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* from their perspectives. There is, however, no satisfying analysis of these principles in their studies. In order to overcome their limits, I shall investigate all Calvin's exegetical writings and analyse Calvin's own statements on the method of *brevitas et facilitas*.

E. Method

Calvin employed several principles which the other Reformers also used in the interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

¹⁰⁷ Recently some scholars dealt with the principles of Calvin's hermeneutics such as accommodation and typology. For an excellent study on the principle of accommodation, see Ford Lewis Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 19-38. Also see A. G. Baxter, "John Calvin's Use and Hermeneutics of the Old Testament," 228-242; Clinton M. Ashley, "John Calvin's Utilization of the Principle of Accommodation and Its Continuing Significance for an Understanding of Biblical Language". On the principle of typology, see C. van der Waal, "The Gospel according to John and the Old Testament," in *Essays on the Jewish Background of the Fourth Gospel*. *Neotestamentica* 6 (1972). Annual Publication of Die Nuwe-Testamentiese Werkgenootskap van Suid-Afrika (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1973), pp. 31-32. Also see Gordon Bates, "The Typology of Adam and Christ in John Calvin," *The Hartford Quarterly* 5 (1985): 42-57.

purpose of my dissertation is not to explore all the principles Calvin used in his writings. Rather its focus is to examine the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture and the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, and to investigate the vital role that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* plays in this hermeneutical programme.

Against the authority of the Roman Catholic church and its method of Scriptural interpretation, Calvin, like Luther, stressed the principles of *sola Scriptura* and *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. His theology played an important role in the development of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. In order for his readers to understand the intention of the author of Scripture and the true meaning of the text easily and clearly, Calvin employed this distinctive principle in his own hermeneutics, which was different from that employed by the other Reformers. Calvin stated that the other Reformers failed in employing the hermeneutical principles that conveyed the simple and brief meaning of the text of Scripture to their readers.

Calvin clearly suggested the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as a basic dimension of his theological hermeneutics in the dedicatory preface in his *Commentary on Romans*. There he agreed with his old friend Simon Grynaeus on the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin was completely confident of the superiority of this method. He insisted on it as the only hermeneutical method which helped the readers understand

Scripture. In other words, Calvin presented his readers with the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as distinctive principles for the interpretation of Scripture.

In order to obtain a clear understanding of Calvin's hermeneutics, I studied the historical, theological, rhetorical, and hermeneutical dimensions of the issues at stake. In investigating the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, I utilized Calvin's commentaries, his sermons and his letters, his theological treatises, and his *Institutes*. The manner in which I refer to exegetical examples of the hermeneutical issues I discuss is related to the way in which Calvin himself worked.

The purpose of chapter 2 is to study the background of Calvin's hermeneutics. It includes how Calvin prepared himself to be a faithful interpreter of Scripture. I deal with the factors that had influence on Calvin's hermeneutics. In chapters 3 and 4, I survey the history of hermeneutics from Calvin's own perspective. My emphasis is on Calvin's attitude toward other interpreters. In chapter 5, I examine the development, the source, and the employment of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. In order to ascertain the origin of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, I compare this method with the rhetorical skill described with the same term. I argue that Calvin regarded the nature of Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Chapter 6 examines two theological presuppositions in Calvin's hermeneutics: firstly

the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture, and secondly the principle *Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. As far as the Reformers' doctrine of Scripture is concerned, I deal with the fact that the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* is closely related to the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture which offered the Reformers the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. In chapter 7, I identify and describe ten component elements as the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 10, says he calls Calvin an exegetical genius of the first order, and says, "If Luther was the king of translators, Calvin was the king of commentators." J. H. Florin, "The Hermeneutics of Calvin," p. 181, says: "Calvin was an exquisite exegete apart from his Institutes, which can be regarded as a monument of explicit and accurate exegesis, there is the impressive work of his commentaries." F. W. Farrer, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 143-144, describes Calvin as one of the greatest interpreters as follows: "He is one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture who ever lived. He owes his position to a combination of assets. He had a vigorous intellect, a dauntless spirit, a logical mind, a quick insight, a thorough knowledge of the human heart, quickening rich and strange experiences; above all, a manly and glowing sense of the grandeur of the Divine. The neatness, precision and lucidity of his style, his classic training and wide knowledge, his methodical accuracy of procedure, his early independence, his avoidance of needless and commonplace

CHAPTER 2

CALVIN AS AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE

John Calvin was not born a great interpreter. But by God's providence he became one of the great interpreters of Scripture in the history of Christianity. In this chapter I shall investigate John Calvin as a great interpreter. First, I shall deal with how the young Calvin trod the path of learning, what, before his sudden conversion (*subita conversio*), he learned from the humanists, and how he applied the humanistic methods to the interpretation of Scripture. Secondly, I shall examine whose influence made Calvin a great interpreter.¹ Six prominent masters at the colleges which he

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 525. Here he calls Calvin an exegetical genius of the first order, and says, "If Luther was the king of translators, Calvin was the king of commentators." L. Floor, "The Hermeneutics of Calvin," p. 181, says: "Calvin was an exquisite exegete. Apart from his *Institutes*, which can be regarded as a monument of exquisite and accurate exegesis, there is the impressive row of his commentaries." F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 343-344, describes Calvin as one of the greatest interpreters as follows: "He is one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture who ever lived. He owes that position to a combination of merits. He had a vigorous intellect, a dauntless spirit, a logical mind, a quick insight, a thorough knowledge of the human heart, quickened by rich and strange experience; above all, a manly and glowing sense of the grandeur of the Divine. The neatness, precision, and lucidity of his style, his classic training and wide knowledge, his methodical accuracy of procedure, his manly independence, his avoidance of needless and commonplace

attended had a decisive influence on his development as a great interpreter of Scripture²

A. Calvin's Training

Calvin was arguably the greatest theologian among the Reformers, one of the foremost leaders in the history of Christianity, and among the most influential scholars in world history. Robert M. Kingdon introduces the Reformer to us as follows:

John Calvin, a French theologian and ecclesiastical statesman, was one of the most important leaders of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Theological, ecclesiastical, and political ideas that he advanced in many publications, a model church that he created and directed in the city of Geneva, and the assistance he

homiletics, his deep religious feeling, his careful attention to the entire scope and context of every passage, and the fact that he has commented on almost of the Bible, make him tower above the great majority of those who have written on Holy Scripture." For the general studies of Calvin as a brilliant interpreter, see F. W. Farrar, "Calvin as an Expositor," *The Expositor* 7 (1884): 426-444; Paul Traugott Fuhrman, "Calvin the Expositor," *Interpretation* 6 (1952): 188-209; I. H. De Long, "Calvin as an Interpreter of the Bible," pp. 162-182; W. McKane, "Calvin as an Old Testament Commentator," *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif* 25 (1984): 25-259; T. H. L. Parker, "Calvin the Bible Expositor," *The Churchman* 78 (1964): 23-32; A. T. Robertson, "Calvin as an Interpreter of Scripture," pp. 577-578; Philip Schaff, "Calvin as a Commentator," pp. 462-469; Robert Wierenga, "Calvin the Commentator," *Reformed Review* 39 (1978): 4-13.

² There were six teachers: Mathurin Cordier (mid-1523 to end of year), Pierre de l'Etoile (1523-29; 1532-33 ?), Andrea Alciati (autumn 1529-end of 1530), Melchior Wolmar (end of 1530-end of February 1531), Guillaume Budé (1531-1532 ?), and Pierre Danés (late fall, 1531 ?). See Jack B. Rogers & Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*, 1979, pp. 94-96.

provided to the political and intellectual leaders of several countries profoundly influenced the development of Protestantism in many parts of Europe and in North America.³

In order to illuminate Calvin's position as one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture, we first have to take cognisance of his educational background.⁴

John Calvin was born at Noyon,⁵ a celebrated town in

³ Robert M. Kingdon, "John Calvin," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed. For the studies on the biography of John Calvin, see Barend Jacobus Engelbrecht, "Calvyn as die grondlegger van die Reformatoriese leer," *Die Hervormer* 50 (1959): 12-13, 16-17, 20; Emile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps* (Geneve: Slatkine, 1969); A. D. Pont, "Calvyn: 'n lewensskets," *Die Hervormer* 52 (1962): 5-6, 18-19; Benjamin B. Warfield, "John Calvin: The Man and his Work," *Methodist Review* 58 (1909): 642-663; Richard Stauffer, "Calvin," in *International Calvinism: 1541-1715*, ed. Menna Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 15-38; Charles Partee, "Farel's Influence on Calvin: A Prolusion," in *Actes du Colloque Guillaume Farel*, eds. Pierre Barthel, Rémy Scheurer and Richard Stauffer (New Haven: Yale University, 1983), pp. 173-85; T. H. L. Parker, "Calvin in His Age," *Reformed and Presbyterian World* 25 (1959): 300-07; William J. Bouwsma, "The Spirituality of John Calvin," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987); 318-33.

⁴ For the study of the educational preparation for the great exegete of Scripture, see Dean Greer McKee, "The Contribution of John Calvin to New Testament Exegesis."

⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, pp. 297-298: "an ancient cathedral city, called Noyon-la-Sainte, on account of its many churches, convents, priests, and monks, in the northern province of Picardy, which has given birth to the crusading monk, Peter of Amiens, to the leaders of the French Reformation and counter Reformation (the Ligue), and to many revolutionary as well as reactionary characters."

Picardy in north eastern France, on July 10th in 1509.⁶ Noyon was once famous as the place where bishops like St. Merdad and St. Eloi lived,⁷ and where Charlemagne (later Holy Roman emperor) was crowned king of the western Frankish kingdom of Neustria in 768 and Hugh Capet, king of France and founder of the Capetian dynasty (which ruled directly until 1328), was also crowned in 987.⁸ Will Durant, an historian, relating Noyon to Calvin's idea of theocracy, says, "It was an ecclesiastical city, dominated by its cathedral and its bishop; here at the outset he had an example of theocracy - the rule of a society by clergymen in the name of God."⁹

The name of his father was Gérard Cauvin ("whose surname, latinized as 'Calvinus', became Calvin in French"¹⁰), who was a man of hard and severe character. His mother, Joan Franc

⁶ Theodore Beza, "Life of John Calvin," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 1, ed. by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 21. Here Beza recorded Calvin's birthday as "the 27th July in the year of our Lord 1509".

⁷ B. J. van der Walt, *From Noyon to Geneva: A Pilgrimage in the Steps of John Calvin (1509-1564)* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for CHE, 1979), p. 3.

⁸ "Noyon," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia*, 15th ed.

⁹ Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*, *The Story of Civilization: Part VI* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 459. He considers Geneva as the city of God in the world, citing an example that Valentin Andreae, a Lutheran minister from Württemberg, praised the life of Geneva enviously. *Ibid.*, pp. 472-476.

¹⁰ Richard Stauffer, "Calvin," p. 15.

(Jeanne Lefrane), was noted for her personal beauty and great religious fervor and strictness.¹¹ Both of them were persons of good repute in this town.¹² Gérard had "a prominent position as apostolic secretary to the bishop of Noyon, proctor in the Chapter of the diocese, and fiscal procurator of the county."¹³ He was highly esteemed by the noble families in Noyon and had a good relationship with them. This close connection offered Calvin good circumstances to develop as a great exegete, as he did not have to worry about money.

There were two important elements in his early training. First, the great ambition and the sacrificial support of his father was the starting point of his illustrious career. Although he never knew that his youngest son Calvin would become a great exegete, Gérard Cauvin, having ambition for his sons, made his son study the courses of the college of the Capettes in Noyon. It has not been known what courses Calvin studied in the college of his hometown. One would probably suppose that because the college had only a few professors, there were not academic courses like law, philosophy, rhetoric, and the original languages including Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. But not being satisfied with Calvin's attending this college, his father sent Calvin to the college of La

¹¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, p. 298.

¹² Theodore Beza, "Life of John Calvin," p. 21.

¹³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, p. 298.

Marche in Paris in 1523 when he was just fourteen years old.¹⁴ At that time, like other European cities, Paris also was buzzing with the fire of the Reformation set off by Luther in Wittenberg and Zwingli in Zürich.¹⁵ His father devoted his life to the education of Calvin, giving him a cathedral benefice.¹⁶ The devoted support of his father offered Calvin a

¹⁴ William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 9. Here he says, "Calvin's father dispatched him to the university of Paris when he was about twelve, then the normal age for beginning higher education." He measures twelve on Calvin's arriving at Paris because he thinks that Calvin would have been sent in 1521. But Philip Schaff, F. Wendel, and Alister E. McGrath accept the year as "1523". This date is the general view of the scholars. Against this view T. H. L. Parker insists on Calvin's entry at La March in 1520 or 1521. See T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Batavia: Lion Publishing Corporation, 1987), pp. 187-8. Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 27, concludes as follows: "Calvin probably attended Latin Classes under the supervision of Cordier at either or Sainte-Barbe, without the young Calvin having any formal association with either or any college at this initial stage."

¹⁵ W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), p. 18. Here he describes as follows: "There Jean Vallière was executed on August 8 for his Lutheran ideas. Since the beginning of 1519, the intellectual elite had been reading the works of Luther that were printed in Basel, and on April 15, 1521, the theological faculty of the Sorbonne in Paris had followed the lead of Pope Leo X in condemning Luther's teachings. For months later the Parliament of Paris banned all of Luther's writings."

¹⁶ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation: A Study of Calvin as Social Reformer, Churchman, Pastor and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 2 Here he says, "throughout his whole student life, he lived on money originally given for the fulfillment of religious services, and diverted it for his own use for the payment of a mere pittance to a local substitute in the cathedral."

great blessing.¹⁷ The fact that, unlike Luther, who had as a father, a miner, who did not want his son to be a monk, Calvin could live in good circumstances provided by his parents, gives us an important key to understanding the process of the life of Calvin as preparation for developing into a great interpreter of Scripture.

Secondly, in the process of his becoming a great interpreter, the essential influence upon young Calvin was his friendships at the college of the Capettes in his hometown. At that time his native town, Noyon, was ruled by Charles de Hangest. From his childhood Calvin had come in touch with the sons of this family, especially with the sons of Montmor. In 1523, with three young men of the Hangest family, Calvin was

¹⁷ François Wendel, *Calvin: Origin and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1963), p.17. Here on the devoted support of Calvin's father with great ambition for his son F. Wendel says, "As for the father, he had, it seems, great ambitions for his sons and especially for Jean. His good relations with the bishop and the Chapter enabled him to obtain for Jean a chaplaincy to the altar of La Gesine in Noyon Cathedral. Jean Calvin was then twelve years of age: this benefice must have enabled him to pursue his studies without drawing too heavily on his father's revenues: he resigned it, for unknown reasons, in 1529, but resumed it in 1531. In 1527 he became the occupant of another benefice; this time it was the curacy of St-Martin-de-Martheville, which he afterwards exchanged for that of Pont l'Eveque, the place from which the Cauvin family had come. In procuring these benefices for his son, Gerard Cauvin was only doing what was customary at the time, He may have had to commit himself to guide Jean towards the study of theology, which however would not be surprising on the part of an episcopal official."

sent to Paris.¹⁸ One of them was Claude de Hangest, Abbot of St. Eloi's at Noyon, to whom Calvin dedicated his commentary on the *De Clementia* of Seneca in Paris on April 4 in 1532. Calvin called him the most saintly and most wise prelate in his day.¹⁹ Williston Walker describes the situation in the hometown and the friendships of Calvin with them as follows:

Quite as influential in the development of the boy's life as this instruction in the schoolroom of the Capettes were the friendships which he formed with his contemporaries among the sons of the noble family of Hangest, notably with those of Louis de Hangest, lord of Montmor, and of his brother, Adrien, lord of Genlis. To Claude, son of the nobleman last named, Calvin was, years later, to dedicate his first book, when Claude had become abbot of Saint-Eloi at Noyon. With Joachim and Ives, and a brother of theirs whose name is now lost, sons of the seigneur of Montmor, Calvin stood in intimate school

¹⁸ McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, pp. 25-26, opposes the traditional view that Calvin actually began to study theology while at Paris. He points out, "Most recent Calvin biographies slavishly repeat Rashdall's statement that theology was taught - apart from at the houses of the various religious orders - solely at the Sorbonne and the Collège de Navarre. This assertion rests upon an unreliable seventeenth century source - the notebook of Philippe Bouvot. . . . However, the evidence available does not permit us to conclude that Calvin actually began to study theology while at Paris. If he were to have gone up to Paris in 1523, he could have completed the quinquennium by 1527 or 1528. At this point, he would have been able to begin studies in one of superior faculties - theology, law or medicine. Yet it is at this point that Calvin's father appears to have directed his son to the study of law, rather than theology, and that the move to Orléans took place. This suggests that Calvin had graduated in arts by this point, in order to enter the superior faculty of civil law at Orléans. It is therefore necessary to stress that we have no evidence that Calvin ever began formal study within the Parisian faculty of theology, although we have ample evidence that he initially intended to do so, probably on account of the direction of his father."

¹⁹ *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, ed. Ford Lewis Battles and Andre Malan Hugo (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 10.

fellowship; and his relations to these households of Montmor and Gelis seem indeed, to have been much closer than merely those of the schoolroom.²⁰

Gérard's relationship with the noble family explains the fact that the young Calvin was "from a boy very liberally educated in the family of the Mommors, one of the most distinguished in that quarter."²¹ Afterwards a son of de Mommor followed Calvin to Geneva.²² Calvin's friendships played an important role in developing his humanistic study before his sudden conversion. This background of Calvin's education helped him to make rapid progress in learning, and let him acquire "a refinement of manners and a certain aristocratic air, which distinguished him from Luther and Zwingli."²³

In an attempt to understand Calvin's intellectual development, one should keep in mind that before his theological studies, he first studied law with leading humanists. Therefore his hermeneutical method was influenced by his humanistic learning.²⁴ Then Calvin learned from the

²⁰ Williston Walker, *John Calvin: The Organizer of Reformed Protestantism 1509-1564* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 27-8.

²¹ T. Beza, *Life of John Calvin*, p. 21.

²² Ibid.

²³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, p. 300.

²⁴ For the studies of the humanistic formation of Calvin, see Josef Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin: Studien zur Gedankenwelt des französischen Frühhumanismus* (Graz: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachf., Ges. M.B.H., 1950), pp. 119-483, and *Calvin und das Recht* (Graz: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachf., Ges. M.B.H., 1934), pp. 1-93. Quirinus Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in*

humanists rhetoric, philosophy, and philology skills needed by a great interpreter of Scripture.

The first steps in Calvin's development as an interpreter were set when he went to the college of La Marche. This college was imbued with a humanistic spirit with which Calvin now came into contact. Calvin fortunately had a chance to meet a famous professor in the college of La Marche. His name was Mathurin Cordier, the best Latin teacher in the country and one of the founders of modern pedagogy. He had a great influence upon Calvin who learned to read and to write Latin from him.²⁵ He was also the first master who introduced Calvin

French Humanism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), pp. 146-164. This book is the best to show how Calvin became a humanist and how, after his sudden conversion, he made progress in humanism. Cf. A. E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, pp. 51-67; F. J. M. Potgieter, *De Verhouding tussen die teologie en die filosofie by Calvyn* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1939); François Wendel, *Calvin et l'humanism* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), pp. 7-34, and *Calvin*, pp. 27-45.

²⁵ Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), p. 57. On his influence upon Calvin Ganoczy writes the following: "This outstanding priest was definitely a partisan of pervasive reform, both in teaching methods and education which he wanted to base on trust and not constraint, and all aspects of piety, which he hoped would be less formal and more Christ-centered. Cordier proved himself to be an heir of biblical humanism and of the *devotio moderna*. He wanted students to be initiated not only in grammar but at the same time in piety and in love of Christ, his word and his laws. Although the young Calvin spent only a few months in the school of this illustrious master, Cordier had a profound influence on him." Cordier's influence on Calvin, however, does not mean that he taught young Calvin the Gospel and made the most important contribution to Calvin's conversion. The connection between Cordier's influence and Calvin's sudden conversion is an unproved conjecture.

to the philosophy of humanism and Christian piety.²⁶ T. F. Torrance points out correctly that M. Cordier "not only laid the foundation of Calvin's education and taught Calvin the true method of learning, but imbued him with such a taste for literary studies that Calvin could trace the progress he made in later years to Cordier's instruction."²⁷ When Calvin founded the Academy of Geneva in 1559, he provided Cordier with the position to instruct Latin. There he died at the age of eighty-five in the same year as Calvin did in 1564. Cordier's influence upon Calvin was demonstrated when Calvin dedicated to his old teacher his *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Thessalonians* on February 17th, 1550. Here Calvin called him "a man of eminent piety and learning, principal of the college Lausanne."²⁸ Calvin expressed his heartfelt thanks as follows:

It is befitting that you should come in for a share in my labors, inasmuch as, under your auspices, having entered on a course of study, I made proficiency at least so far as to be prepared to profit in some degree the Church of God. When my father sent me, while yet a boy, to Paris, after I had simply tasted the first elements of the Latin tongue, Providence so ordered it that I had, for a short

²⁶ F. Wendel, *Calvin et l'humanism*, p. 11; Alexander Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, p. 57. Steven Ozment, also points out the fact that Cordier introduced Calvin to 'the scholarly world of humanism', in *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 352.

²⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p. 96.

²⁸ "The Author's Dedicatory Epistle," in *Comm. on 2 Th.* p. 233.

time, the privilege of having you as my instructor, that I might be taught by you the true method of learning, in such a way that I might be prepared afterwards to make somewhat better proficiency.²⁹

According to John T. McNeill, it was Cordier who let Calvin discover the delights of good learning and acquire that unflinching sense of style and diction that marked all his writings.³⁰ Then under him Calvin learned "in large measure something that was to be one of his greatest assets: his style, so that Calvin could be both an excellent Latinist and a writer with the capability of expressing an elegant French."³¹ Later his Latin study made it possible that he could read the Fathers' writings and the rhetorical writings of Cicero and Quintilian.³² In Latin Calvin probably began to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (London: Oxford University, 1954), p. 98.

³¹ Ross William Collins, *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva*, p. 22. For the studies on Calvin's style of language, see Francis M. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin in His French Polemical Treatises* (London: Oxford University, 1967); J. Plattard, "L'Institution Chrestienne de Calvin, premier monument de l'eloquence francaise," in *Revue des Cours et Conférences* 37 (1935-6): 495-510, and "Le beau style de Calvin," *Bulletin de l'association Guillaume Budé* 62 (1939): 22-29.

³² For the relation between rhetoric and Calvin's theology, see Benoit Girardin, *Rhetorique et Theologique: Calvin, Le commentaire de l'epitre aux Romains*, *Theologie Historique* 54 (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1979); Lynda Serene Jones, "Fulfilled in your hearing: Rhetoric and Doctrine in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1991); David E. Willis, "Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology," in *The Context of Contemporary Theology*, eds. Alexander J. McKelway and E. David Willis (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), pp. 43-63. Willis insists on Augustine's influence on Calvin's rhetorical

have a chance to understand the theological thoughts of the Fathers. From the writings of Cicero and Quintilian, Calvin also was able to learn the terms and the concepts of *brevitas et facilitas*, which had long been used by Plato and Aristotle in their rhetorical writings.

Generally speaking, rhetoric³³ is closely connected with the interpretation of Scripture because Scripture itself employs many rhetorical devices. C. J. Labuschagne writes, for instance, that there are many rhetorical questions in the Old Testament. As an example he indicates that especially when the author of Scripture expresses Yahweh's incomparability, such

theology: "Augustine is the father to whom Calvin has special recourse, and it is in Calvin's reading of him that we find the primary source of his rhetorical theology. In Augustine, Calvin found the ancient rhetorical tradition turned to the true philosophy of Christ. One of Augustine's chief contributions is that he extended and altered the Ciceronian tendency in the rhetorical tradition and used this latter to shape a distinctively Christian eloquence.

³³ For the studies of rhetorical hermeneutics, see H. J. Bernard Combrink, "The Rhetoric of Sacred Scripture," in *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 102-123; H. G. Gadamer, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik: Metakritische Eroerterungen zu Wahrheit und Methode," in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, ed. K. Apel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), pp. 57-82; M. J. Hyde and C. R. Smith, "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 347-63; S. Mailloux, "Rhetorical Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985): 620-41; G. W. Most, "Rhetorik und Hermeneutik: Zur Konstitution der Neuzeitlichkeit," *Antike und Abendland* 30 (1984): 62-79; H. P. Rickman, "Rhetoric and Hermeneutics," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 14 (1981): 15-25; A. B. Miller, "Rhetorical exegesis," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 5 (1972): 111-18; J. Botha, "On the 'Reinvention' of Rhetoric," *Scriptura: Journal of Bible and Theology* 31 (1989): 14-31.

questions are employed. He writes as follows:

Rhetorical questions are frequently used in the Old Testament to express the absolute power, uniqueness, singularity and incomparability of a person. The rhetorical question is one of the most forceful and effectual ways employed in speech for driving home some idea or conviction. Because of its impressive and persuasive effect the hearer is not merely listener: he is forced to frame the expected answer in his mind, and by doing so he actually becomes a co-expressor of the speaker's conviction.³⁴

Some scholars argue that Paul's rhetoric was a focus of the Reformers like Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin.³⁵ The Reformers influenced by the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla employed a rhetorical approach in their commentaries on the New Testament.³⁶ On rhetorical method H. D. Betz argues that Paul's epistles had "classical categories of invention, arrangement, and style in mind."³⁷ He also regards these as

³⁴ C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, Pretoria Oriental Series, vol. 5, ed. A Van Selms (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), p. 23. This book is a translation of "*Die Onvergelyklikheid van Jahwe in die Ou Testament*" (D.D. diss., Universiteit van Pretoria, 1962). As another example, he suggests that the rhetorical question such as 'who is like. . . ?' is representative. Cf. 1 Sam. 26:15, 1 Sam. 22:14, Job 34:7, Eccles. 8:1 (pp. 8-30).

³⁵ Duane F. Watson and Alan J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method*, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 102-3.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

"an interpretive tool."³⁸ Kennedy maintains that Matthew employed "rhetoric in the most comprehensive way, attending to invention, arrangement, style, and amplification."³⁹ I shall have the opportunity later on to investigate rhetoric as one of the sources of Calvin's ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.⁴⁰

From the college of La Marche,⁴¹ Calvin was transferred by his father, for reasons we do not know, to the college of Montaigu at the end of 1523. Calvin made great progress in the formation of his intellect during his stay in this college. A. Ganoczy writes on Calvin's studies there:

³⁸ Ibid. Betz, according to Watson and Hauser, identifies Galatians as "an apologetic letter using judicial rhetoric common to courts of law." Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 24, says: "The apologetic letter, such as Galatians, presupposes the real or fictitious situation of the court of law, with jury, accuser, and defendant. In the case of Galatian, the addressees are identical with the jury, with Paul being the defendant and his opponents the accusers. This situation makes Paul's Galatian letter a selfapology, delivered not in person but in a written form. If one looks at the letter from the point of view of its function, i.e., from the rhetorical point of view, this substitution is indeed a poor one. Since it is simply a lifeless piece of paper, it eliminates one of the most important weapons of the rhetorician, the oral delivery."

³⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

⁴⁰ See chapter 5. After describing the fact that Calvin learned numerous rhetorical devices from the humanists, Bouwsma stresses the rhetorical role in Calvin's commentaries: "A central principle of humanist hermeneutics also made his commentaries rhetorical," in *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*. Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union and University of California, 1986), p. 12. Cf. W. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, p. 126.

⁴¹ The exact period of Calvin's stay in the college of La Marche is not known. It seems to have been few months.

At Montaigau his studies probably consisted of logic, metaphysics, ethics, rhetoric and science, all of which were taught on the basis of Aristotle with the teachers drawing inspiration from authorities like Ockham, Buridan, Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. These studies were intended as prolegomena to theology and Calvin finished them at eighteen without having been able to begin the sacred sciences which consisted of a commentary on the Bible and the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. He thus escaped the scholastic strait-jacket and kept his intellectual virginity for a humanist and soon a Lutheran interpretation of Catholic tradition.⁴²

At the college of Montaigu there were a few famous scholars such as Beda, Antonio Coronel, and John Major. Probably Calvin began to hear of the Reformation of Luther and the humanistic school from them. A Spaniard, Antonio Coronel, taught Calvin the grammar course of Latin as well as philosophy.⁴³ Through Antonio Coronel's Latin tuition, Calvin, therefore, having already learned Latin from Cordier, became one of the great Latin scholars in the 16th century. This did not only enable him to read the writings of philosophers, rhetoricians, and the Fathers, but also later on to write his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his commentaries in Latin. Here at Montaigu Calvin came into contact with Luther's thought albeit in the negative evaluation that Beda gave of it. Here also Calvin experienced the influence of John Major who taught him "direct knowledge of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and of the Occamist interpretation that he put upon

⁴² Alexandre Ganoczy, "Calvin," in *The Reformation*, ed. Pierre Chaunu (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1985), pp. 120-2.

⁴³ T. Beza, "Life of John Calvin," pp. 21-2.

them."⁴⁴ Following F. Wendel, J. T. McNeill writes:

It is highly likely that he came under the instruction of the celebrated Scot, John Major, or Mair, who returned to Paris in 1525 after a period of teaching in his native country. He was a very learned scholastic philosopher of the Ockhamist persuasion. Among his works were a valuable *History of Greater Britain* (1521) and a commentary on the Gospels (1529), in which he assailed the writings of Wycliffe, Huss, and Luther. It may be reasonably inferred that Calvin heard from his lips some of the material of the latter book before its publication; Major's lectures may indeed have given him his first substantial knowledge of Luther.⁴⁵

In 1963 Karl Reuter⁴⁶ on this issue dared to put forward the hypothesis that Major had a decisive influence on Calvin's intellectual development; that he introduced Calvin to a new conception of anti-Pelagian, Scotist theology, a renewed Augustinianism, and positivism in regard to Scripture.⁴⁷ In

⁴⁴ F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ J. T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, p. 100. Steven Ozment, also has the same view of them, in *The Age of Reform 1250-1550*, p. 354.

⁴⁶ Karl Reuter, *Das Grundverständnis der Theologie Calvins unter Hinbeziehung ihrer geschichtlichen Abhängigkeiten* (Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1963). David C. Steinmetz summarizes Major's influence upon Calvin as follows: "Karl Reuter in 1963 attempted to analyze the basic themes in Calvin's thought and to trace these themes back to their classical and medieval roots. Reuter stressed the importance of Calvin's years at the College de Montaigu and argued that through John Major the young Calvin was influenced by Duns Scotus and Gregory of Rimini, especially by Scotistic personalism and by nominalist epistemology, an epistemology which led, in Reuter's opinion, to a scriptural positivism. Reuter was also interested in the influence of Bernard and the *Devotio moderna* on Calvin's piety and of humanism on Calvin's theology of preaching.", in "Theology of Calvin and Calvinism," in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (Missouri: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), p. 223.

⁴⁷ A. E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, p. 37.

contrast to him, A. Ganoczy and A. E. McGrath argue that Major's direct influence on Calvin's theology cannot be proved.⁴⁸ It is, however, certain that Calvin knew a little of the theology of John Major. The period in the college of Montaigu was very important for Calvin because he could have a chance to master Latin, rhetoric, and philosophy. This training of Calvin was clearly expressed in his commentary on the *De Clementia* of Seneca and, after his conversion, in his interpretation of Scripture. The period in the college of Montaigu was significant, not as preparation for his role as a Reformer, but in that it exposed him to humanist thinking which had an impact on the method used by him for the exegesis of Scripture.

Later his father, who originally intended him to study theology, changed his mind and ordered Calvin to study law because he expected Calvin to become a person with wealth and

⁴⁸ A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, pp.174-8; A. E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, pp. 36-9. A. Ganoczy, disagrees with F. Wendel and K. Reuter: "I do not think that any influence of Major on Calvin's thought has been established, despite the claims of researchers as eminent as F. Wendel and K. Reuter" ("Calvin," p. 122). W. de Greef, however, insists that John Major brought Calvin into contact with the thought world of Peter Lombard and Augustine, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, p. 20. For the relationship between John Major and John Calvin see A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Use of the Fathers and the Medieval," *Calvin Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 149-205.

honor.⁴⁹ But this second plan of his father to make him a good lawyer for a secure life, providentially turned out to be the best possible way for his future as an interpreter of the Bible. In order to be a lawyer, Calvin studied law and rhetoric from Peter De l'Etoile in the university of Orléans and from Andreas Alciati in the university of Bourges. By studying law, Calvin as a humanist learned the necessary method for the interpretation of an original text. A. E. McGrath argues that the sources of the hermeneutical method of Calvin was found in his study of law in the advanced atmosphere of Orléans and Bourges.⁵⁰ Calvin's legal training prepared him to accurately establish the intent of the author of Scripture and the genuine meaning of the text, and to consider the historical background. Donald K. McKim relates Calvin's studying law to his hermeneutical method as follows:

As we have observed, humanist legal scholars were seeking direct access to the corpus of Roman law, not via learned

⁴⁹ T. Beza, about the reasons why Calvin's father changed his first plan, says that the design of making him a priest was interrupted by a change in the view of his father because he saw that law was a surer road to wealth and honor. ("Life of John Calvin," p. 22). In relation to the reason why his father changed his mind, Wendel, points to the real problem as follows: "He caused his son to abandon theology because he was no longer assured of the support of the church dignitaries of Noyon, upon whom he had been counting to provide Jean with a first-class appointment. In consequence of his management of the winding-up of an estate, of which he had not been able to render an acceptable account, Gerard was now embroiled with the Chapter of Noyon. He thought therefore that he was obliged to seek a career for his son elsewhere, and, relying upon the celebrity of Pierre de l'Estsoile, he sent Jean to pursue legal studies at Orleans.", in *Calvin*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ A. McGrath, *The Life of John Calvin*, p. 59.

authorities or traditions, but through the study of the history and social customs of ancient Rome. Such study gave them a direct understanding of the intentions and meanings of the legal texts. Calvin applied a similar concern for context to his work with Scripture. Circumstances and culture are always main ingredients to be understood as one seeks to interpret the Bible. . . . Concern for context led Calvin to seek the divine intention revealed in Scripture. His studies in legal exegesis showed him that the intent of the author is more important than the etymology of words.⁵¹

Thus the knowledge obtained through Calvin's study of law became an important tool for his becoming a great interpreter. After his sudden conversion Calvin often interpreted the meaning of the passages with the concepts of law when he explained to his readers the justice of God, the atonement of Christ, and the judgment of the wicked.⁵² With these terms of law Calvin dealt with the sense of the text clearly, briefly, simply, and practically. Consequently Calvin's studying of law which his father wanted him to follow made a contribution to Calvin's becoming a great interpreter of the Bible and a Christian politician who influenced the Genevan legal reform.⁵³

In the college of Montaigu Calvin had contact with the humanists in Paris. For example, he was closely associated with his scholarly cousin, Pierre Robert Olivier, who had

⁵¹ Donald K. McKim, "Calvin's View of Scripture," p. 49.

⁵² Cf. *Comm. on Rom.* 3:9, 3:19, 3:23, 7:7.

⁵³ For the study of Calvin as lawyer and legal Reformer, see W. Stanford Reid, "John Calvin, Lawyer and Legal Reformer," in *Through Christ's Word*, eds. W. Robert Godfrey and Jesse L. Boyd (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 149-64.

favored the Reformation and showed a great interest in the humanism then in fashion.⁵⁴ Olivier (Olivétan) had two friends, Guillaume Cop who was the chief physician of King Francis, and Guillaume Budé who was "the most learned Hellenist of France, and the most effective liberal opponent of Bêda."⁵⁵ While Calvin criticized the views of Erasmus in the interpretation of Scripture, he always respected the views of Budé, and in his commentaries never contradicted him. Budé especially had a great influence upon Calvin's hermeneutical method. We shall have the opportunity later on to examine the influence of Budé upon Calvin's method of hermeneutics.

Through Olivier, Cop and Budé Calvin probably came into contact with the writings of Luther, Melanchthon, and Lefèvre d'Étaples. But Calvin's knowledge of the writings of Luther does not give us any decisive proof that Calvin's conversion was related to the thought of Luther. On his conversion he did not mention Luther, but only God. Calvin confessed as follows: "since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame."⁵⁶

In 1528 Calvin, in obedience to his father's order, left

⁵⁴ F. Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ McNeill, *The History and Character Calvinism*, p. 99.

⁵⁶ *Comm. on Ps*, p. xl.

Montaigne to study law at the university of Orléans. At the university of Orléans Calvin met many friends like the German Hellenist Melchior Wolmar of Rothweil, Francois Daniel, François de Connan, and Nicolas Duchemin.⁵⁷ Calvin's friend, Wolmar taught him Greek so that Calvin could use the grammatical method of interpretation of Scripture. However the hypothesis that he as a convinced Lutheran had a great role in converting Calvin has not been proved because Calvin nowhere in any of his writings mentioned the influence of Wolmar.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, p. 67.

⁵⁸ F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 23. A. Ganoczy in *The Young Calvin*, p. 68 agrees with him, referring to a statement of Beza. Beza says about Wolmar as Calvin's teacher of Greek as the following: "I have the greater pleasure in mentioning his name, because he was my own teacher, and the only I had from boyhood up to youth. His learning, piety, and other virtues, together with his admirable abilities as a teacher of youth, cannot be sufficiently praised. On his suggestions, and with his assistance, Calvin learned Greek. The collection of the benefit which he thus received from Wolmar, he afterwards publicly testified by dedicating to him the Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians", see *Life of John Calvin*, pp. xxiii-xxiv. From Beza's record, we can not find out Wolmar's influence on Calvin's conversion, except Greek. In his dedicatory epistle Calvin also did not speak of him about the influence related to his religious experience and his conversion as follows: "Nothing, however, has had greater weight with me than the recollection of the first time I was sent by my father to learn civil law. Under your direction and tuition, I conjoined with the study of law Greek literature, of which you were at that time a most celebrated professor. And certainly it was not owing to you that I did not make greater proficiency; for, with your wonted kindness of disposition, you would have had no hesitation in lending me a helping hand for the completion of my course, had I not been called away by my father's death, when I had little more than started." in *Comm. on 2 Cor.* p. 101. Here Calvin called him a lawyer. It is clear that Calvin thought of him as a teacher of law and Greek, not as a religious teacher who converted him from the Roman Catholic church.

Then Calvin came strongly under the influence of humanism. He began to open his eyes to enlightened up-to-date teaching and method.⁵⁹

In 1532 Calvin, after indulging in humanism, wrote his commentary of the *De Clementia* of Seneca.⁶⁰ In this work Calvin demonstrated his ability to make use of philosophy, philology, and rhetoric.⁶¹ There were two reasons why Calvin wrote this book. First, Erasmus published the second work of Seneca in 1529, but he was not satisfied with that, and appealed to the readers to do better. This appeal probably challenged Calvin's ambition to surpass Erasmus, the leader of humanism.⁶² Secondly, another reason why Calvin chose to write about Seneca was that against Epicurean hedonistic tendencies, Christian humanists like Erasmus, Zwingli, and Calvin felt that they found an effective counter position in Stoicism.⁶³ In his study of the *De Clementia* Calvin realized that

⁵⁹ R. S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ For the study of *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, see Alexandre Ganoczy und Stefan Scheld, *Herrschaft-Tugend-Vorsehung: Hermeneutische deutung und veröffentlichung handschriftlicher annotationen Calvins zu sieben Senecatragödien und der Pharsalia Lucas* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982).

⁶¹ For the study of this issue, see Ford Lewis Battles, "The Sources of Calvin's Seneca Commentary," in *Courtney Studies in Reformation Theology I: John Calvin* (Appleford: Sutton Courtney Press, 1966), pp. 38-66.

⁶² F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Christianity and Stoicism were "at one in affirming the existence of a supernatural providence which excludes chance and overrules princes."⁶⁴ Wendel insists that the significance Calvin afterwards attributed to this idea of God's providence was "at least partly of Stoic origin."⁶⁵ For Calvin the doctrine of God's providence is important not only for the system of his theology,⁶⁶ but also for his exegetical

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶⁵ Ibid. For a detailed discussion on the relation of Stoicism to Calvin's view of providence, see: Karl Reuter, *Vom Scholaren bis zum jungen Reformator: Studien zum Werdegang Johannes Calvins* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), pp. 89-104; Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), pp. 105-125; Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), pp. 16-19; Alexandre Ganoczy und Stefan Scheld, *Herrschaft Tugend - Vorsehung: Hermeneutische Deutung und Veröffentlichung Handschriftlicher Annotationen Calvins zu Sieben Senecatragödien und der Pharsalia Lucas*, pp. 37-53.

⁶⁶ For studies of the doctrine of God's providence in Calvin, see: Josef Bohatec, "Calvins Vorsehungslehre," in *Calvinstudien. Festschrift zum 400. Geburtstag Johann Calvins* (Leipzig: Rudolf Haupt, 1909), pp. 337-441; Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), pp. 150-156; Wilhelm-Albert Hauck, *Vorsehung und Freiheit nach Calvin* (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1947); Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, ed. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 70-79; Timothy Pavitt Palmer, "John Calvin's view of the Kingdom of God" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 78-89. Here he suggests that Calvin saw the *regnum Dei* as the *providentia Dei*, and that "the soteriological focus of Calvin's doctrine of providence is reaffirmed by the close relation between the *regnum Dei* and the *providentia Dei*." (pp. 88-89); Pieter C. Potgieter, "The Providence of God in Calvin's Correspondence," in *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag*, ed. Willem van't Spijker (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991), pp. 85-94; F. Wendel, *Calvin*, pp. 177-184; Ernst Saxer, *Vorsehung und Verheissung Gottes: Vier theologische Modelle (Calvin, Schleiermacher, Barth, Sölle) und ein systematischer*

work. Especially the *Commentary on the Psalms* in which he discussed the experience of his sudden conversion by God's providence shows us that in numerous places Calvin tried to interpret the meaning of the passages from the perspective of God's providence.

The Stoic ethic, which was highly regarded by Calvin's contemporaries, "defined virtue as the end or goal of life. A virtuous person is one who lives in accordance with nature or the logos."⁶⁷ From the early church, many fathers like Tertullian and Lactantius used subjects or principles from Stoicism in defense of Christian doctrine.⁶⁸

After the death of his father in 1531, Calvin as a freeman and a humanist went to the college of Fortel in Paris, where the Royal Readers, an illustrious body of humanist scholars recently instituted by Francis I, were teaching the courses.⁶⁹ Having already studied some Greek under Melchior Wolmar, Calvin pursued Hellenic studies by following the

Versuch (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), pp. 17-79; Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature & the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin*, pp. 7-37; Richard Stauffer, *Dieu, la creation et la providence dans la predication de Calvin* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1978), pp. 261-302.

⁶⁷ Hendrik F. Stander, "Stoicism," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishg, Inc., 1990). Cf. C. Tibiletti, "Stoicism and the Fathers," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*. ed. Angelo Di Berardino (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1992).

⁶⁸ Ibid. Cf. R. Stob, "Stoicism and Christianity," *Classical Journal* 30 (1934-1935): 217-224.

⁶⁹ R. S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, p. 5.

courses of Pierre Danes, one of the most illustrious of the new Royal Readers.⁷⁰ Calvin began to learn the elements of Hebrew under Francois Vatable, "although the traditional view is that his real learning in that language was gained at Basle and at Strasburg."⁷¹ Although Calvin was a humanist, by mastering the original languages of Scripture he began to prepare himself for his role as an influential interpreter of the Bible which he assumed after his conversion.⁷² Especially Erasmus, the symbol of the humanists, who first employed the grammatical-historical method and first tried textual criticism, was surpassed by Calvin who showed the correct interpretation of the passage in using that method rigorously. Calvin pointed out in many places the mistakes made by Erasmus' textual criticism - the method of inserting words and changing the word of the original text. I shall examine Calvin's criticism against Erasmus later.

⁷⁰ F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 26.

⁷¹ Ibid. Cf. Ant. J. Baumgartner, *Calvin Hébraïsant et interprète de l' Ancien Testament*, p. 8, p. 14.

⁷² Cf. C. Augustijn, "Calvin und der Humanismus," in *Calvinus Servus Christi*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Budapest: Presseabteilung des Ráday-Kollegiums, 1988), pp. 127-142; William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, pp. 113-127; A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, pp. 178-181; David Lerch, "Calvin und Humanismus: Ein Buch von Josef Bohatec über Budé und Calvin," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 7 (1971): 284-300; Robert D. Linder, "Calvinism and Humanism: The First Generation," *Church History* 44 (1975): 167-181; C. P. Marie, "Calvin's God and Humanism," in *Our Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation*, ed. B. J. van der Walt (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for CHE, 1984), pp. 353-365.

In 1534 Calvin joined the Reformation.⁷³ This event was reflected in the preface of his *Commentary on the Psalms*. He commented on his sudden conversion as follows:

I was as yet a very boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterward, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy, and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether

⁷³ There are a few views on the date of Calvin's sudden conversion (*subita conversio*). A General interpretation is to take the date between 1533 and on 4 May 1534 when he was "returning to his town to surrender his ecclesiastical benefices." (F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 40). David Steinmetz, also accepts this general view, in *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 8. A. E. McGrath, says, "This could be seen as marking a break with the catholic church," in *A Life of John Calvin*, p. 73. But T. H. L. Parker, views it as the early date before this action, in *John Calvin*, p. 196. For a detailed discussion of Calvin's conversion, see A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, pp. 241-266. Here he approaches the problem on Calvin's conversion from a different angle: "In my view many historians have incorrectly emphasized the negative aspect of Calvin's conversion, seeing it as a break with the 'superstitions of the papacy' and the 'Roman Church' rather than as a response to a call to reform the church." (p. 265) Cf. Ernst Koch, "Erwägungen zum Bekehrungsbericht Calvins," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 61 (1981): 185-197; Willem Nijenhuis, "Calvijns 'subita conversio': Notities bij een hypothese," *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 26 (1972): 248-269; Paul Sprener, *Das Rätsel um die Bekehrung Calvins* (Neukirchen: Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1960), pp. 34-72; J. F. Stutterheim, "Die bekering van Calvyn," *Die Brug* 13 (1964): 5-6.

leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.⁷⁴

Recently Heiko A. Oberman interpreted the sudden conversion (*subita conversio*) with reference to other writings of Calvin. On the phrase sudden conversion in the preface of Calvin's *Commentary on the Psalms* Oberman annotates:

In the phrase *subita conversio*, conversion means *mutatio* (this can also happen to *impii*: CO 31. 475 C); the suddenness of *subita*, *subito* (adverb), or *repente* refers to an event *praeter spem*, beyond all expectation (CO 31. 78 B; 459 C; 311 B; cf. CO 48. 141 C), at times also applicable to the *secure us* (as already in the sermon of the 2nd of April, 1553, on Ps. 119) *en une minute de temps* (CO 32. 614 C).⁷⁵

Calvin's conversion from a humanist to one of the great Reformers means the new change of God's calling. One of the workings of God's calling is to interpret and teach Scripture for God's people. The fundamental motive of Calvin's

⁷⁴ *Comm, on Ps, p. xl. Cf. CO 31.21. "Theologiae me pater tenellum adhuc puerum destinaverat. Sed quum videret legum scientiam passim augere suos cultores opibus, spes illa repente eum impulit ad mutandum consilium. Ita factum esset, ut revocatus a philosophiae studio, ad leges discendas trahere, quibus tametsi ut patris voluntati obsequerem fidelem operam impendere conatus sum, Deus tamen arcano providentiae suae fraeno cursum meum alio tandem reflexit. Ac primo quidem, quum superstitionibus papatus magis pertinaciter addictus essem, quam ut facile esset e tam profundo luto me extrahi, animum meum, qui pro aetate nimis obduruerat, subita conversione ad docilitatem subegit. Itaque aliquo verae pietatis gustu imbutus tanto proficiend studio exarsi, ut reliqua studia, quamvis non abiicerem, frigidius tamen sectarer. Necdum elapsus erat annus quum omnis purioris doctrinae cupidi ad me novitium adhuc et tironem discendi causa ventitabant."*

⁷⁵ Heiko A. Oberman, "Initia Calvini: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 115.

interpreting Scripture was to edify the church. "I have felt nothing to be of more importance than to have a regard to the edification of the Church."⁷⁶

B. The Influences on Calvin's Hermeneutics

In this part I deal with Chrysostom and the humanists who greatly influenced Calvin. Among the humanists, Valla, Budé, and Erasmus had a great influence upon Calvin in developing his hermeneutical method.

1. Chrysostom

John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) was born in Antioch, a well-known center for rabbinical studies. He excelled in rhetoric and legal studies under the pagan rhetor Libanius,⁷⁷ and attended the lectures of the philosopher Andragathius.⁷⁸ He did not find satisfaction as a lawyer, and abandoned his career to devote himself to Christian asceticism. Chrysostom

⁷⁶ *Comm. on. Ps*, p. xlix.

⁷⁷ Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, trans. M. Gonzaga, vol. 1 (Westminster: Newman, 1959), pp. 16-21. Cf. Thomas E. Amerigen, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyric Sermons of St. John Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1921).

⁷⁸ Erwin Preuschen, "Chrysostom," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), p. 72.

was baptized by Meletius, bishop of Antioch and trained by Diodorus, teacher of the Antiochene school and later Bishop of Tarsus.⁷⁹ Then he learned theology, Aristotelian philosophy, the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, Josephus, and Scripture.⁸⁰ About 373, after his mother's death, Chrysostom left Antioch to take up a more rigorous monasticism in the mountains. Consequently Chrysostom's ascetical discipline ruined his health. In 381 he was ordained a deacon, and in 386 the new bishop, Flavius, made him a preaching elder. In the task of preaching Chrysostom's rhetorical skill, advanced by his scholarship and piety gained him a reputation as a biblical interpreter second to none. Sixth century churchmen began to call him golden mouth (*Chrysostomos*).

Chrysostom primarily stressed the natural, literal, grammatical and historical sense of Scripture. He accepted the authority of Scripture and emphasized the human factor in the

⁷⁹ Diodorus as Chrysostom's teacher was the father of Antiochene hermeneutics. After his studies in Athens, he, a native of Antioch, became the head of the Antioch school and continued the tradition of adhering to the strict literal and historical interpretation of Scripture. He rejected allegorical interpretation, and used *theoria*, the key to understanding the true meaning of the text. His works were unhappily destroyed by the Arians whom he had so successfully refuted, and he was also anathematised by the Eutychians. For Diodorus' hermeneutics, see David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 107-8; Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), pp. 31-8.

⁸⁰ Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, vol. 1, pp. 90-98. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Preaching of Chrysostom: Homilies on the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), pp. 14-15.

interpretation of Scripture. He rejected the allegorical interpretation of the Alexandrian school.⁸¹ Of course, he used the allegorical interpretation in cases where Scripture itself suggested it. He used the principle 'Scripture interprets Scripture'. The fact that his printed treatises and six hundred sermons had about eighteen thousand Scripture references proves this principle. He used the Antiochene concept of *theoria*. He attempted to find out the true, historical meaning of the text. In case the text required more than a simple historical interpretation, he liked a typological method that was consistent with the historical event and distinct from allegorization.⁸² One of the most important features of Chrysostom's hermeneutics was that his interpretation had a good application to the Christian life.

Calvin's view of Chrysostom appeared in the Latin preface to an intended French translation of Chrysostom's homilies.⁸³ There Calvin stated his motivations for translating Chrysostom's sermons. First, although Calvin did not follow Chrysostom's wrong theological conclusions, he admired Chrysostom as a biblical interpreter and as a good preacher. Secondly, this work was one of Calvin's literary ideals. Thirdly, Erasmus did not succeed in translating all of

⁸¹ Elizabeth A. Clark, "John Chrysostom and the Subintroductae," *Church History* 46 (1977): 171-185.

⁸² David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, p. 118.

⁸³ *Praefatio in Chrysostomi Homilias*, CO 9.831-838.

Chrysostom's works because he published a very incomplete edition. Finally, Calvin wanted to make a living for himself as a man of letters.

Calvin preferred to follow Chrysostom rather than Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, and Augustine. Concerning Augustine's method of interpretation, Calvin stated:

*Augustinus citra controversiam in fidei dogmatibus omnes superat. Religiosus quoque imprimis scripturae interpret, sed ultra modum argutus. Quo fit ut minus firmus sit ac solidus.*⁸⁴

Calvin regarded Augustine as the great theologian in the dogmas of faith, but rejected him as an interpreter of Scripture because he was "oversubtle, less firm and solid".

But of Chrysostom's method, Calvin remarked:

*Chrysostomi autem nostri haec prima laus est quod ubique illi summo studio fuit a germana scripturae sinceritate ne minimum quidem deflectere, ac nullam sibi licentiam sumere in simplici verborum sensu contorquendo.*⁸⁵

Calvin set a high value on Chrysostom's method of rejecting

⁸⁴ *Praefatio in Chrysostomi Homilias*, CO 9.835. Cf. Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Calvin Chrysostom As Exegetical Tutor," p. 30. "Augustine is beyond question the greatest of all in the dogma of faith; he is also outstanding as a devotional interpreter of Scripture; but he is oversubtle, with the result that he is less solid and dependable."

⁸⁵ *Praefatio in Chrysostomi Homilias*, CO 9.835. Cf. Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Calvin Chrysostom As Exegetical Tutor," p. 30. "The outstanding merit of our author, Chrysostom, is that it was his supreme concern always not to turn aside even to the slightest degree from the genuine, simple sense of Scripture and to allow himself no liberties by twisting the plain meaning of the words."

the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and showing the genuine, simple sense of the text. This method of Chrysostom had an important influence on Calvin's ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. I shall deal with Chrysostom's influence on Calvin's ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* in chapter 5.

Chrysostom had a great influence on Calvin's hermeneutical method.⁸⁶ On Chrysostom's interpretation of the text of Scripture Calvin expressed his opinion clearly in his commentaries. Calvin's attitude toward Chrysostom was various. I shall demonstrate this with reference to a few casual examples. Calvin entirely agreed with Chrysostom in cases where Chrysostom correctly interpreted the text of Scripture. "I have no objection to Chrysostom's remark, that the word *spiritual* conveys an implied contrast between the blessing of Moses and of Christ."⁸⁷ Calvin followed Chrysostom because he conveyed the grammatical interpretation of the text correctly.⁸⁸

Calvin, however, rejected Chrysostom's interpretation in some cases according to his own rules for the interpretation

⁸⁶ On the influence of Chrysostom upon Calvin's hermeneutics, see Alexandre Ganoczy and Klaus Müller, *Calvins Handschriftliche Annotationen zu Chrysostomus: Ein Beitrag zur Hermeneutik Calvins* (Wisebaden: Franz Steiner, 1981); Alexandre Ganoczy and Stefan Schell, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins: Geistesgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen und Grundzüge*, pp. 118-9; Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*, pp. 114-116.

⁸⁷ *Comm. on Eph. 1:3*, p. 197.

⁸⁸ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 1:2*, pp. 53-4.

of the text. First, Calvin did not accept the 'forced' interpretation of a text. "Chrysostom improperly, in my opinion, refers it to the Jews, who were carnal. . . . Equally forced would be that opinion, as applied to the apposite clause."⁸⁹ Calvin pointed out that Chrysostom's interpretation was sometimes exceedingly far-fetched.⁹⁰ Secondly, Calvin refused Chrysostom's wrong theological interpretation. "The exposition of Chrysostom is not more correct, who refers to the dominion which was given to man in order that he might, in a certain sense, act as God's vicegerent in the government of the world."⁹¹ In the interpretation of Jn. 3:5 "Unless a man be born of water", Calvin did not accept Chrysostom's view that the word *water* meant baptism.⁹² Thirdly, Calvin pointed out that Chrysostom did not reveal the mind of the author of Scripture. Calvin strongly believed that the chief task of an interpreter was to lay open the intention of the writer (*mentem scriptoris*).⁹³ "I do not agree with Erasmus. . . . There is greater probability in the opinion of Chrysostom, who interprets it to mean severity against more atrocious sins; though I did not think that even he has hit the Apostle's

⁸⁹ *Comm. on Jn. 6:63*, p. 273.

⁹⁰ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 6:3*, p. 201.

⁹¹ *Comm. on Gen. 1:26*, p. 94.

⁹² *Comm. on Jn. 3:5*, p. 110.

⁹³ *Comm. on 2 Th. 5:22*, p. 302.

meaning."⁹⁴ Fourthly, Calvin did not follow Chrysostom if he did not follow the simple interpretation of the text. "The clause, in grace, Chrysostom explains in different ways. I, however, take it simply."⁹⁵

2. Valla

Laurentius Valla was born in Rome in 1405. Valla's father was a consistorial advocate in Rome, and an uncle supported Valla with a humanistic training before he turned to theology. Consecrated as priest in 1431, he received a chair of eloquence at Pavia, but he left the city in 1432 due to quarrels with the jurists of the university. In 1435 or 1436 he entered the service of King Alfonso V of Aragon, his protector for the next ten years, and under his patronage Valla proved, about 1440, the falsification of the Donation of Constantine in *Declamatio de falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione*. In 1444 he investigated a critical comparison between the Vulgate and the Greek New Testament in *Collatio Novi Testamenti*. As an Italian humanist, he attacked Scholasticism, the method he ridiculed in *Dialecticae Disputationes contra Aristotelicos* (1499). In *De libero arbitrio* (1493) Valla denied the possibility of understanding

⁹⁴ *Comm. on Tit.* 2:15, p. 323. See also *Comm. on Isa.* 53:8, *Comm. on Gen.* 8:33.

⁹⁵ *Comm. on Col.* 3:16. See also *Comm. on Ac.* 8:36, *Comm. on Gal.* 2:6, *Com. on 2 Cor.* 1:15.

the harmony of God's omnipotence with human free will, and in *De Professione Religiosorum* criticized the ideals of the religious life. Although Valla's novel and audacious views caused him to be suspected of heresy, he had a great influence on Renaissance scholars and also on the Reformers. His writings were held in esteem by Martin Luther. K. Benrath comments on Valla as follows. "His didactic industry and literary productiveness, his perspicacious philological and historical criticism, his efforts to free science from the fetters of scholastic tradition are great and lasting merits."⁹⁶

Valla was one of the first exponents of modern historical criticism,⁹⁷ because he used *apparatus criticus* in his *Collatio Novi Testamenti*. Concerning this work Parker says;

Applying to the New Testament the methods which were increasingly being used in the elucidation of secular literature, Valla subjected the text of the Vulgate to a comparison with the Greek. The results he made into a book of notes on the New Testament. This existed in two recessions which were circulated among his acquaintance. Erasmus came upon a copy of the revision made in the fourteen-fifties by Valla himself, borrowed it from the monastery near Brussels in the free and easy way of the sixteenth century, and published it in 1505. The book was well received in the early sixteenth century and provided a spur to New Testament scholarship. It was known under

⁹⁶ K. Benrath, "Valla," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 12, pp. 136-7.

⁹⁷ Cf. Quirinus Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism*, pp. 102-113; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, pp. 110-126; T. H. L. Parker. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, pp. 150-151.

the title of *Annotationes*, Erasmus's name for it.⁹⁸

Calvin learned the new method of Valla through his legal training at Orléans and Bourges. Torrance says, "It must also be noted that Calvin's legal training under the new methods took him out of the kind of thinking so inveterate in scholastic philosophy and theology, in which thought is addressed to oneself, in which questions are asked and answers given within the single mind."⁹⁹ Valla's influence upon Calvin's hermeneutics appeared in the *De Clementia*, the *Institutes*, and the commentaries.

Calvin quoted Valla's exposition to explicate the correct meaning of words like *licentia*.¹⁰⁰ Calvin showed in the *De Clementia* that he followed Valla in the criticism of the Epicurean theology.¹⁰¹ In the commentaries on Acts 26:28 and Gal. 6:8, Calvin followed Valla while he rejected Erasmus and the Vulgate. Although he did not often mention Valla, Calvin

⁹⁸ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, pp. 188-9. Cf. Jacques Chomarat, "Les Annotations de Valla, celles d'Erasmus et la grammaire," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVIIe siècle*, eds. Olivier Fatio et Pierre Fraenkel (Geneve: Librairie Droz S.A., 1978), pp. 202-228.

⁹⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p. 125. Cf. William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, p. 13; Quirinus Breen, "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition," in *Christianity and Humanism: Studies in the History of Ideas*, ed. Nelson Peter Ross (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 107-29.

¹⁰⁰ Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Quirinus Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1935), p. 111.

was able to develop his own hermeneutics through the new method influenced by Valla.¹⁰²

3. Budé

Guillaume Budé, a French humanist, was born in Paris in 1467. He studied law at Orléans, and, after leading a fast life for several years, gave himself to study Greek, philosophy, theology, and science. On August 21 in 1522 Francis I nominated him librarian of the royal library at Fontainebleau and royal councillor, and it was owing to Budé's initiative that the king enlarged the Royal Library of Paris and also the Royal College. He felt the necessity of reforms in the Roman Catholic church, but, like many scholars and bishops of his day, he could not leave the Roman Catholic church for the Protestant church.

Budé directly had a great influence on the humanistic learning of Calvin.¹⁰³ None exceeded Budé among many humanists in his influence upon the hermeneutical skills of Calvin. His influence upon Calvin clearly appeared in the *De Clementia* and

¹⁰² Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, p. 30. Hugo argues that Calvin's theological thinking was deeply influenced by Valla.

¹⁰³ Josef Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin: Studien zur Gedankenwelt des französischen Frühhumanismus*, pp. 119-240. Bohatec deals with Calvin's relationship to the French humanism of his time, and to that of the acknowledged leader of the French Renaissance, Budé.

his commentaries. For example, Calvin quoted many times from the books of Budé in the *De Clementia: De asse et partibus eius libri quinque, Annotationes reliquae in pandecas, Commentarii linguae graecae, Forensia, De studio literarum recte institutuendo, and Dictionarium graecolatinum*. Calvin's *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* clearly showed that Budé was the starting point for Calvin's hermeneutical method. Calvin followed the method of Budé: juridical interpretation, a sound method of historical criticism, and a literary criticism which was a comparative study of words.¹⁰⁴ T. F. Torrance also notes that Calvin could develop his own method in continuity with Budé,

Calvin developed further the line taken by Budé in the way in which he digs out and elucidates the meaning of words by paying attention not only to the etymology, grammar, syntax and style but also to the history of ideas and the complex of meaning within which they were originally used and acquired their distinctive significance. Then it is in this classical sense that Calvin himself employs them.¹⁰⁵

Budé's influence on the hermeneutical method of Calvin also appeared in his commentaries. For example, while Calvin pointed out many problems in the interpretation of Erasmus, he simply followed the interpretation of Budé and agreed with it. An example can be found in Calvin's *Commentary on 2*

¹⁰⁴ F. L. Battles, "The Sources of Calvin's Seneca Commentary," in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, eds. G. E. Duffield and F. L. Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 43-5.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p. 134.

Corinthians. On understanding the terms of this text, Calvin entirely agreed with Budé's view. "The Greek term being *hupostasis*, the old interpreter has rendered it *substantiam* (substance), Erasmus renders it *argumentum* (subject-matter), but neither is suitable. Budaeus, however, observes that this term is sometimes taken to mean boldness, or confidence, as it is used by Polybius."¹⁰⁶ Calvin accepted his authority in the interpretation of the text. "Budaeus renders this passage thus: - 'Setting foot upon, or entering on the possession of those things which he has not seen.' I have followed his authority, but have selected a more suitable term."¹⁰⁷

Calvin's agreement with the interpretation of Budé illustrates his high regard for Budé. That Calvin firmly followed the interpretation of Budé illustrates that Budé's influence on the hermeneutical method of Calvin was great and strong. Budé's influence on Calvin's hermeneutical method certainly appeared in the fact that Calvin often used the expression "Budaeus also has observed."¹⁰⁸ Calvin even followed Budé's computation of money. "Now, since Josephus says that the shekel of the sanctuary was worth four Attic drachmas, if he is speaking of these, we gather from the computation of Budaeus that the price of the field was about two hundred and

¹⁰⁶ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 9:4*, p. 306.

¹⁰⁷ *Comm. on Col. 2:18*, p. 197. *CE. Comm. on Ex. 11.*

¹⁰⁸ See *Comm. on Rom. 9:3*, *Comm. on 1 Cor. 2:1*, *Comm. on 2 Cor. 1:13*, *9:4*, *Comm. on Col. 2:18*, *Comm. on Ac. 1:1*, *Comm. on Php. 3:9*. *Comm. on Php. 3:9*, p. 97.

fifty pounds of French money; if we understand the common shekel, it will be half that amount."¹⁰⁹ On the denarius, Calvin also accepted Budé's computation. "As the denarius, according to the computation of Budaeus, is equal to four times the value of a carolus and two deniers of Tours, this sum amounts to thirty-five francs, or thereby."¹¹⁰ Calvin admitted the authoritative interpretation of Budé on grammatical matters of the text. A passage in his *Commentary on Philippians* is a case in point: "But as the verb *heuriskomai* (find), while it has a passive termination, has an active signification, and means - to recover what you have voluntarily given up, (as Budaeus shows by various examples) I have not hesitated to differ from the opinion of others."¹¹¹

The important fact in these references is that Calvin always showed deference to Budé. In his commentary on *De Clementia* Calvin showed respect for Budé. "Guilielmus Budaeus, the first ornament and pillar of literature, thanks to whom our France has today claimed for herself the palm of learning, has carefully and fully explained the proper meaning of this

¹⁰⁹ *Comm. on Gen.* 23:11, p. 583. Cf. *Comm. on Ex.* 30:12.

¹¹⁰ *Comm. on Jn.* 2:7, p. 229. Cf. *Comm. on Jn.* 6:7.

¹¹¹ *Comm. on Php.* 3:9, p. 97.

expression."¹¹² Calvin gave Budé a place all by himself, above Chrysostom, Erasmus, and all other interpreters.

4. Erasmus

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, Dutch humanist and theologian, was born in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, on October 27, probably 1466. Trained at Deventer by the Brethren of the Common Life (1475-84), Erasmus spent six years as a monk and then attended the Collège de Montaigu (1494). In 1499 he met John Colet. This meeting was a turning point in Erasmus' thought. Colet's influences on Erasmus were the ideals of Christian humanism and the importance of a return to the normal sense of the biblical text. Inspired by the chance discovery of an obscure copy by Valla who criticized the accuracy of the Latin Vulgate, Erasmus gave himself to the production of a new Latin New Testament based on a critical Greek New Testament. This edition was printed by Froben of Basel in 1516 and was the basis of most of the scientific study of Scripture during the Reformation period. Although Erasmus did not join the Reformation, his influence was enormous. Catholics and Protestants alike quoted and cited

¹¹² Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, pp. 115-117. Cf. CO 5.54. "Gulielmus Budaeus, primum rei literariae decus et columnen, cuius beneficio palmam eruditionis hodie sibi vindicat nostra Gallia, diligenter et copiose explicat huius loquutionis proprietatem."

Erasmus freely on matters of biblical and theological interpretation.

As Erasmus prepared a new Latin edition of the New Testament, Martin Luther was lecturing on Romans (1515-1516). In the *Enchiridion* (1503) Erasmus emphasized spiritual and allegorical interpretation, before he used the philological method of interpretation which he defended in his preface to Valla's *Collatio Novi Testamenti* (1505). Erasmus employed his hermeneutical method in publishing a new Latin New Testament based on a critical Greek New Testament in 1516. This *Novum Instrumentum's* influence was immense.

Significant influences on Erasmus' hermeneutical studies were Florentine Neoplatonism to which Colet introduced him, and the work of the early church Fathers, especially that of Origen and Jerome. Erasmus detailed his new hermeneutical method in letters, *apologiae*, prefaces and dedications to further editions of the *Novum Testamentum* (1519, 1522, 1527, 1535) and in the *Ratio verae theologiae* (1518), *De libero arbitrio* (1524), *Hyperaspistes* (1526, 1527), and *Ecclesiastes, sive de ratione concionandi* (1523, pub. 1535).¹¹³

¹¹³ Ruth Chavasse, "Erasmus," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 199. For the studies of Erasmus' hermeneutics, see John William Aldridge, *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966); John B. Payne, "Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus," in *Scrinium Erasmianum*, ed. J. Coppens (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), pp. 13-49, and *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Peoria: Bratcher, 1970); T. F. Torrance, "The Hermeneutics of Erasmus," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey Jr.*, eds. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), pp.

The starting point for Erasmus' hermeneutics was "the neo-Platonic conception of the contrast between flesh and spirit, which was grounded in the nature of the world and of man."¹¹⁴ His approach can be derived from the flesh-spirit conception which determined his anthropology. J. B. Payne says;

He links flesh and spirit, or body and soul, in man with letter and spirit in the Bible. The flesh was identified with the letter or literal sense, or with the history or historical sense; the spirit, with hidden meaning or mystery or allegory. The one was outward and crass: the other inward and sublime.¹¹⁵

In the *Methodus* prefixed to the *Novum Instrumentum* Erasmus stressed the necessity of understanding the text by means of grammar in the original languages and a knowledge of the contemporary historical, geographical, and social situation. Since he thought that the Vulgate translation of Jerome did not sufficiently give the original sense of the text, Erasmus suggested that the original words of the author be recovered as far as possible by the restoration of the text.¹¹⁶ Thus he

48-78; Manfred Hoffman, *Erkenntnis und Verwirklichung der wahren theologie nach Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), pp. 39-47, 59-61, 73-88, 90-3; Andre Godin, "Fonction d'Origene dans la pratique exegetique d'Erasmus: Les annotations sur l'epitre aux Romains," in *Histoire de l'exegese au XVI siecle* (Geneve: Libraire Droz S.A., 1978), pp. 118-132; Henning Graf Reventlow, "Erasmus," in *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 39-48.

¹¹⁴ J. B. Payne, "Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus," pp. 18-19.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

emended the text of the New Testament.

Erasmus as a moralist also emphasized the tropological or moral sense of Scripture. For him the chief goal of interpretation was to discover the moral meaning. For example, he stressed a new lay piety in his *Enchiridion*. McGrath correctly points out that:

Erasmus conceived his work as a lay person's guide to Scripture, providing a simple yet learned exposition of the philosophy of Christ. This philosophy is really a form of morality: the New Testament concerns the knowledge of good and evil, in order that its readers may eschew the latter and love the former. The New Testament is the *lex Christi*, 'the law of Christ', which Christians are called to obey. Christ is the example whom Christians are called to imitate.¹¹⁷

In the interpretation of the Psalms he also stressed the tropological reading of the text. Payne argues that for Erasmus the tropological sense was closely connected with the historical sense.¹¹⁸ He tried to interpret the obscure and hidden meaning of Scripture by means of the allegorical method. One of the features of his hermeneutics was that he did not abandon allegorical interpretation. But his allegorical method was not to be used to develop fantastic doctrine but rather to help his readers penetrate beneath common sense to a deeper meaning.¹¹⁹ On the purpose of allegory Payne states;

¹¹⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Interpretation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 37.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹¹⁹ T. F. Torrance, "The Hermeneutics of Erasmus," p. 63.

Erasmus names several purposes of allegory; (1) to veil the mysteries from the impious; (2) to exercise the minds of the pious, since we are more avid for what is hidden and acquired with labor than for what comes to us easily; (3) to fix the divine truth in our memory through imagery; (4) to lead us by degrees to perfect knowledge.¹²⁰

His works had a great influence on the hermeneutical method of the Reformers. First, he posited new objectives for the interpretation of Scripture through the grammatical-historical method. His methods provided interpreters with solid principles of scriptural interpretation.¹²¹ Secondly, he was the first interpreter who broke with the medieval fourfold interpretation of Scripture: the literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical. He did not use the scholastic method of interpretation.¹²²

Erasmus among the humanists had a great influence upon the Reformers, including Calvin. Erasmus' influence upon Calvin clearly appeared in the *De Clementia*. There Calvin mentioned the books of Erasmus: *Adagia* (35 times), *Panegyric of Philip* (3 times), *Apophthegmata* (7 times), and *Education of a Christian Prince* (8 times). The method which Calvin used in explicating the text of Seneca was borrowed from Erasmus' *Paraphrases*. Calvin's *Institutes* was more indebted to him than appeared on the surface. Thus Erasmus' influence upon Calvin

¹²⁰ J. B. Payne, "Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus," p. 39.

¹²¹ Ruth Chavasse, "Erasmus," p. 198.

¹²² Ibid.

was very great. Interpretation eighteen times.

Erasmus' influence on Calvin as critic and exegete was far reaching. The former's insistence upon the necessity of knowing the original languages of the Bible; his principle that the more obscure passages of the Bible should be interpreted with the help of those which are clear; his plea for understanding the Bible in its "natural, or historical and grammatical" sense, and spiritually, that is, for moral edification; his view of the Bible as having been written under the direction of the Holy Spirit (*Ut enim Spiritus ille divinus, mentium apostolicarum moderatur*) without a forced uniformity as to content.¹²³

In spite of Erasmus' influence, Calvin did not follow Erasmus entirely. Especially, Calvin criticized Erasmus' interpretation of Scripture.¹²⁴ For example, in his *Commentary on Romans* in 1540 Calvin only once agreed with him,¹²⁵ but

¹²³ Joseph Haroutunian, "Calvin as Biblical Commentator," in *Calvin: Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 19. On Erasmus' influence upon Calvin, Haroutunian goes on to say, "His conviction that various and divergent accounts and teachings in the Bible do not diminish its authority and saving power; his critical attitude with regard to the authorship of certain books, and his independence in relation to patristic interpreters, including Jerome; his dictum: *In fontibus versetur oportet, qui vellit esse vere theologus* - 'Every man who would be a true theologian must return to the sources' - all this, together with the example of free and competent examination of Scripture he sets in his emendations and annotations, are written large in Calvin's Commentaries. (How much of this agreement is to be credited to the direct influence of Erasmus on Calvin and how much to the humanistic classical training which Calvin had received is of course debatable)."

¹²⁴ Don H. Compier, "The Independent Pupil: Calvin's Transformation of Erasmus' Theological Hermeneutics," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 217-233.

¹²⁵ *Comm. on Rom. 2:8*, p. 92.

rejected Erasmus' interpretation eighteen times.¹²⁶

Calvin criticized several aspects of Erasmus' original hermeneutics. First, Calvin pointed out that Erasmus did not reveal the mind of the author properly. In the interpretation of Tit. 1:7 "For a bishop ought to be blameless, as a governor of the house of God", Calvin said, "The Latin word *dispensator* (steward or manager) - employed in the old translation, and retained by Erasmus - does not at all express Paul's meaning; for, in order that greater care may be exercised in the election, he adorns the office of a bishop with this honorable eulogy, that it is a government of the house of God."¹²⁷ He pointed out that Erasmus did not reveal Luke's mind because he translated a verb wrongly.¹²⁸ Secondly, Calvin argued that Erasmus did not understand Scripture wholly so that he did not interpret the meaning of the text correctly. In the interpretation of Ac. 3:26 "He hath raised up his Son", Calvin said,

I like not Erasmus' translation; for he saith, when he had raised him up, as if he spake of a thing which was done long ago. But Peter meaneth rather, that Christ was raised up, when he was declared to be the author of the blessing; which thing, since it was done of late and suddenly, it ought to move their minds the more. For the Scripture useth to speak thus, as in the last place, of

¹²⁶ *Com. on Rom.* 1:14, 1:23, 4:20, 4:21, 5:14, 7:16, 7:24, 8:2, 8:3, 8:19, 9:10, 12:3, 12:9, 12:14, 12:16, 14:2, 15:16, 16:4.

¹²⁷ *Comm. on Tit.* 1:7, p. 293.

¹²⁸ See also *Comm. on Ac.* 2:22, p. 93. Cf. *Comm. on Ac.* 24:19-22, 26:28, *Comm. on 1 Pe.* 1:13, 3:4.

Moses, whereunto Peter alludeth.¹²⁹ The origins of the
 Thirdly, Calvin complained that Erasmus revised the original
 text too drastically.¹³⁰ Consequently Erasmus' interpretation
 became unnatural. Fourthly, Calvin pointed out that Erasmus,
 for example, made a mistake in translating the words of the
 text of 1 Peter 4:1. "Erasmus has incorrectly, as I think,
 rendered the word 'he who did suffer.' (*patiebatur*) applying
 it to Christ. For it is an indefinite sentence, which
 generally extends to all the godly, and has the same meaning
 with the words of Paul in Rom. 6:7, He who is dead is
 justified or freed from sin."¹³¹

Calvin, after his conversion, developed the method taught
 by the humanists and applied his own method to interpret the
 text of Scripture. That included the ideal of *brevitas et
 facilitas* mentioned in the dedicatory epistle in his
Commentary on Romans. Especially Calvin's training in rhetoric
 helped him develop this hermeneutical method. But Bouwsma's
 assertion that a central principle of humanist hermeneutics
 made the commentaries of Calvin rhetorical is a little
 exaggerated.¹³² Recently McGrath has argued that Calvin's
 studying law had a great influence upon his method of

¹²⁹ *Comm. on Ac.* 3:26, p. 162.

¹³⁰ *Comm. on Rom.* 8:3, p. 279.

¹³¹ *Comm. on 1 Pe.* 4:1, p. 121.

¹³² W. J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century
 Portrait*, p. 126.

interpretation. According to McGrath, the origins of the method of hermeneutics which made Calvin the greatest biblical interpreter of his age lay in his study of law in the advanced atmosphere of Orleans and Bourges.¹³³

Calvin's Approach to the Bible was a new kind of interpretation.

In order to understand Calvin's approach to the Bible, we first need to understand the background of his interpretation. Calvin was a lawyer, and the Jews and the Christians had a long history of interpreting the Bible in a legalistic way.

Calvin's approach to the Bible was a new kind of interpretation of Scripture. He was a lawyer, and he was trained in the law from the perspective of a jurist. He distinguished between the biblical method from theirs, which was developed by the humanistic principles of *brevisitas* et *facilitas*. Calvin's approach to the theology of Augustine, Jerome, and others, who were often disagreed with their own hermeneutical method, especially in the case of Pauline Epistles. He criticized their method of interpretation prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church of his time.

¹³³ Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture*, p. 59. For the discussion on this matter, see Michael Leonard Monheit, "Passion and Order in the Formation of Calvin's Sense of Religious Authority," (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1988). Here Monheit insists that Calvin's method of interpretation was much influenced by the training in law rather than the humanistic training.

CHAPTER 3

Calvin's Attitude Toward the Fathers and Medieval Interpretation

In order to understand Calvin's hermeneutics accurately, we first need to determine his attitude toward the Scriptural interpretation practised by the Fathers, the Roman Catholics, and the Jewish interpreters.

Calvin observed that they did not have the sound method of Scriptural interpretation. He, therefore, criticized them from the perspective of his hermeneutical ideal. By distinguishing his hermeneutical method from theirs, Calvin developed his own distinctive principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Although he respected the theology of Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose, Calvin often disagreed with their wrong hermeneutical methods. Especially in the commentaries on the Pauline Epistles he strongly criticized their Scriptural interpretation prevalent in the Roman Catholic church since Origen.

In this chapter I shall investigate how Calvin dealt with the interpretation of Scripture of others from the perspective of his own distinctive principles of *brevitas et facilitas* which he employed in his exegetical writings.

A. Origen

A learned interpreter, creative philosopher, master of the spiritual life, and active churchman, Origen, was born in Alexandria of Christian parents around 185. He received a thorough Christian education in the home of his parents, and studied in the Catechetical School under Clement. During the persecution of Septimius Severus (202) his father, Leonides, was beheaded.¹ Then Origen was prevented from meeting martyrdom only by a trick of his mother, who concealed his clothes in order to compel him to remain at home.² Later Origen took the place of his teacher, Clement, who had fled, as head of the Catechetical School. Origen's great work on Biblical criticism was the *Hexapla*, a study edition of the Old Testament, presenting in parallel columns the Hebrew text, a Greek transliteration, and translations of Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint, and Theodotion. Among his hermeneutical works are the *Scholia* on Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers,

¹ *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, trans. Christian Frederick Cruse and Isaac Boyle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 217.

² *Ibid.*, p. 218. Eusebius recorded as follows; "It was then, too, that the love of martyrdom so powerfully seized the soul of Origen, though yet an almost infant boy, that he advanced so close to encounter danger, and was eager to leap forward and rush upon the conflict. . . . But when he saw that there was no other course for him to pursue, as his great zeal was far beyond his years, he could not remain inactive, but sent to his father a most encouraging letter on martyrdom, in which he encouraged him, saying, 'take heed, (father) not to change thy mind on account of us.'"

commentaries on almost all the books of Scripture, and many homilies. One of the most significant theological works of Origen was the *De Principiis (On First Principle)*, conceived as a systematic exposition of Christian doctrine in four books on God (the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit) and the heavenly beings, of man and the material world, of free will and its consequences, and of the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture.

Origen believed that the Scriptures themselves are divine, that is, are inspired by the Spirit of God.³ Origen also recognized that most of the narrative material in Scripture was historical, and that the literal meaning was useful for simple believers.⁴ But his method of Scriptural

³ Origen, *On First Principles*, 4.1, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973), p. 256.

⁴ Origen did not ignore the literal interpretation of the text entirely. On this issue, see Moisés Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?: The History of Interpretation in the light of Current Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house, 1987), pp. 58-63; Dan G. McCartney, "Literal and Allegorical Interpretation on Origen's *Contra Celsum*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 281-301.

For the studies of Origen's hermeneutics, see H. de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: L'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950); Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986); R. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM, 1959); S. Lauchli, "Die Frage nach der Objektivität der Exegese des Origenes," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 10 (1954): 165-197; Jean Daniélou, "Les sources bibliques de la mystique d'Origène," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 23 (1947): 126-141; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 167-178; M F. Wiles, "Origen as Biblical Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1. eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University

interpretation became allegorical due to Philo's strong influence.

Being under the influence of neoplatonism, Origen went on to accept the allegorical exegesis of Philo. Scripture was for him a mirror, which reflected the divinity sometimes darkly, sometimes brightly. A Key to the allegorization of Scripture was found in Proverbs 22, 20-21: 'Behold, I have ascribed it to thee three manner of ways, in thoughts and knowledge, that I might show thee the certainty, and the words of truth, to answer out of these to him who sent thee.'⁵

Origen also based his vision of the threefold meaning of Scripture on Paul's threefold division of human personality in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 'spirit, soul, and body'. He believed that the meaning of a passage of Scripture might have a bodily or literal sense, a soul or moral sense, and a spiritual or allegorical sense. He described this view as follows;

Each one must therefore portray the meaning of the divine writings in a threefold way upon his own soul; that is, so that the simple may be edified by what we may call the body of the Scriptures (for such is the name we may give to the common and literal interpretation); while those who have begun to make a little progress and are able to perceive something more than that may be edified by the soul of Scripture; and those who are perfect and

Press, 1989), pp. 454-489; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 187-203; David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church*, pp. 87-102; Charles J. Scalise, "Origen and the *Sensus Literalis*," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Peterson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), and "The *Sensus Literalis*: A Hermeneutical Key to Biblical Exegesis," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989): 45-65; John Rogerson, "The Old Testament," in *The Study and Use of the Bible*, vol. 2, *The History of Christian Theology*, ed Paul Avis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 31-35.

⁵ James George Kiecker, "The Hermeneutical Principles and Exegetical Methods of Nicholas of Lyra, O. F. M. (CA. 1270-1349)" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1978), p. 240.

like the men of whom the apostle says: 'We speak wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, which are coming to nought; but we speak God's wisdom hidden in a mystery, the wisdom which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory-such as these may be edified by that spiritual law, which has a 'shadow of the good things to come,' as if by the Spirit. Just as man, therefore, is said to consist of body, soul and spirit, so also does the Holy Scripture, which has been bestowed by the divine bounty for man's salvation.⁶

Origen emphasized the allegorical interpretation of Scripture in contrast to the Jews who understood the prophecies literally. "For the Jews, owing to their hardness of heart and their desire to appear wise in their own sight, have refused to believe in our Lord and Savior because they suppose that the prophecies that relate to him must be understood literally."⁷ He interpreted Scripture without a sufficient balance between the 'spiritual' meaning and the literal meaning, and developed the allegorical method of Scriptural interpretation to the extreme.

Origen as the founder of allegorical interpretation had a great influence on the hermeneutics of the Fathers and the Middle Ages. His 'threefold sense' was later transformed into the 'fourfold sense' of the Fathers. The allegorical interpretation of Origen influenced the method of interpretation of the Alexandrian school, Augustine, and Aquinas. This principle was used by many interpreters of the Middle Ages: Gregory Thaumaturgus, the martyr Pamphilus,

⁶ Origen, *On First Principles*, 4.2.4, pp. 275-6.

⁷ Origen, *On First Principles*, 4.2.1, p. 269.

Athanasius, Didymus the Blind, Pierius, Theognostus, Hierax of Leontoplois, Eusebius of Vercellae, Eusebius of Caesarea, Firmilian, and Victorinus of Pettau.⁸

How did Calvin criticize Origen's allegorical interpretation? Calvin's attitude toward allegorical interpretation clearly appears in his *Institutes* and commentaries. For example, in his *Institutes* Calvin rejected allegorical interpretation as follows:

First, suppose I do not want to accept their allegory. What pray, will they do? For no doubt the fathers divided this interpretation without regard to the true meaning of the Lord's words. Allegories ought not to go beyond the limits set by the rule of Scripture, let alone suffice as the foundation for any doctrines.⁹

Here Calvin did not deny allegorical interpretation based on the 'rule of Scripture', but rejected it in those cases where the true meaning of the text was twisted.

Calvin pointed out the weaknesses of Origen's allegorical

⁸ Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 201-2.

⁹ *Inst.* 2.5.19, p. 339. Cf. CO 2: 246. "*Primum, si nolim locum dare ipsorum allegoriae, quid obsecro facturi sunt? nam praeter germanum orationis Domini sensum a patribus excogitatum fuisse, nihil dubium est. Allegoriae ultra procedere non debent quam praeuntem habent scripturae regulam; tantum abest ut fundandis ullis dogmatis per se sufficient.*" For the study of Calvin's attitude toward allegorical interpretation, see Michael Carl Armour, "Calvin's Hermeneutic and the History of Christian Exegesis," pp. 172-214. According to Armour, one of the reasons of Calvin's rejecting allegory was that it simply ignored the design of the Holy Spirit (*Ibid.*, p. 194). David L. Puckett, "John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament," pp. 106-7, also argues that allegorical exegesis, according to Calvin, was the antithesis of historical interpretation, and vitiated the simplicity of Scripture (*scripturae simplicitas*).

interpretation. First, Calvin criticized Origen for ignoring the literal sense of the text and 'torturing' Scripture.

But as the apostle declares that these things are allegorized, Origen, and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the outer bark of the letter, there lurk deeper mysteries, which cannot be extracted but by beating out allegories.¹⁰

For Origen the literal meaning of the text was 'too mean and poor'. It was not very important for him. He, therefore, used the allegorical method to find the deeper mysterious truths of Scripture. It was wrong for Origen to think that the deeper mysterious sense of a passage was better than the simple and literal sense. Calvin indicated that Origen forced or twisted the simple text of Scripture. Calvin wanted an interpreter to explain the text literally without twisting it. I name this the avoidance of forced interpretation, one of the most important elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* because it emphasizes the clear and simple meaning of the text. He, therefore, clearly rejected the allegorical interpretation with his principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin also pointed out that Origen's allegorical interpretation went away from the true sense of the text of Scripture. For Calvin the true meaning of the text was to reveal the intention of an author (*mentem scriptoris*). Therefore Origen's allegorical interpretation which did not

¹⁰ *Comm. on Gal. 4:22*, p. 135.

show the true sense of the text of Scripture formed a striking contrast to Calvin's method revealing the mind of the author by employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

Secondly, Calvin blamed Origen for insisting on the various meanings of one passage.

Scripture, they say, is fertile, and thus produces a variety of meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning.¹¹

For Calvin the rich wisdom of Scripture did not mean that a text had various senses. Calvin pointed out that Origen's threefold meaning of the text did not have the basis of the historical-grammatical method. In stead of insisting on the various meanings of the text, Calvin showed that the true sense of the text was the natural and obvious meaning. The principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, according to Calvin, were to present his readers the natural and clear meaning of the text.

Thirdly, Calvin argued that the starting point of Origen's allegorical interpretation applied the terms letter and spirit in 2 Cor. 3:6 incorrectly to the principles of Scriptural interpretation. In the interpretation of the passage "for the letter killeth" in 2 Cor. 3:6, Calvin

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 135-6. For studies on Calvin's rejection of allegorical interpretation, see also *Inst.* 3.4.5; *Comm. on Gen.* 2:8, *Comm. on Isa.* 33:18, *Comm. on Jer.* 31:24, *Comm. on Da.* 8: 20-25; 10:6.

criticized Origen for developing his allegorical principle. "The terms letter and spirit, therefore, do not refer to the exposition of the word, but to its influence and fruit."¹² Here Calvin maintained that the key point of Origen's principle of allegorical interpretation originated from a mistaken interpretation of Scripture. Grasping the wrong point of Origen's hermeneutical method, and confirming that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* were based on Scripture itself, Calvin clearly could employ these ideals in interpreting the text of Scripture. In fact, Calvin was the first interpreter who broke with the old method of the pre-Reformation interpreting the text by means of a sharp contrast between letter and spirit. Calvin, therefore, rejected Origen's allegorical interpretation, for, according to him, this method perverted the true sense of Scripture¹³ and did not show its natural and clear meaning.

B. Ambrose

Ambrose (340-397) also became an allegorical interpreter by using the method of Origen and Philo.¹⁴ For example, he

¹² *Comm. on 2 Cor.* 3:6, p. 175.

¹³ Cf. *Comm. on Gen.* 6:14, 21:12.

¹⁴ For the studies of the interpretation of Ambrose, see Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), p. 655; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 205-6. Bertrand de Margerie,

employed the allegorical interpretation of Philo in his other commentary on Genesis and used Origen for his commentary on Luke.¹⁵

Calvin followed Ambrose in some interpretations. In explaining the concept of righteousness, for example, Calvin accepted Ambrose's correct interpretation.

For this reason, it seems to me that Ambrose beautifully stated an example of this righteousness in the blessing of Jacob: noting that, as he did not of himself deserve the right of the first-born, concealed in his brother's clothing and wearing his brother's coat, which gave out an agreeable odor (Gen. 27:27), he received himself with his father, so that to his own benefit he received the blessing while impersonating another. And we in like manner hide under the precious purity of our first-born brother, Christ, so that we may be attested righteous in God's sight. Here are the words of Ambrose: "That Isaac smelled the odor of the garments perhaps means that we are justified not by works but by faith, since the weakness of the flesh is a hindrance to works, but the brightness of faith, which merits the pardon of sins, overshadows the error of deeds."¹⁶

Calvin, however, pointed out some problems in the interpretation of Ambrose. First, Calvin thought that the interpretation of Ambrose was exceedingly forced. For example, Calvin criticized Ambrose's interpretation of 1 Cor. 9:5 "Have

Les premiers grands exégètes Latins, vol. 2, Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1983), pp. 99-143; Milien Lamirande, "Enfance et développement spirituel: le commentaire de Saint Ambroise sur Saint Luc," *Science et Esprit* 35 (1983): 103-116.

¹⁵ Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978). p. 20. "St. Ambrose made Philo Judaeus the basis of his commentary on Genesis. . . . but he added allegories and he used Origen for his commentary on St. Luke."

¹⁶ *Inst.* 3.11.23, pp. 753-4.

we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Calvin said,

One thing farther must here be noticed, that the Apostles had no horror of marriage, which the Papal clergy so much abominate, as unbecoming the sanctity of their order. . . . For as to the explanation given by Ambrose, as referring to other persons' wives, who followed the Apostles for the purpose of hearing their doctrine, it is exceedingly forced.¹⁷

In the interpretation in 2 Cor. 2:5 "But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part; that I may not overcharge you all." Calvin mentioned that Ambrose's interpretation was ingenious: "I am aware, that Ambrose understands it as meaning - part of the saints, inasmuch as the Church of the Corinthians was divided but that is more ingenious than solid."¹⁸ From the perspective of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin rejected the forced interpretation of Ambrose. According to Calvin, in order to justify doctrine many interpreters forced and twisted the real sense of the text of Scripture. Calvin tried to find out the genuine meaning of the text. Secondly, Calvin did not agree with Ambrose because Ambrose's interpretation was, in his view, not suitable to the intention of the author of Scripture. For example, in the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5:22 "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Calvin demonstrated that his interpretation was closer to

¹⁷ *Comm. on 1 Cor.* 9:5, p. 293.

¹⁸ *Comm. on 2 Cor.* 2:5, p. 149.

Paul's intention than Ambrose's: "At the same time, neither of them (Chrysostom and Ambrose) explains Paul's meaning, and perhaps have not altogether hit upon what he intends. I shall state briefly my view of it."¹⁹ Calvin showed the suitability of the text, one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, by means of the intention of the author, the historical situation, the grammatical construction, and the context of the present passage. Calvin, however, was not always against the interpretation of Ambrose and sometimes agreed with him if his view was suitable.²⁰

C. Jerome

Jerome (345-420) used the allegorical interpretation of his early days under the influence of Origen. But later he came to stress the historical interpretation of the Old Testament narratives and prophecies in his commentaries on Jeremiah. He added the deeper, spiritual sense of a passage to the literal meaning.²¹ Later he distanced himself somewhat

¹⁹ *Comm. on 1 Th.* 5:22, p. 302.

²⁰ *Comm. on 2 Cor.* 4:6, pp. 199-200.

²¹ Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. 96. For the studies of Jerome's hermeneutics, see Bertrand de Margerie, *Les premiers grands Latins*, pp. 145-179; David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church*, pp. 129-136. Witt Semple, "St. Jerome as Biblical Translator," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 48 (1965-66): 228-9; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp.

from this allegorical interpretation of Scripture. In spite of this, he could not entirely give up allegorical interpretation in his writings.²² Calvin pointed out some problems in Jerome's interpretation. First, Calvin did not agree with Jerome when his interpretation was not simple and did not show the intention of the author. In his exposition of Gal. 2:6 "whatever they were", Calvin said,

Chrysostom and Jerome take a harsher view of the words as an indirect threatening of the most distinguished apostles. "Whatsoever they may be, if they swerve from duty, they shall not escape the judgement of God: neither the dignity of their office, nor the estimation of men, shall protect them." But another interpretation appears to me more simple, and more agreeable to Paul's design.²³

Here Calvin criticized Jerome who did not show the mind of the author and the simple sense of the text. Calvin suggested that his readers employ the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* revealing the intention of the author and the simple meaning of the text. Secondly, Calvin pointed out that Jerome's interpretation was not sufficiently grounded on grammatical methods. For example, on the Greek participle *kategnosmenos* (worthy of blame) Calvin clearly explained:

It was customary with the Greeks to give to their participles the signification of nouns, which, every person must see, is applicable to this passage. This will enable us to perceive the absurdity of the interpretation

222-34. John Rogerson, "The Old Testament," pp. 41-46.

²² A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 33.

²³ *Comm. on Gal. 2:6*, p. 54. Cf. *Comm. on Isa. 28:19*, *Comm. on Jer. 1:17, 3:12, 13:27*, *Comm. on 1 Cor. 7:33, 16:21*, *Comm. on Gal. 2:26*.

given by Jerome and Chrysostom, who represent the whole transaction as a feigned debate, which the apostles had previously arranged to take place in presence of the people. They are not even supported by the phrase, "I withstood him to the face," *kata prosopon*, which means that "to the face," or "being present," Peter was chastised and struck dumb.²⁴

Thirdly, Calvin argued that Jerome's interpretation was, in many cases, not agreeable to the context of a passage.²⁵ In the interpretation of Lamentations 5:13 "They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood." Calvin stated;

The Prophet now says, that *young men had been delivered to the mill*, or to the grinding-house; and we know that of all servile works this was the lowest; for as they used asses to grind, so also they used slaves. The meaning is, that the Jews were shamefully treated, and were reduced to the most abject condition. I know not how came Jerome to give this version, that they were basely used for lust; for *thechen*, means to grind or to tear. He thought that it means here something base, which could not be named, as though the enemies had shamefully abused the young men; we may gather from the second clause of the verse that such an idea does not accord with the passage.²⁶

Here Calvin stressed the suitability of the context, one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Fourthly, Calvin pointed out that Jerome's interpretation was often 'forced and strained'. With reference to Jer. 2:31 Calvin wrote: "Hence Jerome says, that they were said to be your, and not my prophets; as though God thus denied that he had given them any

²⁴ *Comm. on Gal.* 2:11, p. 62. Cf. *Comm. on Isa.* 6:4, 6:13, 8:7.

²⁵ *Comm. on 2 Ti.* 4:5, p. 258.

²⁶ *Comm. on La.* 5:13, pp. 505-6.

commission. But this view is forced and strained."²⁷

Criticizing Jerome's twisting the true meaning of the text, Calvin showed antiforme, one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

D. Augustine

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) had a great influence upon the interpretation of the Middle Ages.²⁸ Trigg says, "In the exegesis of Scripture, as in so much else, Augustine summed up the achievements of the Latin Patristic tradition and passed

²⁷ *Comm. on Jer.* 2:31. p. 134. Cf. *Comm. on Jer.* 3:12, *Comm. on Mt.* 25:1; *Comm. on Jn.* 4:1.

²⁸ For the studies of Augustine's hermeneutics, see J. R. Smith, "Augustine as an Exegete," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 61 (1904): 318-44; Maurice Pontet, *L'Exégétique de S. Augustin prédicateur*, *Théologie* 7 (Paris: Aubier, 1945); Gerald Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 541-563; Robert W. Bernard, "The Rhetoric of God in the Figurative Exegesis of Augustine," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 88-99; Bernard de Margerie, *Saint Augustine*, vol. 3, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1983); David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church*, pp. 136-46; Gerald Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 541-563; Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*, pp. 22-43; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 234-239; Henry Chadwick, "Augustine," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 65-69; Elaine Pagels, "The Politics of Paradise: Augustine's Exegesis of Genesis 1-3 versus that of John Chrysostom," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 67-99; John Rogerson, "The Old Testament," pp. 47-53.

it on to the Medieval church."²⁹

Augustine accepted the fourfold sense of the text which would be adopted later by medieval interpreters. Caplan explains the method of the four senses of Biblical interpretation succinctly:

Senses are multiplied in four ways: (1) according to the *sensus historicus* or *literalis*, by a simple explanation of the words; (2) according to the *sensus tropologicus*, which looks to instruction or to the correction of morals; (3) according to *allegoricus*. Exposition by this sense is exposition by a 'sense other than the literal'; (4) the *sensus anagogicus*, used mystically or openly, 'the minds of the listeners are to be stirred and exhorted to the contemplation of heavenly things.'³⁰

Although he did not ignore the literal meaning of the text, Augustine tended to stress the spiritual and allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Ambrose had a significant influence upon Augustine's method of allegorical interpretation. Augustine suggested that an interpreter should "use what is morally worthy of God as a criterion, a principle of exegesis he derives from the need for charity."³¹ He also insisted that the interpretation of Scripture be consistent with the church's rule of faith. Following the rule of faith, Augustine emphasized the doctrinal interpretation of Scripture.

²⁹ Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 43.

³⁰ Harry Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching," *Speculum* 4 (1929): 283.

³¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 3.12.18, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 90.

Calvin stood firmly in the theological method and tradition of Augustine. But in his commentaries Calvin did not follow Augustine's interpretation of Scripture.³² That Calvin did not accept Augustine's wrong interpretation does not mean that Augustine's method did not include a literal interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin's attitude toward Augustine's interpretation³³ was ambiguous because Calvin generally followed Augustine's theological doctrine of Christianity, but rejected Augustine's wrong interpretation of the text. Using the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin rejected Augustine's prolix interpretation of Scripture. Here Calvin showed how he formed brevity, one of principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. This principle was to interpret the text in as brief a manner as possible. In a letter to Farel in 1549 he said, "You know how reverently I feel toward Augustine, yet I do not conceal that his prolixity is displeasing to me. Still it may be that my brevity is too concise."³⁴ Calvin stated that Augustine's interpretation did not show the intention of the author

³² For the study of the relationship of Augustine to Calvin in the interpretation of Scripture, see Georges Besse, "Saint Augustin dans les oeuvres exégétiques de Jean Calvin: Recherches sur l'autorité reconnue a saint Augustin par Calvin en matière d'exégèse," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 5-6 (1959-1960): 161-172.

³³ In his commentaries Calvin directly mentioned Augustine around 100 times.

³⁴ "To Farel, September 1, 1549," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 2, p. 247.

clearly.

He (Paul) says further, that the Spirit is given, that is bestowed through the gratuitous goodness of God, and not conferred for our merits; according to what Augustine has well observed, who, though he is mistaken in his view of the love of God, gives this explanation, - that we courageously bear adversities, and are thus confirmed in our hope, because we, having been regenerated by the Spirit, do love God. It is indeed a pious sentiment, but not what Paul means: for love is not to be taken here in an active but a passive sense. And certain it is, that no other thing is taught by Paul than that the true fountain of all love is, when the faithful are not slightly touched with this conviction, but have their souls thoroughly imbued with it.³⁵

Since Calvin believed that the chief task of an interpreter was to reveal the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*), he seldom followed Augustine's interpretation without showing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin correctly criticized Augustine: "Augustine's interpretation of the word *proe-grape* ("hath been set forth") is harsh, and inconsistent with Paul's design."³⁶ He also pointed out that the problem with Augustine's interpretation was that his explanations were not related to the text.

For though what Augustine says is true, that even the sins of the saints are, through the guiding providence of God, so far from doing harm to them, that, on the contrary, they serve to advance their salvation; yet this belongs not to this passage, the subject of which is the cross.³⁷

Here Calvin employed respect for the context, one of the most significant elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

³⁵ *Comm. on Rom*, 5:7, pp. 193-4.

³⁶ *Comm. on Gal*. 3:1, p. 79.

³⁷ *Comm. on Rom*. 8:28, p. 315.

This principle was that an interpreter limited the scope of his interpretation on the issues related to the passage of Scripture, and tried not to depart from the central message of the text and to wander outside the key point of the subject. Calvin's criticism above did not mean that Augustine had disregarded for the context in interpreting the meaning of the text. What Calvin pointed out was that the exceedingly doctrinal interpretation of Scripture made an interpreter not to see what the passage itself said. Calvin agreed with Augustine on doctrine, but disagreed with him on the wrong interpretation of the Biblical text. In the interpretation of Gen. 22:12, for example, "Now I know that thou fearest God" Calvin remarked that Augustine's interpretation was forced. "The exposition of Augustine, 'I have caused thee to know,' is forced."³⁸ Calvin indicated that the problem with Augustine's interpretation was related to the fact that he did not examine the Greek manuscripts.³⁹

The prolix, doctrinal, forced interpretation of Augustine motivated Calvin to employ the principle of brevity. Through criticizing the problems of Augustine's interpretation, Calvin took the opportunity to formulate his own distinctive principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

E. The Roman Catholics

³⁸ *Comm. on Gen. 22:12*, p. 570.

³⁹ *Comm. on Jn. 12:32*, p. 37.

Before dealing with the interpretation of Scripture of the Roman Catholics we need to take into account the general background to the biblical interpretation of the Middle Ages. The Medieval Ages' interpretation was rooted in the tradition of the Fathers, which it developed in its own characteristic way.⁴⁰ During the Middle Ages, the interpreters interpreted Scripture mainly with the use of the *gloss* and the *scholium* (or *scholion*) and the fourfold sense in accordance with the tradition of the Fathers. Generally the *gloss* was the most characteristic device of the Medieval interpreters.⁴¹ It consisted of brief commentaries on words, phrases or sentences.⁴² The *scholium* was a longer theological interpretation of certain parts of the text which an interpreter considered important. During that era the use of the *gloss* and the *scholium* functioned as a canon for interpreting Scripture. Also, most of the interpreters during

⁴⁰ For the studies of Middle Ages' hermeneutics, see Walter J. Burghardt, "On Early Christian Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 11 (1950): 78-116; Robert E. McNally, *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1986), p. 29, and "Medieval Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 445-454; Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 4 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959); Ceslaus Spicq, *Esquisse d'une histoire de l'exégèse Latine au Moyen Age* (Paris: Z.J. Vrin, 1944); Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood, *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Medieval Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 435-441; James M. Vosté, "Medieval Exegesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 10 (1948): 229-246.

⁴¹ Wilhem Pauck, ed., *Luther: Lectures on Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. xxv.

⁴² Ibid.

the Middle Ages took the fourfold sense of Scripture as their hermeneutical starting point.⁴³ During the late Middle Ages Andrew of Victor, Nicholas of Lyra, and Thomas Aquinas⁴⁴ stressed the literal sense of Scripture more than other interpreters of their day. But the fourfold sense of Scripture was still largely accepted by the Medieval interpreters. Especially Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349) began to reject the allegorical interpretation and the tradition of the Fathers. Adopting the method of Thomas Aquinas' hermeneutics, Lyra developed his own method for the interpretation of Scripture. He placed considerable emphasis upon the literal sense of

⁴³ For example, Jerusalem may be interpreted to have the fourfold sense as follow:

"Literal: the *physical city* of Jerusalem

Allegorical: the *church*

Tropological: the *human soul*

Anagogical: the *heavenly Jerusalem/life hereafter.*" See F. E. Deist and J. J. Burden, *An ABC of Biblical Exegesis* (Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1983), p. 79.

⁴⁴ For the studies on Thomas Aquinas' interpretation, see M. Dubois, "Mystical and Realistic Elements in the exegesis and Hermeneutics of Thomas Aquinas," *Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries*, eds. Benjamin Uffenheimer and Henning Graf Reventlow (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 39-54; Hugh Pope, "St. Thomas as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture," in *St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Aelred Whitacre (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1925), pp. 111-44; Maximino Arias Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget: Die Prinzipien Seiner Schriftdeutung und Seine Lehre von schriftsinnen* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1971); Per Erik Person, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957); Gerhard Ebeling, "Hermeneutik Locus of the Doctrine of God in Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas," *Journal for Theology and the Church* 3 (1967): 70-111; T. F. Torrance, "Scientific Hermeneutics According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962): 259-289.

Scripture, and especially influenced Luther's hermeneutics.⁴⁵

Calvin strongly criticized the Roman Catholic church on the interpretation of Scripture and began to point out the weaknesses in the Roman Catholic view of Scripture.⁴⁶ Calvin criticized that the Roman Catholic church did not accept the clarity of Scripture. "Wherefore it is detestable blasphemy against God in that the Papists say, that the Scripture is dark and doubtful. For to what end should God have spoken, unless the plain and invincible truth should show itself in his words?"⁴⁷ The theological basis of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* employed by Calvin derived from the fact that Scripture itself was clear. But the Roman Catholic interpreters did not accept the Reformers' view that the fundamental clarity of Scripture offered a hermeneutical principle of Scripture.⁴⁸ Calvin also rejected the Roman Catholic view that an interpretation of Scripture adopted by a vote of council was true and certain.⁴⁹ He attacked the 'Romanists' for teaching that the power of interpreting

⁴⁵ James George Kiecker, "The Hermeneutical Principles and Exegetical Methods of Nicholas of Lyra, O. F. M. (CA. 1270-1349)," pp. 274-282. Here he argues that in his *Commentary on Song of Songs* Luther's basic approach was strikingly similar to the interpretation of Lyra.

⁴⁶ According to my investigation, Calvin criticized the Roman Catholic church's interpretation around 160 times in his *Institutes* and commentaries.

⁴⁷ *Comm. on Ac.* 18:28, p. 205.

⁴⁸ For this issue, see chapter 6.

⁴⁹ *Inst.* 4.9.13, p. 1177.

Scripture belonged to councils, and without appeal.⁵⁰ He criticized their view that the authority of Scripture was grounded in the approval of the church.⁵¹ In contrast to the Roman Catholic view, Calvin stressed the intention of the author and the Holy Spirit. By using the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, he tried to reveal the mind of the author inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Calvin pointed out several problems in the Roman Catholic interpretation of Scripture. He maintained that the Roman Catholic church perverted the text for the purpose of establishing their doctrines. "Papists pervert this passage, for the purpose of establishing the doctrine which they have contrived, without any authority from Scripture."⁵² According to him, the 'Papists' forced the text into serving their doctrine of meritorious works.⁵³ In the interpretation of Gen. 22:15 "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham" Calvin argued that the Papists boldly seized this passage in order to prove that works were deserving of all the good things which God conferred upon us.⁵⁴ Calvin correctly pointed out that the Papists' dependence upon the translation of the Vulgate made them torture the text. "*Eddaddeh* is translated by the Vulgate,

⁵⁰ *Inst.* 4.9.14, p. 1177.

⁵¹ *Inst.* 4.9.14, p. 1178.

⁵² *Comm. on 1 Cor.* 13:8, p. 425.

⁵³ *Comm. on 2 Cor.* 4:17, pp. 213-4.

⁵⁴ *Comm. on Gen.* 22:15, p. 572.

'I will call to remembrance,' on which account this passage has been tortured by Papists to support auricular confession, but so absurdly that even old wives can laugh at it."⁵⁵ Against the Roman Catholic interpreters' forcing the true sense of the text for establishing their own doctrine, Calvin stressed simplicity and avoided forced interpretation.

In the interpretation of Luke 22:19 "This is my body for you" Calvin interpreted symbolically. Calvin said, "the Lord appoints to us for a spiritual use an earthly and corruptible sign; which cannot take place, unless his command and promise are distinctly heard for the edification of faith."⁵⁶ But Calvin rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation of the 'Papists'. He criticized their interpretation of texts.⁵⁷ On the interpretation of Jn. 21:15 "Jesus saith to Simon Peter", Calvin argued that the Church of Rome 'tortured' this passage to support the 'tyranny of their Popery'.⁵⁸ Thus the Papists maintained that Peter held the highest rank, because he alone was specially addressed, granting that some special honour was conferred on him. Calvin pointed out that their view twisted the true meaning of the text in order to establish the primacy of the Pope.⁵⁹ Calvin thought that the true sense of the text

⁵⁵ *Comm. on Isa.* 38:15, pp. 173-4.

⁵⁶ *Comm. on Lk.* 22:19, p. 206.

⁵⁷ *Comm. on Lk.* 22:19, p. 208.

⁵⁸ *Comm. on Jn.* 21:15, p. 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* on Jn. 21:22, p. 281.

could not be found by means of the method employed by the Roman Catholic interpreters.

Calvin maintained that the interpretation followed by the Church of Rome did not relate to the contexts of passages. In order to justify the doctrine of the Roman Catholic church, so Calvin explained, the 'Papists' interpreted the passages with its traditions and dogmas. Thus this interpretation made the Church of Rome disregard the context of the text. For example, in the commentary of Gal. 2:15 "by the works of the law", Calvin remarked.

As the Papists of the present day are uneasy when we extort from them the acknowledgement that men are justified by faith alone, they reluctantly admit that "the works of the law" include those of a moral nature. Many of them, however, by quoting Jerome's gloss, imagine that they have made a good defence; but the context will show that the words relate also to the moral law.⁶⁰

Here Calvin argued that an interpreter should employ the principle of suitability by considering the context of a passage. Calvin maintained that the interpretation of the 'Papists' did not reveal the intention of the author because they endeavored to establish 'the merit and righteousness of good works'.⁶¹ By employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin did his best to discover the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*).

F. The Jews

⁶⁰ *Comm. on Gal. 2:15*, pp. 68-9.

⁶¹ *Comm. on Da. 6:22*, p. 381.

From Philo in Alexandria (c. 25 BC-40 AD) to Rabbi Solomon and David Kimchi in the Middle Ages, the Jewish interpreters had a great influence upon many Christian interpreters in the understanding of the Old Testament. However many Protestant interpreters, with their emphasis upon the continuity and the authority of both the Old and New Testaments, were in conflict with them. For example, one of the major arguments was to deal with the proper interpretation of the fulfillment of prophecy in the Old Testament.

I now turn to investigate Calvin's attitude toward the Jews and his assessment of the Jewish hermeneutics. Calvin's general view of the Jewish interpreters was negative. Calvin attacked them often in his Old Testament commentaries.

Calvin frequently used rabbinic commentaries and mentioned the Jewish interpretation.⁶² But Calvin referred to them not by name but collectively.⁶³ He called them 'the Rabbins',⁶⁴ or 'the Hebrews',⁶⁵ or 'the Hebrew interpreters'.⁶⁶ Calvin referred to many Jewish authors in

⁶² In his commentaries on the Old Testament, Calvin mentioned the Jewish interpretation approximately 90 times. Especially in his *Commentary on Psalms*, Calvin criticized the Hebrew interpreters in many places.

⁶³ *Comm. on Da.* 9:24.

⁶⁴ *Comm. on Da.* 9:24, *Comm. on Ps.* 119:1.

⁶⁵ *Comm. on Ps.* 17:10, 119:1.

⁶⁶ *Comm. on Hab.* 3:13.

this fashion: the Targum of Jonathan,⁶⁷ the Chaldee Paraphrast (the Chaldean Targum),⁶⁸ Zaadias (Saadia Gaon),⁶⁹ Rabbi Barbinel (Isaac Abarbanel),⁷⁰ and David Kimchi.⁷¹

Calvin recognized Jewish commentaries as being useful for the understanding of Hebrew grammar and words.⁷² But Calvin's

⁶⁷ *Comm. on Isa.* 38:2, p. 153. "Jonathan renders it, 'Give up thy house to another'; but the construction conveys a different meaning."

⁶⁸ *Comm. on Isa.* 11:5, p. 382. "The Chaldee Paraphrast explains it thus; 'and the righteous shall be round about him, believing worshippers shall approach him.' But I adopt a more simple interpretation, as if he had said, 'he shall not appear like kings, clothed with purple and a crown, or girded with a belt; righteousness and truth shall shine forth in him.'"

⁶⁹ *Comm. on Isa.* 40:31, p. 239.

⁷⁰ *Comm. on Da.* 2:44, p. 183. He was a strong opponent of the Christian interpretation on Daniel.

⁷¹ *Comm. on Ps.* 112:5, p. 326. Calvin regarded him as the most correct expositor among the Rabbins. In his *Comm. on Gen.* 3:1, pp. 146-7. Calvin criticized him because his interpretation was forced. In his interpretation of Ps. 112:5 Calvin mentioned that more correct was the interpretation of the Chaldean Paraphrast.

⁷² On this issue, see David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, pp. 1-7. Calvin's using Jewish commentaries for the understanding of Hebrew grammar and words caused a misunderstanding of the Lutheran theologians of 16th century. This misunderstanding originated from the ignorance of Calvin's hermeneutical principles. For example, Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603) who "worked energetically to eradicate crypto-Calvinist theological tendencies" strongly criticized the commentaries of Calvin. See William R. Russell, "Aegidius Hunnius" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 2, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 276; Ken Schurb, "Sixteenth-Century Lutheran-Calvinist Conflict on the *Protevangelium*," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54 (1990): 25-47.

general attitude toward the Jewish interpreters was and
critical.⁷³ and to pronounce carelessly on subjects

Calvin demonstrated that the Jewish interpreters twisted the true meaning of the text. Calvin believed that all of Scripture did bear a witness to Christ Jesus as its goal. In John 5:39 Jesus said that the Scriptures testified about him. But in Calvin's view, the Jewish interpreters 'tortured' the proper christological meaning of texts because of their unbelief and wilful refusal to recognize Jesus as the Christ. "We must not be surprised at the shameful ignorance of these Rabbins, and at their blundering at the very rudiments, since they do not acknowledge the necessity for a Mediator."⁷⁴ The problems of the Jewish hermeneutics resulted, in his view, from their failure to acknowledge the christological orientation of Scripture.⁷⁵ Calvin maintained that they purposely wanted to pervert the text relating to Christ.

The rabbis confound the two monarchies, through their desire to comprehend under the second what they call the kingdom of the Greeks; but they display the grossest ignorance and dishonesty. For they do not err through simple ignorance, but they purposely desire to overthrow what Scripture here states clearly concerning the advent

⁷³ For the study of Calvin's attitude toward the Jewish interpreters, see David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, pp. 52-81.

⁷⁴ *Comm. on Da. 7:27*, p. 77.

⁷⁵ K. Exalto, "Calvijn over de vervulling van de oud-testamentische beloften," in *Reformatorsche Stemmen verleden en heden: Bundel uitgegeven ter gelegenheid van het vijftigjarig bestaan van de Willem de Zwijgerstichting*, ed. D. H. Borgers, etc. (Apeldoorn: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1989), pp. 115-117.

of Christ. Hence they are not ashamed to mingle and confuse history, and to pronounce carelessly on subjects unknown to them.⁷⁶

In the interpretation of texts on the coming of the Messiah, Calvin attempted to show that the Jewish interpreters purposely denied the christological sense of the text. In the interpretation of Hos. 6:2 "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight", Calvin stated, "This place the Hebrew writers pervert, for they think that they are yet to be redeemed by the coming of the Messiah; and they imagine that this will be the third day. . . . Notwithstanding, this place is usually referred to Christ."⁷⁷ Calvin observed that the Jews did not treat this prophecy as relating to the final day of Christ's advent.⁷⁸ Calvin's opinion was that the Jewish interpreters perverted the true exposition and tortured the Prophets' meaning. In the interpretation of Isa. 7:14 "Behold, a virgin shall conceive", Calvin mentioned that the Jews rejected the christological meaning of the passage.

This passage is obscure; but the blame lies partly on the Jews, who by much cavilling, have laboured, as far as lay in their power, to pervert the true exposition. They are hard pressed by this passage; for it contains an illustrious prediction concerning the Messiah, who is here called Immanuel; and therefore they have laboured, by all possible means, to torture the Prophet's meaning

⁷⁶ *Comm. on Da. 2:39*, p. 174.

⁷⁷ *Comm. on Hos. 6:2*, p. 217.

⁷⁸ *Comm. on Da. 7:27*, p. 72.

to another sense.⁷⁹

Calvin argued that the Jewish commentators twisted the true meaning of the text 'in order to ascribe to the glory of their own nation and to boast their own privileges'.⁸⁰ Their 'boasting privileges' appeared in their forced interpretation of Jos. 2:1 "They came into a harlot's house". Here the Jewish interpreters considered the name harlot to mean one who kept an inn. Concerning this interpretation, Calvin argued that the Rabbis presumptuously wrested Scripture and gave it a different turn for the honour of their nation.⁸¹

Calvin indicated that the Jewish interpreters perverted the simple meaning of the text and obscured the plain truth of Scripture.⁸² In doing so their interpretation was suited to their own interests.⁸³ They perverted and obscured the meaning of the text by 'the most chilling comments'.⁸⁴ Here Calvin employed the principle of the avoidance of forced interpretation, one of the most important elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. The Jewish interpreters did not show the simple and true sense of the text of Scripture because they did not have the correct view of Messiah.

⁷⁹ *Comm. on Isa.* 7:14, p. 244.

⁸⁰ *Comm. on Da.* 2:44, p. 181.

⁸¹ *Comm. on Jos.* 2:1, p. 43.

⁸² *Comm. on Ps.* 109:8, p. 278.

⁸³ *Comm. on Ps.* 27:9, p. 459.

⁸⁴ *Comm. on Ps.* 29:1, p. 475.

Calvin often pointed out that many of the Jewish expositors did not reveal the real intention of the author.⁸⁵ An example can be found in his *Commentary on Isaiah 54:2*. "They who think that the Church is compared in this passage to a synagogue are, in my opinion, mistaken, and only succeed in increasing the obstinacy of the Jews, who perceive that the Prophet's meaning is tortured."⁸⁶ For Calvin the chief one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, however, was to reveal the intention of the author. But they ignored the significant purpose of the interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin maintained that the Rabbis invented 'an absurd fable': "The Jews have, according to their manner, invented a foolish fable."⁸⁷ They exercised their wit in fabulous glosses which had no historical foundation.⁸⁸ Calvin denied the strange story invented by the Jewish interpreters to explain Jer. 17:11 "As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool". He wrote: "The Rabbis, according to their practice, have devised fables; for they imagine that the partridge steals all the eggs of other birds which she can find, and gathers them in one heap, and then that the pullets, when

⁸⁵ *Comm. on Ps. 15:4*, p. 211.

⁸⁶ *Comm. on Isa. 54:2*, p. 135.

⁸⁷ *Comm. on Gen. 4:23*, p. 219.

⁸⁸ *Comm. on Am. 2:1*, p. 172.

hatched, fly away, as by certain hidden instinct, they understand that it is not their mother."⁸⁹ Jewish pride, in Calvin's view, was exposed in the lack of humility with which the Jewish interpreters approached the text: They used their own conjectures in the interpretation of Scripture. In the interpretation of Ps. 136:13 "Who divided the Red Sea" Calvin argued that their conjectures were literally diabolic:

The Psalmist speaks of divisions in the plural number, which has led some Jewish authors to conjecture that there must have been more passages - an instance of their solemn trifling in things of which they know nothing and of their method of corrupting the Scriptures entirely with vain fancies. We may well laugh at such fooleries, yet we are to hold them at the same time in detestation; for there can be no doubt that the rabbinical writers were led to this by Satan, as an artful way of discrediting the Scriptures. Moses plainly and explicitly asserts that the heaps of waters stood up on both sides, from which we infer that the space between was one and undivided.⁹⁰

Here Calvin showed the principle of the avoidance of conjecture, one of the most significant elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. This principle was to remove wrong speculations and to seek the simple meaning of the text. Calvin pointed out that their interpretation was not simple and natural. "The rabbins give this explanation - that the Prophet says that he himself was God's herald, and thus recites his words; but this is forced and unnatural."⁹¹ He also said, "Some Jewish interpreters understand it of the laws

⁸⁹ *Comm. on Jer. 17:11*, p. 358.

⁹⁰ *Comm. on Ps. 136:13*, p. 186.

⁹¹ *Comm. on Zec. 2:8*, p. 68.

of the heathen. . . . I therefore keep by the more simple explanation."⁹² From the principle of the avoidance of forced interpretation, Calvin criticized the Jewish interpretation.

It is clear that Calvin's attitude toward the Jewish interpreters was extremely critical and negative. Although Calvin referred to their grammatical commentaries and etymological skills, he strongly maintained that their interpretation of the Old Testament was a failure because they did not recognize Jesus as the Christ and the Messiah. Calvin's precise insight to judge the wrong interpretation of the Jewish interpreters was closely related to the employment of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

⁹² *Comm. on Ps. 119:109*, p. 488.

CHAPTER 4

CALVIN AND THE REFORMATION

The Renaissance provided the cultural background for the Reformers to interpret Scripture by means of its original languages. Renaissance humanism especially had a great influence on the methods of biblical interpretation used by the Reformers who mainly expanded the hermeneutical method of the humanists. Desiderius Erasmus strongly influenced them. Under Erasmus' influence the Reformers stressed the one literal sense over against the fourfold sense of Scripture, and they insisted that Scripture be its own interpreter.

In this chapter I deal with Calvin's attitude toward the other Reformers' interpretation of Scripture,¹ as well as that

¹ For the studies on the Reformers' interpretation of Scripture, see Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 3-22; Donald M. Lake, "The Reformation Contribution to the Interpretation of the Bible," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, ed. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 178-98. Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 19 (1984): 121-152; Pasmela J. Scalise, "The Reformers as Biblical Scholars," *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989): 23-28; J. A. B. Van den Brink, "Bible and Biblical Theology in the Early Reformation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 337-352; Paul L. Lehmann, "The Reformer's Use of the Bible," *Theology Today* 3 (1946-7): 328-344; Cornelis Augustijn, "The

of the Anabaptists, and the Libertines. was correct, but the Reformation scholar's view on the authority of

A. Luther

Before dealing with the hermeneutical principles of Martin Luther, we need to understand what Luther's basic attitude toward Scripture was.

Luther's views on the sole authority of Scripture had its origin in the influence which William of Ockham (1280-1349) exercised on his thinking by his teachers Jodokus Trutfetter von Eisenach and Bartholomäus Arnoldi von Usingen (1462-1532),² and through the writings of Gabriel Biel³ and Pierre d'Ailly.⁴ These Ockhamists were concerned chiefly with stressing the sole authority of Scripture. Ockham did not recognize the pope as the final judge of the question as to

Sixteenth-Century Reformers and the Bible." in *The Bible and Its Readers*, ed. Wim Bekin (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 58-68.

² Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Sein Weg zur Reformation 1483-1521* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1981), pp. 44-7.

³ On the study for the influence of Biel upon Luther, See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 22. Here Lohse says, "Luther learned a form of Ockhamism that had been revised by Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), a moderate disciple of Ockham who had taught in Tübingen. . . . Luther's later studies in theology, beginning in 1507, also primarily exposed him to Biel's modified version of Ockhamist theology."

⁴ A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther, Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 34.

whether his understanding of Scripture was correct.⁵ But the pre-Reformation Scholastics' stress on the authority of Scripture did not satisfy Luther enough for him to use their method of interpretation. Although there was a certain continuity between their doctrine on the authority of Scripture and that of Luther,⁶ his views on the clarity of Scripture and the method of its interpretation differed from theirs. This discovery of Luther broke the exclusive authority of the Roman Catholic church. Luther's doctrine of the clarity of Scripture made him the pillar of the Reformation.

Luther's hermeneutical method⁷ was influenced by

⁵ M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1944), p. 14. See the Preface to *Compendium Errorum Papae* of Ockham to which Reu refers.

⁶ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Holy Scripture*, vol. 2, *The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 53-5, says: "Scholarship has generally ignored the continuities between the view of Scripture held during the later Middle Ages and the Reformers' view of Scripture and, by extension, has tended to ignore the way in which both medieval scholastic and Reformation Protestant formulations concerning the character, authority, and interpretation of Scripture combine to produce the later Protestant scholastic doctrine of Scripture. . . . We must recognize in Luther's teaching both a certain continuity and discontinuity with the medieval doctrine of Scripture and, again, both a measure of continuity and discontinuity with the later Protestant doctrine as codified during the era of orthodoxy."

⁷ For the studies of Luther's hermeneutics, see Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Hermeneutical Principles of Luther's Early Writings" (Th.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1948); Mark Ellingsen, "Luther as Narrative Exegete," *The Journal of Religion* 63 (1983): 394-413; Raymond E. Surbury, "The Significance of Luther's Hermeneutics for the Protestant Reformation," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 24 (1953): 241-61; Gerhard Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," *Theology Today* 21 (1964): 34-46; O. Walter, "Scripture as

Augustine, Ockham, Lyra, Erasmus, Reuchlin, and the French humanist Lefèvre d'Étaples, known as Faber Stapulensis.⁸ The latter's influence on Luther was exercised through his *Quincuplex Psalterium* which was intensively studied by Luther.⁹ Through this study Luther developed a critical

Viewed by Luther and Calvin," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7 (1975): 31-6; Ralph W. Doermann, "Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Can We Still Use Them?" in *Interpretation Luther's Legacy*, eds. Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), pp. 14-25; A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960); Denis R. Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology* (Waterloo: Wilfried Luarier University Press, 1983); Raymond Larry Shelton, "Martin Luther's Concept of Biblical Interpretation in Historical Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1974); James S. Preus, "Old Testament *Promissio* and Luther's New Hermeneutic," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 145-61; Douglas Carter, "Luther as Exegete," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32 (1961): 517-521; A. E. McGrath, "Luther," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 414-6; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 322-41; Friedrich Beisser, *Claritas Scripturae bei Martin Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); Kurt Aland, "Luther as Exegete," *The Expository Times* 69 (1957): 45-48; Rudolf Ficker, "Ut *Simplicissime Tractaretis Scripturas*: Martin Luther as Interpreter of Scripture," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 15 (1983): 175-196; Scott H. Hendrix, "Luther against the Background of the History of Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 229-239; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings*, pp. 5-134.

⁸ James Comer Howell, "A Hermeneutical Approach to Psalm 90" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1984), pp. 95-6. Here he mentions that in the interpretation of Psalm 90 Luther derived his exegetical information from Lyra, Faber, and Reuchlin.

⁹ On M. Luther's use of Faber Stapulensis, see the introductory article preceding his annotations of Faber Stapulensis (WA 4.463-66, "*Adnotationes Quincuplici Fabri Stapulensis Psalterio manu adscriptae*"). For the study of this copy with many annotations from the hand of M. Luther, see WA 4.466-526. (Faber Stapulensis, "*Adnotationes Quincuplici Psalterio adscriptae*").

attitude toward Lyra¹⁰ and his employment of the fourfold sense of Scripture.¹¹ Luther's dependence on Faber can be

¹⁰ For the study of Lyra's hermeneutics, see James George Kiecker, "The Hermeneutical Principles and Exegetical Methods of Nicholas of Lyra, O.F.M. (CA. 1270-1349)."

Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), who was influenced by Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (or Rashi), influenced young Luther's hermeneutical method. In his *First Lectures on the Psalms* Luther followed Lyra in many places. Luther, however, often rejected Lyra's wrong views. For example, in the explanation of Psalm 4 Luther said as follows: "Psalm 4 has the title *To victory with instruments, a psalm of David*. . . . And since this title is often used in the Psalms and is here given for the first time, we ought to look at it a little more closely. But in the first place, I am not one who is willing to accept as true what Nicholas of Lyra reports from his Rabbi Solmon, namely, that it is called "to victory" because when the Levite singers sang this psalm, one chorus tried to outsing another. This is very much like a boyish invention. . . . Therefore that interpretation is absurd and irrelevant." (LW 10. 42).

The fact that in his *Lectures on Romans* Luther quoted Lyra's statements many times makes us realize the influence exerted by Lyra upon Luther's hermeneutical method. Especially Luther was influenced by Lyra's moral interpretation (Ibid., p. 127, p. 281). Luther, however, pointed out the problems of Lyra's interpretation from the perspectives of the grammatical method (Rom. 12:1, Ibid., p. 325), the context (Rom. 5:6), the analogy of Scripture (Rom. 6:6), the themes such as faith, sin, and the justification by faith (Rom. 1:3-4, 3:5, 5:1).

¹¹ Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Hermeneutical Principles of Luther's Early Exegesis," p. 43. Lowell C. Green, *How Melancthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel: The Doctrine of Justification in the Reformation* (Greenwood: The Attic Press, In., 1980), p. 112, also says, "Faber had rejected the medieval hermeneutics of a fourfold interpretation of Scripture and had focused on the *sensus literalis* or literal meaning. However, he wanted to understand the Psalms not in any historicizing manner but as prophetic witnesses to Christ. This hermeneutic interested Luther greatly and guided him in his early Biblical studies." Cf. Henry Heller, "The Evangelicism of Lefèvre d'Étaples: 1525," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 42-77. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 53-64 and "Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c. 1455-1536) Calvin's Forerunner in France," in *Africa Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. A. D. Pont (Pretoria: University van Pretoria, 1980), pp. 1-21.

noticed in his *Lectures on Romans*¹² and in his marginal notes to the *Quincuplex Psalterium*.¹³ Although they helped to some extent in the development of the method of Luther's interpretation of Scripture, he was to a large extent influenced by his personal study of Scripture and the exegetical insights he gained from it.¹⁴ In his *Lectures on Romans* and in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Luther was still

¹² In spite of Faber's influence on Luther's method, Luther disagreed with Faber's view of the authorship of Hebrews and the Christological interpretation (Rom. 3:5).

¹³ Ibid., p. 47. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), p. 60, says, "Luther's expository writings give abundant evidence of the influence exerted by Lefèvre on his method of scriptural interpretation. In his subsequent labors as preacher and commentator Luther would assign a place of central importance to the christological significance of the text. Like Lefèvre, he devoted his first endeavors in biblical exegesis to the book of Psalms; and from Lefèvre he learned the primary importance of the literal sense and the twofold distinction within that sense. In expounding the Psalter he, too, sought to bring out the native sense—that, namely, intended by both divine and human authors, which he described as the "prophetic" literal sense, and which, as distinguished from the bare "historic" literal sense, pointed to and was fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. For Luther, as for Lefèvre, Christ was the key to the Psalter and to the Scriptures in their entirety."

For the study of Faber's influence on Luther's hermeneutics, see Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 48 (1951): 182-230. For the study of the relationship Luther to Faber, see Guy Bedouelle. "Lefèvre d'Étaples et Luther: Une Recherche de frontières (1517-1527)," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 63 (1983): 1-2, 17-31.

¹⁴ A. C. George, "Martin Luther's Doctrine of Sanctification with Special Reference to the *Formula Simul Iustus et Peccator*: A Study in Luther's Lectures on Romans and Galatians" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981), p. 29; C. Warren Hovland, "Anfechtung in Luther's Biblical Exegesis," in *Reformation Studies*, ed. Franklin H. Littell (Richmond: John Knox, 1962), p. 60.

immersed in the exegetical tradition of the Middle Ages, to the extent that he employed the fourfold interpretation of Scripture along with *glossa* and *scholia*.¹⁵ But soon Luther broke with the traditional methods of interpretation and started applying his own principles of hermeneutics. Wilhem Pauck comments on Luther's own method: "The upshot of all this was that he developed a spiritual exegesis in which he essentially combined the *quadriga* with Faber's method in such a way that the literal-prophetic understanding of the Scripture became connected and interpenetrated with a reading of the text in terms of the tropological or moral sense."¹⁶ Thus Luther's method came from a combination of the philological-grammatical method of the humanists and the tropological interpretation of the Scholastics.¹⁷

Generally Luther had five hermeneutical principles of Scripture. First, he used the principle *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. This hermeneutical principle came from Luther's assertion that the sole authority and perspicuity of Scripture lies in itself. Luther employed the self-interpretation of Scripture against an interpretation through the teaching and

¹⁵ Gerhard Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," p. 40.

¹⁶ Wilhem Pauck, *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, pp. xxxii-iii.

¹⁷ W. Schwarz, "Studies in Luther's Attitude towards Humanism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1955): 66-76.

tradition of the Roman Catholic church.¹⁸ For him the true method of interpretation was to put Scripture alongside Scripture in a right and proper way.¹⁹ In chapter 6 I will deal with this first aspect of Luther's hermeneutical method, namely, "*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres.*"²⁰

Secondly, Luther broke with the four-fold sense of scriptural interpretation of the Middle Ages which he used in an earlier period in his life. Instead, he stressed one meaning of the text: the literal meaning arrived at by the historical-grammatical method. Luther said:

The Christian reader should make it his first task to seek out the literal sense, as they call it. For it alone is the whole substance of faith and Christian theology; it alone holds its ground in trouble and trial.²¹

Luther is the first of the Protestant interpreters to employ this method. Luther used this method in his two catechisms. In his interpretation of the Sabbath in the third commandment, for example, Luther uses a grammatical approach:

Our word 'holy day' or 'holiday' is so called from the Hebrew word 'Sabbath,' which properly means to rest, that is, to cease from labor; hence our common expression for 'stopping work' literally means 'observing a holy day or

¹⁸ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁹ Skevington A. Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 21.

²⁰ WA 10.3.238.

²¹ LW 9.24. Luther also said that our effort must be concentrated on arriving at one simple, pertinent, and sure literal sense. Cf. LW 3.27.

holiday.²²

In his explanation of the church in the third article Luther explains the meaning of the original word to his readers:

Thus the word 'church' (Kirche) really means nothing else than a common assembly; it is not of German but of Greek origin, like the *ecclesia*. In that language the word is *kyria*, and in Latin *curia*. In our mother tongue therefore it ought to be called 'a Christian congregation or assembly,' or best and most clearly of all, 'a holy Christian people.'²³

Luther fearlessly advanced the literal meaning in the face of his opponents. Nowhere is this method more apparent than in his controversy with Jerome Emser, Secretary to Duke George of Saxony and a Court Chaplain.²⁴ In the interpretation of the Lord's Supper Luther regarded the literal aspect of the utmost importance. Against Zwingli, Luther, influenced by Augustine, gave the following explanation in this regard:

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of the Lord Christ in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by Christ's word to eat and drink. . . . It is bread by and wine comprehended in God's Word and connected with it.²⁵

According to Kolb, Luther showed the usage of a literal interpretation on the Lord's Supper.

He [Luther] presumed that God actually works His saving

²² M. Luther, *The Large Catechism (1529)*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 375. Hereafter referred to LC.

²³ LC 416-7.

²⁴ A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 29.

²⁵ LC 447.

will through elements of the created order which He has selected to do the task, including Jesus' human flesh and oral and written human language, as well as the water of baptism and the bread-body and wine-blood of the Lord's Supper. He presumed the words of institution should be interpreted literally even though he could not understand how that could be.²⁶

On explaining the meaning of observing a holy day literally, Luther continued to say that even though in the Old Testament God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest, the commandment was given to the Jews concerning the outward observance²⁷.

Thirdly, Luther stressed the distinction between Law and Gospel in order to understand the meaning of the text correctly. Recently, a number of scholars have emphasized the hermeneutical significance of the Law-Gospel distinction.²⁸ In

²⁶ Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching* (Hutchinson: Crown Publishing, Inc., 1992), p. 9.

²⁷ LC 375-6.

²⁸ Ralph A. Bohlmann, *Principle of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), especially in chapter 7 deals with the hermeneutical function of Law-Gospel. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. P. F. Koehneke and H. J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 6-11; A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 29-33; Gerhard O. Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 240-252; Horace Hummel, "Are Law and Gospel a Valid Hermeneutical Principle?" *Concordia Theological Quarter* 46 (1982): 181-207. Hummel insists that we should recognize the distinction between Law and Gospel as a hermeneutical principle of Scripture of Luther. Also Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, p. 157, says, "Luther's important distinction between the law and the gospel is also closely related to his interpretation of the Scripture in terms of its center. The Word of God encounters people as law and as gospel, as a word of judgment and a word of grace. . . . And this twofold dimension of the Word of God must be taken

spite of recognizing the distinction between Law and Gospel as a hermeneutical principle in interpreting Scripture, they have not found out their own hermeneutical method. That makes it difficult to interpret the text in terms of this distinction.

In the conclusion of the Ten Commandments in the *Small Catechism*, Luther showed the clear contrast of Law and Gospel.²⁹ The expressions on Law were "God threatens to punish," "We should fear his wrath," and "do what he has commanded," "disobey". The expressions of Gospel were "He promises grace and every blessing to all," "love," and "trust." Therefore, Luther confirmed that an interpreter's starting point was to know the essence of the distinction between Law and Gospel. Luther said, "You see that the Creed is a very different teaching from the Ten Commandments. The latter teach us what we ought to do; the Creed tells what God does for us and gives to us."³⁰ Therefore, in order to interpret Scripture correctly, Luther maintained that an interpreter needed to know the distinction between Law and Gospel from the text of Scripture. This principle did not require one to take a word in its literal sense in interpreting many texts of the Old Testament relating to Christ. Rather this principle was related to a Christological

into account in our interpretation of Scripture as well as in our preaching."

²⁹ M. Luther, *The Small Catechism (1529)*, in *The Book of Concord*, p. 344. Hereafter referred to SC.

³⁰ LC 419.

interpretation centering on Christ. The hermeneutical principle of Law and Gospel of Luther was connected to typology. In the explanation of the meaning of baptizing with water, Luther contrasted the old Adam (the Law) with the new man (the Gospel).³¹ Luther also used typology from the Old Testament in many places. For example, in the interpretation of Psalm 49:2 "All who are earth-born and sons of men" Luther showed a typological interpretation.

The Hebrew has "low-born and high-born." In Hebrew there are three designations for man. The first is Adam. This, strictly speaking, refers to the bodily nature of man and the outside man, according to which he was shaped from the clay of the earth. Adam properly denotes earth, especially reddish earth. And so the apostle says very aptly, Rom. 5:14, that Adam was a type of the One who was to come, for the earthly and physical man is a type of the heavenly (that is, spiritual).³²

Fourthly, one of the most significant principles was that of Christological interpretation. Johann Staupitz, who influenced Luther's "rediscovery" of Christ,³³ told Luther, "One must keep one's eyes fixed on that man who is called Christ. In Christ all treasures are hidden: apart from Him they are closed to us."³⁴ Luther followed the clue to its logical conclusion, so that his theology might be thoroughly Christocentric.³⁵ From this perspective Luther developed his

³¹ SC 349.

³² LW 10.224. Cf. LW 10.151, LW 10.298.

³³ A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word*, p. 169.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Christological hermeneutics.³⁶ Bornkamm defines this method as follows:

The direct application of the Old Testament texts to Jesus Christ, his words and deeds, his death and resurrection, his church and his work in the believer was by far the strongest and most comprehensive theme in Luther's interpretation of the Old Testament.³⁷

Luther thought of the Old and New Testaments as a unit, whose oneness was to be found in Christ crucified.³⁸ Thus he considered Christ as the heart or the center of the Bible.

Luther said,

He who would read the Bible must simply take heed he does not err, for the Scripture may permit itself to be stretched and lead, but let no one lead it according to his affects, but let him lead it to the source, i.e., the cross of Christ. Then he will surely strike the center.³⁹

Although Luther did not often use this method in his Catechisms, his Christological interpretation played an important role in giving a clear exposition. In the explanation of the Ten Commandments in his *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony* (1528), Luther used the strongly Christological interpretation of

³⁶ Even though Luther's Christological hermeneutics had a little a vulnerable point, this method played a great role in removing the fourfold sense of the interpretation of Scripture employed by the interpreters of the Middle Ages. Cf. David S. Dockery, "Martin Luther's Christological Hermeneutics," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983): 189-203.

³⁷ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, ed. Victor I. Gruhn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 101.

³⁸ Raymond F. Surburg, "The Significance of Luther's Hermeneutics for the Protestant Reformation," p. 257.

³⁹ As quoted by Surburg, p. 258. Cf. WA 1.52.15-18.

Scripture. This method appears clearly in his interpretation of the third commandment "You shall sanctify the holy day."

Luther first pointed out the wrong literal interpretation

which the Jews gave to this commandment and stressed a

Christological interpretation. Luther detailed,

Therefore, according to its literal, outward sense, this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter, like the other ordinances of the Old Testament connected with particular customs, persons, times, and places, from all of which we are now set free through Christ.⁴⁰

Here Luther used the distinction between Law and Gospel to give one Christological interpretation to this commandment. He thought that this method could criticize and correct the wrong interpretation of the Jews.

Fifthly, Luther employed the simple interpretation of Scripture. The principle of simplicity means the natural, straightforward, clear, brief, and plain way. A good example of this method can be found in the dispute with Latomus⁴¹ and "The Bondage of the Will."⁴² Against Latomus and Erasmus, Luther insisted that Holy Scripture is necessarily clearer, simpler, and more reliable than any other writings.⁴³ John Goldingay states on this method: "The insistence on interpreting Scripture in the natural, straightforward way

⁴⁰ LC 376.

⁴¹ LW 32.217.

⁴² LW 33.24, 90.161-3.

⁴³ LW 32.11.

depends upon the prior claim that the Scriptures are, in fact, fundamentally of clear and unambiguous meaning."⁴⁴

Luther regarded the Holy Spirit as the most plain writer and speaker in heaven. Therefore, he said: "His words cannot have more than one sense, the very simplest sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural sense."⁴⁵

In the preface to his *Small Catechism*, Luther said that the deplorable conditions which he encountered constrained him to prepare this brief and simple catechism (*catechismus simplicissime et brevissime*).⁴⁶ This expression includes the fact that he would employ brief and simple interpretation. In his *Person Prayer Book* (1522), Luther told that the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer summarized everything with such brevity and clarity that no one could complain or make any excuse that the things necessary for his salvation were too complicated or difficult for him to remember.⁴⁷ The reason why Luther used this simple principle is the following: "This I must explain a little more plainly,

⁴⁴ John Goldingay, "Luther and the Bible," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982): 36.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, *Dr. M. Luther's Answer to the Superchristian, Superspiritual, and Superlearned Book of Goat Emser of Leipzig, with a Glance at His Comrade Murner, 1521*, trans, A. Steimle, Works of Martin Luther, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1930), p. 350.

⁴⁶ SC 340.

⁴⁷ LW 43.13.

so that it may be understood and remembered."⁴⁸ Thus he wanted the common people to understand the meaning easily. "This much, however, should be said to ordinary people so that they may mark well and remember the meaning of this commandment."⁴⁹

Luther showed the characteristic elements of the method of simplicity. Luther showed that the distinction between Law and Gospel helped in finding this simple meaning. After Luther explained the observance of the holy day with the principle of Law and Gospel, he said, " This, then, is the plain meaning of this commandment."⁵⁰ He maintained that this method should be used with the proper language. Luther stated: "This I say plainly for the sake of the young, so that it may sink into their minds for when we preach to children, we must also speak their language."⁵¹ Here he spoke of accommodation which has been used by many interpreters since the Early Church Ages. Luther showed that interpreting the text's meaning with the context connected it to the method of simplicity. Luther presented that the commandment following was easily understood from the preceding one (*Sequentia praecepta intellectu jam sunt facilia ex interpretatione prioris*).⁵² Luther's method related closely to the literal exposition of the words. The

⁴⁸ LC 365.

⁴⁹ LC 367.

⁵⁰ LC 376.

⁵¹ LC 375.

⁵² LC 393.

principle did not twist the meaning of the word, but rather made it natural. On the explanation of the eighth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Luther said:

In its first and simplest meaning, as the words stand ("You shall not bear false witness"), this commandment pertains to public courts of justice, where a poor, innocent man is accused and maligned by false witnesses and consequently punished in his body, property, or honor.⁵³

Luther thought that the simple interpretation of Scripture appeared clearly through the use of the language like the verb and the noun. In the exposition of the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name," Luther argued the following: "This petition, then, is simple and clear as soon as we understand the language, namely, that 'to hallow' means the same as in our idiom 'to praise, extol, and honor' in word and deed."⁵⁴

Although in the epistle dedicatory in his *Commentary on Romans* Calvin did not mention the hermeneutical method of Luther, Luther's influence upon Calvin was proved by the fact that Calvin cited Luther's writings.⁵⁵ The only letter that Calvin wrote to Luther, although Melanchthon did not hand it over, expressed a deep sense of respect of Calvin for

⁵³ LC 399.

⁵⁴ LC 426.

⁵⁵ T. F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p. 156.

Luther.⁵⁶ Calvin showed his endeavor to read the text of Scripture in Luther (*legerem apud Lutherum*).⁵⁷ In spite of this influence, Calvin was not satisfied to imitate Luther, but rather advanced his own method. Fullerton points out the difference between Luther and Calvin:

The most astonishing difference between Luther and Calvin is that, whereas Luther's religious canon of interpretation, the Christocentric theory of Scripture, dominated his exegetical method at every turn, Calvin's dogmatic theories of Scripture controlled his exegesis only to a limited extent. In the case of no great commentator is it more necessary to distinguish between the theologian and the exegete than in the case of Calvin.⁵⁸

Calvin did not follow Luther's interpretation when his view was frivolous and not solid. For example, with regard to interpreting the age of Abraham in his commentary on Gen. 11:27 Calvin rejected Luther's interpretation. "The conjecture of Luther, that God buried that time in oblivion, in order to hid from us the end of the world, in the first place is frivolous, and in the next, may be refuted by solid and convincing arguments. . . . A firm valid argument is also

⁵⁶ CO 12.7.

⁵⁷ CO 9.51.

⁵⁸ Kemper Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority: A Study in the History of the Doctrine and Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), p. 133. For the discussion of the comparison between Luther and Calvin on hermeneutics, see K. V. Warren, "Luther and Calvin on the Doctrine of Scripture," *Vox Reformata* 40 (1983): 3-35; Thomas Parker, "Interpretation of Scripture: A Comparison of Calvin and Luther on Galatians." *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 61-75; Pieter A. Verhoef, "Luther's and Calvin's Exegetical Library," *Calvin Theological Journal* 3 (1968): 5-20.

deduced from the age of Sarai"⁵⁹ In the interpretation of Gen 13:14 "And the Lord said unto Abram", Calvin refused Luther's speculation because he did not explain the text from the perspective of the promise and fulfillment in Christ.⁶⁰ Calvin's theological aspect was a covenantal approach in interpreting this text. While Luther distinguished the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, Calvin emphasized the continuity of both Testaments.⁶¹

Calvin did not entirely reject Luther's interpretation, but did not accept his view in so far as Luther did not interpret the words simply. In the interpretation of Gen. 6:3 "My Spirit shall not always strive." Calvin expressed his attitude toward Luther. "However, I do not entirely reject the opinion of Luther, that God having seen the deplorable wickedness of men, would not allow his prophets to spend their labour in vain. But the general declaration is not to be restricted to that particular case."⁶² In the interpretation of Gen. 11:10 "These are the generations of Shem", Calvin agreed with Luther: "Luther very properly compares the incredible torments, by which they were necessarily afflicted,

⁵⁹ *Comm. on Gen. 11:27*, pp. 335-6.

⁶⁰ *Comm. on Gen. 13:14*, p. 375.

⁶¹ Willem VanGemenen, "Systems of Continuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testament*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1988), pp. 37-62.

⁶² *Comm. on Gen. 6:3*, pp. 241-2.

to many martyrdoms."⁶³

Calvin followed Luther when Luther interpreted the text of Scripture correctly. But he refused Luther's interpretation when Luther's argument did not have a historical-grammatical approach and the interpretation without the unity of the Old and New Testament.⁶⁴

B. Zwingli

The hermeneutical method of Zwingli came originally from his humanistic education, his reformed understanding of Scripture, and the Christian faith.⁶⁵ He, according to

⁶³ *Comm. on Gen. 11:10*, p. 334.

⁶⁴ Although Calvin was influenced by Luther, he rejected Luther's view when Luther's interpretation was too absurd. Cf. CO 15.454. "*Restat iam alterum crimen, quod non ubique Lutheri interpretationibus subscribam. Verum si iam cuique interpreti non licebit de singulis scripturae locis quod sentit in medium proferre, quorsum servitutis recidimus? Imo, si mihi usquam a Lutheri sententia discedere non licuit, munus interpretandi suscipere absurdum fuit ac ridiculum.*" Calvin, *Comm. on Da. 8:23*, p. 119, did not follow Luther who indulged his thoughts too freely.

⁶⁵ W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 59. For the studies of the hermeneutics of Zwingli, see Fritz Büsler, "Zwingli the Exegete: A Contribution to the 450th Anniversary of the Death of Erasmus," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.* pp. 175-196; Gerald Hobbs, "Exegetical Projects and Problems: A New Look at an Undated Letter from Bucer to Zwingli," in *Prophet Pastor Protestant: The Work of Huldrych Zwingli after Five Hundred Years*, eds. E. J. Furcha and H. Wayne Pipkin (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1984), pp. 89-107, and "Zwingli and Old Testament," in *Huldrych Zwingli 1483-1531: A Legacy of Radical Reform*, ed. E. J. Furcha (Montreal: McGill University, 1985), pp. 144-78; Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli: His Life and*

McGrath, insisted "that the best possible exegetical aids (such as a knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages, and of the various figures of speech employed in scripture) should be employed in an effort to establish the natural sense of Scripture."⁶⁶ Especially the influence of Erasmus on Zwingli through the whole of his life might have exercised an effect not only on the methodological and scientific-theoretical elements but rather also on the shape and content of Zwingli's theology.⁶⁷ His approach to the hermeneutics of Scripture in the period 1515-20 was basically Erasmian. Erasmus' influence upon Zwingli can already be seen in his early hermeneutical works, such as his marginal comments of 1516-17 to Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum*.⁶⁸ In many places Zwingli followed Erasmus: his translation of the text, his textual criticism, his illustrations and his patristic references.⁶⁹

The starting point of Zwingli's hermeneutics was the distinction between the natural and non-literal senses of Scripture. McGrath explains this fact correctly: "In common

Work, trans/ Ruth C. L. Gritsen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 183), pp. 101-3.

⁶⁶ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Fritz Büsler, "Zwingli the Exegete: A Contribution to the 450th Anniversary of the Death of Erasmus," pp. 191-2.

⁶⁸ Adolf Meier, "Zwingli's Übersetzung des Römerbriefs," *Evangelische Theologie* 19 (1959): 40-52.

⁶⁹ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 168.

with the medieval tradition, he (Zwingli) insists that nothing should be believed which is established on the basis of a non-literal sense of Scripture, unless it can first be demonstrated on the basis of the letter of Scripture. The spiritual senses should be regarded as the embellishment of an exegetical argument rather than its foundation."⁷⁰ First, Zwingli stressed the necessity of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture. He suggested as follows;

Before I say anything or listen to the teaching of man, I will first consult the mind of the Spirit of God (Ps. 84 (A.V. 85): "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." Then you should reverently ask God for his grace, that he may give you his mind and Spirit, so that you will not lay hold of your own opinion but of his. And have a firm trust that he will teach you a right understanding, for all wisdom is of God the Lord. And then go to the written word of the Gospel. . . . You must be *theodidacti*, that is, taught of God, not of men: that is what the Truth itself said (John 6), and it cannot lie.⁷¹

Zwingli believed that the Holy Spirit was indispensable for the interpretation of Scripture, and that we should receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit before we turned to it.⁷² Secondly, Zwingli argued that attention to the immediate context was a prerequisite in interpreting the text.⁷³ In the eucharistic controversy with Luther, according to Stephens,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Huldrych Zwingli, "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*. ed. G. W. Bromiley, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 88-9.

⁷² W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, p. 60.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 64.

Zwingli emphasized "that 'This is my body' must be seen in the light of the words that immediately follow, such as 'Do this in remembrance of me' or 'which is given for you'."⁷⁴ Thirdly, he maintained that faith, or the analogy of faith was necessary for interpreting Scripture. He argued that our reason could not accept God's command unless faith enlightened an interpreter with God's Word.

And that was all of God, who so enlightened him (Abraham with the Word that he knew it to be the Word of God, even though he was commanded to do something quite contrary to God's former promise. The nerves and bones and muscles of faith all braced themselves. His reason could not accept the command, but faith withstood reason (Rom. 4), saying: The one who promised and gave thy son at the first can raise him up again from the dead, or he can use some other means to give the world the Saviour promised through him. . . . And faith gained the victory; note well that it did so by the light which the Word of God had itself brought with it.⁷⁵

Fourthly, Zwingli like Erasmus stressed the moral dimension of the text. His "development of the Erasmian concept of the tropological sense of Scripture" clearly showed his moralist concerns, and set him apart from the young Luther in this crucial respect.⁷⁶

The fact that in his *Institutes* and commentaries Calvin hardly mentioned the interpretation of Zwingli makes it difficult for us to understand Calvin's attitude toward

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God," p. 76.

⁷⁶ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 169.

Zwingli.⁷⁷

C. Melanchthon

Melanchthon's hermeneutics was closely related to Aristotle's method which he learned from Heinrich Bebel.⁷⁸ He developed his scholarship on Aristotle.

Melanchthon had studied Aristotle with Franz Stadian while a student, and Stadian presented the traditional line of interpreting the *Posterior Analytics* as dealing with a branch of metaphysics. We consider it logic now. . . . Not only that, but Stadian suggested that Melanchthon begin a project for editing Aristotle in Greek and thereby replacing the barbarous Latin translations that had distorted the philosopher for centuries. Despite offers of assistance from Stadian, his old schoolmaster Georg Simler, Reuchlin and Oecolampadius, the venture did not get off the ground. But a seed was planted that the most important and necessary work on Aristotle required complete fidelity to his text. What he had learned as a corrector of books was expanded to faithfulness to the text.⁷⁹

After studying Aristotle, Melanchthon lectured on the ethical and political writings of Aristotle.⁸⁰ He, therefore, was a specialist on Aristotle. But his *Loci Communes* of 1521 showed

⁷⁷ W. J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait*, p. 119, argues that Calvin thought Zwingli's interpretation apt and ready but too free.

⁷⁸ Philip Melanchthon, *A Melanchthon Reader*, trans. Ralph Keen (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3. On the relationship of Melanchthon to Aristotle, see Franz Hildebrandt, *Melanchthon: Alien Or Ally?* (New York: Kraus Reprint CO, 1968), pp. 1-10.

⁸⁰ Heinz Scheible, "Melanchthon," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 3, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 41-45.

that he rejected the philosophy of Aristotle and followed Luther's theology. There he clearly betrayed the influence of the rhetorical tradition, especially in terms of the organization of its material. For example, in the argument on the knowledge of the laws of nature he did not agree with the philosophy of Aristotle and the opinion of Cicero.⁸¹ He also departed from Erasmus by basing his thought on Scripture alone and by rejecting a moral universalism.

His commentaries on Scripture broke new ground. They gave up the four senses of the Middle Ages, treated the New Testament like the classics, and stressed the need of history and archaeology for the interpretation of Scripture. But his commentaries were not grammatical-historical, but were full of theological and practical material, confirming the doctrines of the Reformation, and edifying believers. In his *Commentary on Romans* (1522) he employed the method of *loci* as his hermeneutical method. The *loci* method of Melanchthon mainly existed in interpreting a text relating it to the important doctrines of the Reformation. McGrath comments on the method of Melanchthon's *Loci* as follows:

Melanchthon adopts the principle that theology may be organized around a single, saving doctrine, which effectively provides the key to Scripture, That key, according to Melanchthon, is not the Erasmian *imitatio Christi*, but Luther's doctrine of justification *sola fide*. The rhetorical origins of Melanchthon's *loci* are evident in his 1519 treatise on rhetoric, in which he

⁸¹ Philip Melanchthon, "*Loci Communes Theologici*," in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 50.

makes reference to the principle of the *locus didacticus*.⁸²

Calvin always praised Melanchthon's learning, genius, and industry. "Philip Melanchthon, who by his singular learning and industry, and by that readiness in all kinds of knowledge, in which he excels, has introduced more light than those who had preceded him."⁸³ Calvin recognized Melanchthon as an excellent interpreter. "Philip Melanchthon, who excels in genius and learning and is happily versed in the studies of history, makes a double computation."⁸⁴ But Calvin did not agree with Melanchthon's hermeneutical method. Calvin commented on the method of *loci*. "But as it (the commentary on Romans of Melanchthon) seems to have been his object to examine only those things which are mainly worthy of attention, he dwelt at large on these, and designedly passed by many things which common minds find to be difficult."⁸⁵ Calvin did not criticize the interpretation of Scripture of Melanchthon. But he pointed out that Melanchthon did not interpret every passage one by one.⁸⁶ The direct reason why Melanchthon did so was that he wanted to interpret the passage

⁸² Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 67.

⁸³ "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxv.

⁸⁴ *Comm. on Da. 9:25*, p. 209.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ John Robert Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor," p. 161.

from the perspective of the important theological themes. In his *Commentary on Romans* Melanchthon stressed the passages relating to the doctrinal themes such as the justification by faith, grace, the distinction between Law and Gospel, sin, faith, and good works. Therefore Melanchthon's interpretation of Scripture was doctrinal rather than straightforwardly exegetical.⁸⁷

D. Bucer

Bucer intensively studied the writings of Erasmus, so that the hermeneutical method of Erasmus had a great influence on that of Bucer. Bucer used "das antithetische schema *externa/spiritualia*" as a hermeneutical principle to find the moral application of the text from its historical sense.⁸⁸ Thus he turned the historical meaning of the passage into the spiritual.⁸⁹ But he rejected the allegorical interpretation of

⁸⁷ For studies on the hermeneutics of Melanchthon see. John R. Schneider, *Philip Melanchthon's Rhetorical Construct of Biblical Authority: Oratio Sacra* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 1990); Rolf Schäfer, "Melanchthons Hermeneutik im Römerbrief-Kommentar von 1532," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963): 216-235; Robert D. Preus, "Melanchthon the Theologian," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31 (1960): 469-475; Peter F. Barton, "Die Exegetische Arbeit des Jungen Melanchthon 1518/19 bis 1528/29: Probleme und Ansätze," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 54 (1963): 52-89.

⁸⁸ Johannes Müller, *Martin Bucers Hermeneutik* (Heidelberg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965), pp. 169-78

⁸⁹ Alister McGrath, "Reformation to Enlightenment," in *The Science of Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Avis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 124.

Scripture, and stressed the literal meaning. Following Erasmus, Bucer emphasized the tropological meaning of Scripture - the moral application of the text of Scripture to the specific historical situation of his readers.⁹⁰ The tropological interpretation of the text was especially important for Bucer's Old Testament approach.

Scholars have already recognized the central role of pneumatology for Bucer's theology.⁹¹ Bucer clearly stressed the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture.⁹² Bucer said,

This Spirit, both through the Scriptures and through hidden inspirations, leads his own unto every truth and instructs them in every good work. For he is the Spirit of wisdom, i.e., the one who gives a firm cognition of God and of his works and judgments. He is the Spirit of

⁹⁰ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 53.

⁹¹ Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 75.

⁹² *Ibid.*, P. 76. Here H. G. Reventlow says: "It is evident that for Bucer 'the Spirit works mainly on the level of the intellect', though the fact that the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled guarantees that God's approach is completely grace. This understanding of the Spirit also had a decisive influence on Bucer's hermeneutics. Luther's indissoluble identification of word and spirit is expressly rejected by Bucer; by themselves the outward scripture (the 'letter') and the proclaimed word are useless, unless inner illumination through the Spirit given by God discloses their true understanding. In this division between Spirit and letter we can clearly see the legacy of dualism in Bucer. On the other hand, in contrast to the extreme Spiritualists Bucer did not give up scripture but explicitly related the knowledge given by the Spirit to the understanding of scripture. This again leads to a two-stage pattern: the first thing needed is illumination by the Holy Spirit; understanding of the word of scripture then follows from this."

understanding, imparting a true and salutary understanding of the works and judgments of God.⁹³

Bucer used the principle *Scriptura sui ipius interpres* for no prophecy in Scripture was a matter of our own interpretation.⁹⁴ He interpreted the Old Testament from the New Testament.⁹⁵ His important method of hermeneutics was that all Scriptures applied to Christ. This method was closely related to Bucer's use of d and his opposition to allegory.⁹⁶

Calvin praised Bucer's scholarship of the interpretation of Scripture. In his epistle to Grynaeus in the *Commentary on Romans*, Calvin expressed his respect as follows;

In the last place comes Bucer, who, by publishing his works, has given as it were the finishing stroke. For in addition to his recondite learning and enlarged knowledge of things, and to the clearness of his mind, and much

⁹³ Martin Bucer, "De Regno Christi," in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, pp. 194-5.

⁹⁴ *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*. 2.59.4-10 (R. Stupperich: Gütersloh/Paris, 1960-1981). Hereafter cited as BW.

⁹⁵ BW 1. 253.5-12.

⁹⁶ W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), p. 149. For studies on Bucer's hermeneutics, see R. Gerald Hobbs, "How Firm a Foundation: Martin Bucer's Historical Exegesis of the Psalms," *Church History* 53 (1984): 477-91, and "Martin Bucer on Psalm 22: A Study in the Application of Rabbinic Exegesis by a Christian Hebraist," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVIe siècle*, pp. 144-63; Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931), pp. 65-9; Irena Backus, "Introduction," in *Martini Bucer Opera Latin* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); August Lang, *Der Evangelienkommentar Martin Butzers und die Grundzüge seiner Theologie* (Leipzig: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1972); Bernard Roussel, "Bucer exégète," in *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century Europe*, vol.1, eds. Christian Krieger and Marc Lienhard (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), pp. 39-54.

reading and many other excellencies, in which he is hardly surpassed by any at this day equalled by few and excelled by still fewer - he possesses, as you know, this praise as his own - that no one in our age has been with so much labour engaged in the work of expounding Scripture.⁹⁷

Calvin agreed with Bucer's correct interpretation.⁹⁸ In the interpretation of Rom. 1:7 "Grace to you and Peace", for example, Calvin followed Bucer's suitable interpretation. "There are those who prefer to regard the word peace as signifying quietness of conscience; and that this meaning belongs to it sometimes, I do not deny: but since it is certain that the Apostle wished to give us here a summary of God's blessings, the former meaning, which is adduced by Bucer, is much the most suitable."⁹⁹ Calvin followed Bucer's interpretation which agreed with the context.¹⁰⁰ "I agree with Bucer, who proves that the argument is not made to depend on one expression, but on the whole passage."¹⁰¹ Calvin stated that Bucer appropriately quoted the text of the Old Testament in order to interpret the meaning of the text of the New Testament.¹⁰²

Although Bucer did not use the *loci* method of Aristotle,

⁹⁷ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxv.

⁹⁸ *Comm. on Mt.* 2:23, 26:17; *Comm. on Lk.* 24:27.

⁹⁹ *Comm. on Rom.* 1:7, p. 51.

¹⁰⁰ *Comm. on Rom.* 1:12, p. 58.

¹⁰¹ *Comm. on Rom.* 4:4, p. 158.

¹⁰² *Comm. on Jn.* 1:33, p. 69.

Calvin pointed out that Bucer's interpretation was prolix. Calvin argued that it was very diffuse for busy men to read his commentary and too academic for simple men to understand it.¹⁰³

E. Bullinger

When Heinrich Bullinger studied the Fathers like Chrysostom, Ambrose, Origen, and Augustine, he felt the impact of Erasmus, Luther, Melanchthon, and Zwingli. After Zwingli's death at Kappel in 1531, the defeat at Kappel forced Bullinger into refuge at Zurich, and here he succeeded Zwingli as virtual leader of church life in both city and canton.

Bullinger emphasized the centrality of Scripture, and insisted that the interpretation of Scripture was to be sought from itself alone, so that it might itself be the interpreter.¹⁰⁴ Bullinger used the analogy of Scripture like Luther employed the hermeneutical principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. He also suggested the necessity of an interpreter's spirituality because Scripture could not "be understood by one who is opposed to God or careless of him, but only by one whose heart is devoted to God."¹⁰⁵ He

¹⁰³ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxvi.

¹⁰⁴ T. H. L. Parker, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans 1532-1542* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1986), p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

recognized the significance of the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. He maintained that an interpreter should consider the general rules of rhetoric and the circumstances of the text of Scripture.¹⁰⁶ In order to interpret Scripture correctly, Bullinger stressed "brevity, literalness, faithfulness to the original, attention to the context, making the ancient Scriptures relevant to a new age, and the correction of error."¹⁰⁷ Bullinger had sought brevity in his works, and did not write at greater length, but aimed at an active brevity in order for the reader not to be burdened by his expositions.¹⁰⁸ In spite of the fact that Bullinger used brevity, Bullinger did not develop its use as his hermeneutical method.¹⁰⁹

In his Epistle to Grynaeus Calvin considered Bullinger's *Commentary on Romans* as positive. "Then follow Bullinger, who has connected plainness, for which he has been highly commended."¹¹⁰ Calvin did not criticize Bullinger's hermeneutical method because of this fact.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ For the study of this debate, see Richard C. Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?" p. 191.

¹¹⁰ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxv.

¹¹¹ For studies of Bullinger's hermeneutics, see Susi Hausammann, *Römerbriefauslegung zwischen Humanismus und Reformation: Eine Studie zu Heinrich Bullingers*

F. The Anabaptists

In the hermeneutics of Scripture the Anabaptists had much in common with the Reformers. They stressed one of the Reformers' hermeneutical principles of Scripture, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. For example, Balthasar Hubmaier, one of the founders of the Anabaptists, said:

Searching the Scriptures does not take place with unspiritual chatter about innovations, nor with wordy warfare fighting until one is hoarse, but rather by illuminating the darker texts of Scripture with the clearer. This is just what Christ taught us when he explained the Scripture of Moses concerning Levirate marriage by reference to the Scripture on resurrection.¹¹²

Römerbriefvorlesung von 1525 (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970); Istvan Tokes, "Bullingers Hermeneutische Lehre," in *Heinrich Bullinger 1504-1575: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum 400 Todestag*, eds. Ulrich Gäbler und Erland Herkenrath (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1975), pp. 161-189; Ernst Koch, "Paulusexegese und Bundestheologie: Bullingers Auslegung von Gal. 3, 17-26," in *Historie de l'exegese au XVIIe siecle*, ed. Oliver Fatio et Pierre Fraenkel (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1978), pp. 432-50; Joel E. Kok, "Heinrich Bullinger's Exegetical Method: The Model for Calvin?" in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, pp. 241-254.

¹¹² Balthasar Hubmaier, "Theses against Eck," in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), p. 53. On the historical background of Hubmaier's text Pipkin and Yoder say as follows: "Dr. John Maier from Egg (1586-1643), usually Eck, was previously Hubmaier's university teacher and now the leading Catholic polemicist against the Zwinglian Reformation. On August 13, 1524, Eck addressed to the Swiss Confederacy a "Missive and Petition" against the innovations of the Reformation. Zwingli's answer to Eck was dated August 31 and Hubmaier's parallel reaction, the present text, was in Eck's hands by September 18; Hubmaier must therefore have written it during the first days of his stay in Schaffhausen or even his last days in Waldshut." (Ibid., p. 49).

But there were some basic differences on the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament, the degree to which Scripture was the unique authority, and the extent to which the interpretation of Scripture was dependent on obedience to Christ. These differences between the Reformers and the Anabaptists derived from their own views of Scripture and the Holy Spirit.¹¹³ The most serious problem of the Anabaptists was that they rejected the simple identification of the Word of God with Scripture. They thought that the Word of God was the voice of God speaking through the Holy Spirit. We see this figure from Hans Denck's *Recantation* (1528). In the first article of his *Recantation* he confessed his view on Scripture.

I hold the Scriptures dear above all of man's treasures, but not as high as the Word of God which is living, strong, (Heb. 4:12) eternal and free of all elements of this world; for inasmuch as it is God Himself, it is spirit and not letter, written without pen or paper so that it can never be erased. Consequently, salvation is not bound to Scripture even though Scripture may be conducive to salvation (2 Tim. 3:16). The reason is this: Scripture cannot possibly change an evil heart even though it may make it more learned. A pious heart, on the other hand, i.e., one which has a spark of divine zeal, can be improved by all things. Thus Scripture serves believers unto salvation and toward the good. To unbelievers it is unto damnation as are all other

¹¹³ Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, pp. 49-72. He says: "God's Spirit, which the Anabaptists believed themselves to possess, is the ultimate authority which first gives authority to the written word of the Bible. Here, however, was a danger of making the principle of the Spirit so independent that as with the extreme Spiritualists (say Sebastian Franck), scripture can in fact become completely superfluous" (Ibid., p. 53).

things.¹¹⁴

For the Anabaptists a great part of interpreting Scripture was imitating it. For example, one of the Anabaptist leaders, Melchior Hofmann who was opposed to the Reformed doctrine of justification, stressed "sanctification, the imitation of the life of Christ."¹¹⁵ Irena Backus says, "The Anabaptist tended to find in scripture a direct and historical model, so that scriptural passages constitute an intrinsic part of their writings."¹¹⁶ Their method, therefore, became

¹¹⁴ Hans Denck, "Recantation," in *Selected Writings of Hans Denck*, ed. Walter Fellmann, Edward J. Furcha, and Ford Lewis Battles (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1975), pp. 123-4.

¹¹⁵ "Melchior Hofmann," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956).

James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1976), p. 211, says: "Melchior Hoffman, a Swabian furrier, began his ministry in 1523 when he preached the gospel of Martin Luther in the Baltic lands. In 1523 he was clearly on the side of Luther and the princes against Thomas Müntzer and the peasants. Frequently involved in jealous disputes with the learned in his own religious camp and always preoccupied with the apocalyptic and prophetic parts of the Bible, he eventually alienated Luther, who would have no part of his "fanatical speculations". In 1529 he disputed in Holstein for a more or less Zwinglian interpretation of the communion and for this reason was at first received in Strassburg as a welcome ally. It was not long, however, before he was advised by the Reformed pastors to return to his furrier's trade. Instead, in 1529 and 1530 in Strassburg, then the Reformation's open city for the exchange of radical Protestant ideas, Hoffman became a Melchiorite, that is, the leader of his own sect."

¹¹⁶ Irena Backus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegesis," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 2, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 152.

the hermeneutics of obedience.¹¹⁷ In his writing *Restitution* (1534) the Anabaptist Bernhard Rothmann developed his own hermeneutical method of Scripture. He argued that one did not need a written interpretation by men in glosses or postils, but rather to this he added that God and his Spirit should be the master.

It may well be that sometimes I will consider the interpretation of man and grasp the understanding of the interpreter and then be able to speak about it in flowing words. However, since God's kingdom, does not consist in words but in power. I will never achieve the power of the knowledge of God unless God's Spirit drives me with power, teaches me, and leads me into the Scriptures.¹¹⁸

Rothmann suggested that in order to understand Scripture correctly, an interpreter should honor and fear God the almighty in Christ his Son. This can be called the hermeneutics of obedience. He says:

But if you wish to understand the Scriptures correctly, very well, for this we will give you good advice. The content of the whole Scriptures is briefly summarized in

¹¹⁷ Ben C. Ollenburger, "The Hermeneutics of Obedience: Reflections on Anabaptist Hermeneutics," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), pp. 45-61. For the studies of the hermeneutics of Anabaptists, see Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: Presuppositions, Principles and Practice," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 5-10; John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics and Discipleship," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 11-28; C. J. Dyck, "Hermeneutics and Discipleship," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 29-44; William Klassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: The Letter and the Spirit," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 77-90.

¹¹⁸ Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), p. 150.

this: Honor and fear God the almighty in Christ his Son. This is the beginning of all wisdom. And in the same breath, that as Christ was obedient to the Father and fulfilled his will, we too should fulfill his will with trembling and quaking. Whoever understands this and proves it by his deeds is not blind but has understood the whole Scriptures.¹¹⁹

They made many mistakes when they interpreted the Old Testament and its apocrypha with typology and allegory. On the hermeneutical problems of Melchior Hofmann, Williams and Mergal say:

Hofmann interpreted the Old Testament, including its apocrypha, as containing the types of the institutions of the New Covenantal Church of the Spirit. But when his thinking was applied in Münster, his allegorization of the law thickened once again into the law of a regenerated and regulated remnant engaged in the rebuilding of a Jerusalem in Westphalia.¹²⁰

Hofmann thought that the Revelation of John (interpreted in the light of the Old Testament apocalypse) was the key to the history of the World "from the beginning of the New Testament until the end of the Second Coming."¹²¹ His wrong doctrine of eschatology made his hermeneutics radical.

Calvin emphasized the hermeneutical problems of the Anabaptists. In reacting to the Anabaptist position, Calvin in the first place pointed out that the most serious problem of their hermeneutics was that it rejected the relationship

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 29.

¹²¹ Hofmann emphasized the imminence of the end of the world in his Revelation exegesis of 1530. See James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, pp. 212-226.

between the Old and the New Testaments. Calvin criticized their view by advancing the concept of the covenant.

Indeed, that wonderful rascal Servetus and certain madmen of the Anabaptist sect, who regard the Israelites as nothing but a herd of swine, make necessary what would in any case have been very profitable for us. . . . So, then to keep this pestilential error away from godly minds, and at the same time to remove all the difficulties that usually rise up immediately when mention is made of the difference between the Old and the New Testament, let us look in passing at the similarities and differences between the covenant that the Lord made of old with the Israelites before Christ's advent, and that which God has now made with us after his manifestation.¹²²

Here Calvin recognized both the similarities and the differences. He maintained that the differences between two Testaments did not remove the basic unity of Scripture.¹²³ He stated that the two were actually one and the same. "Both can be explained in one word. The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same."¹²⁴ Calvin freely admitted the differences in Scriptures. "I say that all these pertain to the manner of dispensation rather than to the substance."¹²⁵ In the interpretation of Ac. 2:17 "I will pour out my Spirit," Calvin attacked the Anabaptists' view that the

¹²² *Inst.* 2.10.1, p. 429.

¹²³ Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), p. 310.

¹²⁴ *Inst.* 2.10.2, p. 429. Cf. CO 2.313, "*Ac uno quidem verbo expediri utrumque potest. Patrum omnium foedus adeo substantia et re ipsa nihil a nostro differt, ut unum prorsus atque idem sit.*"

¹²⁵ *Inst.* 2.11.1, p. 450.

Old Testament was inferior because God's people did not have the Holy Spirit. Here Calvin argued that this text intended "to prove that the Church can be repaired by no other means, saving only by the giving of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁶ By emphasizing the context in the interpretation of a passage, Calvin pointed out the problem of the hermeneutics of the Anabaptists.

Secondly, Calvin stated that the Anabaptists exhibited an extreme dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "Certain Anabaptists of our day conjure up some sort of frenzied excess instead of spiritual regeneration. The children of God, they assert, restored to the state of innocence, now need not take care to bridle the lust of the flesh, but should rather follow the Spirit as their guide, under whose impulsion they can never go astray."¹²⁷ They insisted that the Holy Spirit commanded us to follow Him.¹²⁸

Thirdly, Calvin noted that the hermeneutics of the Anabaptists disregarded the context of Scripture.¹²⁹ An example of this is found in his discussion of the Anabaptists' teaching on oaths in Mt. 5:34 "Swear not at all". Here Calvin showed the problem of their hermeneutics.

¹²⁶ *Comm. on Ac. 2:17*, p. 84.

¹²⁷ *Inst. 3.3.14*, p. 14.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Francis M. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin: In His French Polemical Treatises*, p. 33, also points out that the Libertines did not use context and parallel texts correctly.

The Anabaptists, too, have blustered a great deal, on the ground, that Christ appears to give no liberty to swear on any occasion, because he commands, Swear not at all. But we need not go beyond the immediate context to obtain the exposition: for he immediately adds, neither by heaven, nor by the earth. Who does not see that those kinds of swearing were added by way of exposition, to explain the former clause more fully by specifying a number of cases?¹³⁰

In his *Against the Anabaptists* Calvin added to this by saying "Nevertheless, it is necessary to expound the words of our Lord Jesus, because it does seem at first that He intends to prohibit all swearing. Now, in order to understand it correctly, it is necessary to understand the occasion which prompted Him to speak as He did."¹³¹ Here Calvin correctly pointed out that the interpretation of the text of Scripture of the Anabaptists did not consider the context of a passage.

Fourthly, Calvin criticized the fact that by interweaving different points, they cited only fragments of Scripture. Therefore they were "so pleased with this (approach) that they make themselves believe that there is far more majesty in speaking this grossly than there is in developing their case in an orderly manner."¹³² Calvin responded to this approach by emphasizing the method of *brevitas et facilitas*. "No better way exists than to expound and contradict the issues clearly

¹³⁰ *Comm. on Mt. 5:34*, p. 294.

¹³¹ John Calvin, "Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful against the Errors of the Common Sect," in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 97.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

and to restate in an orderly manner one point after the other. Indeed, examine and consider closely the sentences of Scripture in order to discover their true and natural sense, using simple and clear words that are familiar to common language."¹³³ They forced the text, and rejected its simple interpretation.¹³⁴

G. The Libertines

Calvin knew that Libertinism developed in Holland, Brabant (Belgium), and Lower German.¹³⁵ Calvin protested against the French-speaking Libertines like Coppin, "a native of Lille, who began propagating the sect's views around 1525 in the region of his birth."¹³⁶ Coppin was succeeded by Quintin who later became the acknowledged founder of the Libertines.¹³⁷ Furthermore there were Quintin's followers, Moulins and Perceval. Calvin reported that he personally met Quintin near Paris.¹³⁸

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 156-7.

¹³⁴ *Comm. on Jer.* 31:34, p. 135.

¹³⁵ John Calvin, "Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists," in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, p. 163.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., Cf. CO 7.159.

Calvin called the Libertines a pernicious sect.¹³⁹ Calvin attacked their wrong method of the interpretation of Scripture. Higman also correctly points out that Calvin's Scriptural argument with the Libertines was "in fact an argument on Scriptural interpretation, on exegetical method primarily."¹⁴⁰ First, Calvin correctly pointed out that the Libertines' basic hermeneutical method was the wrong presupposition "the letter kills but the spirit gives life." This principle made them change Scripture into allegories. Calvin described their incorrect approach. "For they consistently maintained this principle: that Scripture, taken in its natural sense, is but a dead letter and only kills. Thus they abandon it in order to come to the life-giving Spirit."¹⁴¹ In order to pursue their purpose, they rejected the simple sense of Scripture, and accepted allegorical interpretation.¹⁴² Calvin argued that they tried to find out new revelations. "They mean that one should not be content with what is written, or acquired in it at all, but one should speculate higher and look for new revelation."¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁴⁰ Francis M. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin: In His French Polemical Treatises*, p. 32.

¹⁴¹ "Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines Who are Called Spirituals," in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, p. 222.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Secondly, Calvin criticized that their interpretation was more diabolical. "For they seek to turn us away from Scripture in order to make us err by following their imaginations, or rather in order to lead us beyond the limits of Scripture to the end that each might follow his own interests and the devil's illusions instead of following the truth of God."¹⁴⁴ Calvin pointed out that their view of the work of the Holy Spirit was serious. Calvin maintained that the Spirit did not create new doctrines, rather He confirmed Christ's apostles in the gospel which was preached to them.¹⁴⁵ Stressing the fact that "Spirit and Scripture are one and the same,"¹⁴⁶ Calvin attacked the wrong view of the Libertines who extremely stressed the Spirit. With great haughtiness exalting the teaching office of the Spirit, they wrongly appealed to the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁷ For Calvin the Holy Spirit was recognized in His agreement with Scripture,¹⁴⁸ and Word and Spirit belonged inseparably together.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Inst.* 1.9.1, p. 94.

¹⁴⁸ *Inst.* 1.9.2, p. 94.

¹⁴⁹ *Inst.* 1.9.3, p. 95.

CHAPTER 5

THE DEVELOPMENT, THE SOURCES, AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE IDEAL OF *BREVITAS ET FACILITAS*

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how Calvin developed the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, how this ideal originated in the rhetorical writings of Socrates, Plato, Cicero, and Quintilian, and how Calvin became convinced that Scripture itself suggested the employment of these principles. Finally, I shall look at the major writings in which the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* appear as a significant feature of Calvin's hermeneutical approach.

A. The Development of the Ideal of *Brevitas et Facilitas*

How did Calvin develop the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*? It is not easy for us to reconstruct the process of the development of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin himself did, however, reveal the most distinctive steps in this process.

First, Calvin's humanistic training had a decisive influence on his thinking in this regard. The root of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* in Calvin's hermeneutics

clearly was founded on French humanism. A. Ganoczy and S. Scheld insist that Calvin learned this ideal for the first time from F. M. Cordier in the college of Marche.¹ Robert D. Knudsen says:

Calvin took a positive stance also toward rhetoric and the natural science. The influence of rhetorical theory on his theological method has been noted. In the introduction to his commentary on Thessalonians he acknowledges that he owes his humanistic learning and his method of teaching (*discendi rationem*) to the well-known humanist Maturin Cordier.²

E. F. Rice suggests that Calvin learned these principles from the circle of Lefèvre d'Étaples.³ It is, in any case, certain that he could have learned it from his humanistic training. In his day the humanists rediscovered the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* in the classics. Following this ideal they expounded their arguments as concisely as possible.

Secondly, Calvin first employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*. For example, he used the term *illustratio* which is a technical rhetorical term synonymous with *perspicuitas* or

¹ Alexander Ganoczy and Stefan Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins: Geistesgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen und Grundzüge*, p. 114.

² Robert D. Knudsen, "Calvinism as a Cultural Force," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 15.

³ Eugene F. Rice Jr., "Humanist Idea of Christian Antique: Lefèvre d'Étaples and His Circle," in *French Humanism, 1470-1600*, ed. Werner L. Gundersheimer (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 169.

evidentia.⁴ The fact that Calvin used the term shows that he followed Seneca's own method. Calvin employed the *compendium* which "gathers up the discussion and refreshes the reader's memory enabling him to discern the real substance through the details."⁵ But at that stage Calvin did not develop the method very far. According to T. H. L. Parker, the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as Budé employed them dated back to Quintilian.

Brevity is, of course, one of the foremost aims of the Renaissance, an aim which harked back to Quintilian's definition of *methodus* 'as a brief and compendious way of speaking,' which Budé interpreted as suggesting that there could be a short way to understanding a subject or a document.⁶

Calvin, after his conversion, began to develop this ideal in his theological writings. In his commentaries Calvin used these principles to help his readers understand the meaning of Scripture clearly and easily.

Thirdly, another influence on the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* can be traced back to Chrysostom's method of Scriptural interpretation. Here the important question whether Chrysostom, like Calvin, in fact applied the principles of

⁴ "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, edited and translated by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, p. 119.

⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p. 139.

⁶ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 87. On the method of *brevitas et facilitas*, Rudolphe Peter, "Rhétorique et prédication selon Calvin," 250, states that the method of *brevitas et facilitas* dates back to the rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian.

brevitas et facilitas arises. Of course Chrysostom did not use exactly the very same method of *brevitas et facilitas* which Calvin employed. Chrysostom, however, intended to follow a brief and simple approach in his writings. On this issue R. Gamble argues that Calvin followed the method of Chrysostom, who did not twist the simple meaning of the words (*ac nullam sibi licentiam sumere in simplici verborum sensu contorquendo*).⁷ J. R. Walchenbach also states that Calvin believed that Chrysostom did not twist the true meaning of Scripture.⁸ Chrysostom rejected the allegorical interpretation of Scripture followed by the Alexandrian school, and emphasized the literal interpretation used by the Antiochene school. Chrysostom was, in Calvin's view, a good interpreter, and Calvin therefore emulated him. Calvin said:

The outstanding merit of our author, Chrysostom, is that it was his supreme delight always not to turn aside even to the slightest degree from the genuine, simple sense of Scripture and to allow himself no liberties by twisting the plain meaning of the words.⁹

Here we can see that Calvin was influenced by Chrysostom who, in his view, did not twist the meaning of Scripture and insisted on the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. As far as

⁷ R. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas," p. 8. Cf. CO. 9.835. Alexandre Ganoczy and Stefan Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins*, p. 119, state that Calvin followed Chrysostom who did not twist the single sense of the text.

⁸ John Robert Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator," p. 54.

⁹ John H. McIndoe, "Preface to the Homilies of Chrysostom," *The Hartford Quarterly* 5 (1965): 23. Cf. CO 9.835.

the hermeneutical method of Chrysostom is concerned, Calvin followed the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. But this is not to say that he always agreed with the Scriptural interpretation of Chrysostom. In fact, Calvin pointed out many mistakes in Chrysostom especially with regard to the interpretation of theological doctrines,¹⁰ and often disagreed with Chrysostom's view in cases where it was not supported by sufficient proof.¹¹ Calvin also pointed out that Chrysostom did not reveal the intention of the author: "I do not think that even he has hit the Apostle's meaning."¹²

Although Chrysostom employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* partly in that he did not force the real sense of the text of Scripture, showing the simple interpretation of Scripture, Calvin's ideal was better than Chrysostom's. The fact that Calvin did his best to reveal the intention of the author of Scripture leads us to see what the difference between Chrysostom and Calvin was.

B. The Sources of the Ideal of *Brevitas et Facilitas*

The method which Calvin used dated back to the classical rhetorical writings. As far as the ideal of *brevitas et*

¹⁰ In the commentary on John 3:5 "Unless a man be born of water" Calvin disagreed with Chrysostom's view that the word water referred to baptism. Cf. *Comm. on Jn.* 3:5, p. 110.

¹¹ *Comm. on Rom.* 8:3, p. 281.

¹² *Comm. on Tit.* 2:15, p. 323.

facilitas is concerned, Calvin was influenced by Cicero, Quintilian, and Chrysostom. Calvin, however, confirmed that Scripture itself presented him with this ideal.

1. Rhetoric

Calvin's rhetorical skill clearly appears in his Commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* and his *Institutes*.¹³ Calvin, like Erasmus,¹⁴ developed the rhetorical methods of Cicero and Quintilian into his own hermeneutical model. His application of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* to the interpretation of Scripture shows us the value of a theologian with a creative mind and a practical bent. Serene Jones describes Calvin's use of rhetoric and his influence on French literature as follows:

Calvin's use of rhetoric was much more creative; he refined and often stretched the rhetorical rules he was

¹³ Quirinus Breen, "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition," *Church History* 26 (1957): 3-21. He argues that the *De Clementia* has rhetorical form (p. 7), and that the *Institutes* has rhetorical logic: "There is a logic in the *Institutes*. In fact, it is full of logic. But the logic is not syllogistic. It is rhetorical logic. Syllogistic logic uses induction and the syllogism; rhetorical logic uses example and the enthymeme." (p. 13).

¹⁴ He was greatly influenced by Cicero's and Quintilian's rhetoric through the tradition of Italian humanism beginning with Petrarch. Rhetoric played a significant role in Erasmus' systematizing theology and hermeneutic. Cf. Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 15-31. For the study of the relation between hermeneutics and ancient rhetoric, see K. Eden, "Hermeneutics and Ancient Rhetorical Tradition," *Rhetorica* 5 (1987): 59-86.

taught in law school. And the result is a style of presentation that is quite original. In fact, as one scholar has noted, Calvin's preference for a lucid and concise style in both Latin and French, void of unnecessary rhetorical flourishes or distracting ornamentation, constituted a certain sober literary aesthetic that differed significantly from the style adopted by his French contemporaries. As such, his style marked a new period in the evolution of the French language, one that would be recognized only later when it was taken up by such figures as Montaigne, Descartes, and Pascal.¹⁵

The term "rhetoric" has traditionally been applied to the principles of training communicators, those seeking to persuade or inform others.¹⁶ John Henry Freese says:

"Rhetoric, in the general sense of the use of language in such a manner as to impress the hearers and influence them for or against a certain course of action, is as old as language itself and the beginnings of social and political life."¹⁷

Rhetoric was "practiced and highly esteemed among the Greeks from the earliest times."¹⁸

The origin of rhetoric as an art was the island of Sicily.¹⁹ J. H. Freese describes the beginning of rhetoric as

¹⁵ Serene Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), pp. 25-6.

¹⁶ Cf. Christopher Carey, "Rhetoric Means of Persuasion," in *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*, ed. Ian Worthington (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 26-45.

¹⁷ John Henry Freese, "Introduction," in *The Art of Rhetoric, The Loeb Classical Library*, by Aristotle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), p. vii.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. viii. Cf. Michael Gagarin, "Probability and Persuasion: Plato and early Greek rhetoric," in *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*, pp. 46-68. He also thinks that

follows:

According to Cicero, Aristotle, no doubt in his lost history of the literature of the subject, gives the following account of its origin. After the expulsion of the "tyrants" (467 B.C.), a number of civil processes were instituted by citizens, who had been previously banished and then returned from exile, for the recovery of property belonging to them which had been illegally confiscated by the tyrants. This made it necessary for the claimants to obtain assistance from others and the Sicilians, "an acute people and born controversialists," supplied the want in the persons of Corax and Tisias (both of Syracuse), who drew up a system which could be imparted by instruction, and a set of rules dealing with such questions as were likely to arise. These two may therefore claim to have been the founders of technical rhetoric, although Aristotle, in an early lost work called the *Sophist*, gives the credit to the philosopher Empedocles, whose pupil Gorgias is said to have been.²⁰

I shall now examine the rhetoric of Socrates and Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian who began to use the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

a. Socrates and Plato

Since the time of Plato there has been a close relationship between rhetoric and democracy. There the function of rhetoric was "to persuade the unintelligent multitude in the law courts and public assemblies in regard to justice and injustice."²¹ Exiles returning to Syracuse, who had been deprived of their lands by the tyrants, sought their

rhetoric "originated in Sicily with the handbooks of Corax and Tisias as a response to the large number of legal suits which arose after the overthrow of the Syracusan tyrants in 467." Ibid., p. 46.

²⁰ Ibid. p. viii-ix.

²¹ Ibid, p. xviii.

property. Later, in Athens, early teachers of rhetoric, known as Sophists, did not simply teach methods of argumentation; rather, they made rhetoric a central educational discipline. When Athenian democracy grew and higher systematized education advanced, they became very powerful and influential in society.

Socrates, on the definition of rhetoric, did not regard it as an art at all, but a mere knack of gratifying and pleasing the hearer. It was "a species of the genus flattery, like cookery (the art of making dainties), cosmetic (of adorning the person), and sophistic."²²

Among the dialogues of Plato, the *Phaedrus* is famous for "the variety of its contents and style, the richness of its imaginative description, and the sportive humour of its conversation."²³ The main theme of the dialogue is "rhetoric, the art of speaking, a subject which formed an important part

²² Ibid., p. xix. Cf. Rollin W. Quimby, "The Growth of Plato's Perception of Rhetoric," in *Plato: Sophistic Rhetoric*, ed. Keith V. Erickson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), p. 27, says: "Socrates does not say that rhetoric is worthy of study, nor does he excuse its faults by assigning apparent defects to substandard practitioners. As all know, Socrates defines rhetoric as a practical skill in flattery, something less than an art, an ignoble technique. Rhetoric, says Socrates, is ignoble because it is bad for society and it is not an art because 'it cannot give any account of the nature of the things it offers. . . and so cannot explain the reason why it is offered.'"

²³ W. R. M. Lamb, "Introduction to the *Phaedrus*," in *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 407.

of the oral and written instruction of the sophists."²⁴

Plato agreed with the sophists that rhetoric was persuasion. Plato stressed the knowledge of the truth while the sophists thought that it was essential. The sophists insisted that "knowledge of the truth concerning the subject under discussion is not essential; all that is necessary is ability to make one's conclusions seem probable."²⁵ W. R. M. Lamb describes the relationship between the true knowledge and rhetoric as follows:

Plato shows that only the man who knows the truth can know what will seem probable; and he must also know the minds or souls to be persuaded. This he cannot do without a knowledge of the nature of the soul. Now knowledge of the truth concerning the various subjects of discourse and knowledge of all the different classes of human souls must be supplemented by knowledge of the different kind of argument and of the various niceties of speech taught by the sophists. Only he who has acquired all this knowledge is a perfect orator, so far as perfection is attainable by man; but the acquisition of this knowledge is a great task, which no one would undertake merely for the purpose of persuading his fellows; a higher purpose, the perfection of his soul and the desire to serve the gods, must animate the spirit of the student of the real art of rhetoric.²⁶

Plato's opinion of rhetoric was to deal with the soul: "Since the function of rhetoric is to lead souls, the master of this art must first of all know the nature of this thing, the soul,

²⁴ Ibid. For the study of the relationship between Plato and the sophists, see Edwin Black, "Plato's View of Rhetoric, in *Plato: True and Sophistic Rhetoric*, pp. 171-191. Cf. David Glenn Mazorol, "Plato's Rhetorical Art: An Interpretive Commentary and Critique of the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1980).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 408.

on which his art is exercised."²⁷

When, after the speech on language, Phaedrus asked Socrates if there was anyone in Greece who could make a finer and more exhaustive speech on the same subject, he answered as follows:

What? Are you and I required to extol the speech not merely on the score of its author's lucidity and terseness of expression, and his consistently precise and well-polished vocabulary, but also for his having said what he ought? If we are, we shall have to allow it only on your account, for my feeble intelligence failed to appreciate it; I was only attending to it as a piece of rhetoric, and as such I couldn't think that even Lysias himself would deem it adequate. Perhaps you won't agree with me, Phaedrus, but really it seemed to me that he said the same things several times over. Maybe he's not very clever at expatiating at length on a single theme, or possibly he has no interest in such topics. In fact it struck me as an extravagant performance, to demonstrate his ability to say the same thing twice, in different words but with equal success.²⁸

Socrates here already expressed the prototype of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* which Calvin later employed.

Plato mentioned the ideal of *brevitas* in his writings: "I mention these facts to make the point that, among the ancients, this Laconic brevity was the characteristic expression of philosophy."²⁹ He also said, "To prefer the

²⁷ Glenn R. Morrow, "Plato's Conceptin of Persuasion," in *Plato: True and Sophistic Rhetoric*, p. 341.

²⁸ *Phaedrus*, in *the Collected Dialogues of Plato: including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 482-3.

²⁹ *Protagoras*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, p. 336.

concise, sir, is ever our Laconian way."³⁰ But he hardly used the term "*facilitas*" in his writings.³¹

It cannot easily be proved whether or not Calvin directly learned his method from Socrates and Plato. Concerning the issue, Calvin did not mention their writings. Before his conversion, however, Calvin could have learned the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* by studying the Classical writings of Cicero and Quintilian rather than Socrates and Plato. I will deal with this matter later.

b. Aristotle

Before Aristotle, the sophists understood rhetoric as only an art to persuade the hearers.³² Plato, who criticized the sophists, "denied that there could be an art of rhetoric."³³ They did not make rhetoric systematic. Aristotle was the creator of a systematic and scientific art of rhetoric. J. H. Freese says:

The unsatisfactory character of previous productions, whose compilers had neglected the all-important subject

³⁰ Law, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, p. 1312.

³¹ Cf. E. Black, "Plato's View of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 44 (1958): 363-74.

³² Cf. L. Cooper, "The Rhetoric of Aristotle," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 21 (1933): 10-19; L. J. Flynn, "Aristotle: Art and Faculty in Rhetoric," *Southern Speech Journal* 21 (1956): 244-54.

³³ Mary Margaret McCabe, "Arguments in Context: Aristotle's Defense of Rhetoric," in *Philosophical Essay: Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. David J. Furley and Alexander Nehamas (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 129.

of "proofs" and confined themselves chiefly to appeals to the emotions and things irrelevant to the matter in hand, induced him to attack the subject from the point of view of a philosopher and psychologist, not from that of the mere rhetorician, which assuredly Aristotle was not.³⁴

In his *Rhetoric* he defined rhetoric as a counterpart(*antistropos*) of dialectic:" rhetoric is a counterpart(*antistropos*) of dialectic; for both have to do with matters that are in manner within the cognizance of all men and not confined to any special science."³⁵ Calvin quoted this definition when he commented the interpretation of Gal. 4:25, "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."

The word, *sustoicha*, which is translated corresponding to, denotes those things which are so arranged as to have a mutual relation to each other, and a similar word, *sustoichia*, when applied to trees and other objects, conveys the idea of their following in regular order. Mount Sinai is said (*sustoichia*) to correspond to that which is now Jerusalem, in the same sense as Aristotle says that Rhetoric is (*antistropos*) the counterpart to Logic, by a metaphor borrowed from lyric compositions, which were usually arranged in two parts, so adapted as to be sung in harmony. In short, the word, *sustoikey*, corresponds, means nothing more than that it belongs to the same class."³⁶

³⁴ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. xviii.

³⁵ *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.1.1 p. 2. For the study of the definition of rhetoric, see Theresa M. Crem, "The Definition of Rhetoric According to Aristotle," in *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*, ed. Keith V. Erickson (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1974), pp. 52-71. For the study of the background of Aristotle's rhetoric, see William M. A. Grimaldi, *Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1972), pp. 1-17.

³⁶ *Comm. on Gal. 4:25*. p. 140.

Here we can see that Calvin was influenced by Aristotle's rhetoric.

At the beginning of his *Rhetoric* Aristotle defined rhetoric as follows: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever".³⁷ He said, "that which is true and better is naturally always easier to prove and more likely to persuade."³⁸ With the above definition and purpose of rhetoric, he presented the method of style: "Style to be good must be clear (In regard to style, one of its chief merits may be defined as perspicuity), as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do."³⁹ Here the rhetorical term "clearness" or "perspicuity" is defined as the mean between prolixity and excessive conciseness.⁴⁰ According to him, prolixity caused language's clearness to fail: "We thus see how the inappropriateness of such poetical language imports absurdity and tastelessness into speeches, as well as the obscurity that comes from all this verbosity-for when the sense is plain, you only obscure and spoil its clearness by

³⁷ *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.2.1. p. 15.

³⁸ *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.1.12. p. 13.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. III.2.1, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1984), p. 167. Cf. *The Art of Rhetoric*. III.2.1, p. 351.

⁴⁰ "Select Glossary," in *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. 480.

piling up words."⁴¹ He used this technical term from the hermeneutical perspective, i.e. he related clearness or perspicuity with a plain meaning or a simple meaning. According to him, clearness or perspicuity is secured by using the words (nouns and verbs alike) that are current and ordinary.⁴² He meant that a style familiar to the common hearers should be used. He also argued that a writer had to give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially. "Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary; for our hearers are prejudiced and think we have some design against them, as if we were mixing their wines for them."⁴³ The statement that "Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary" shows us one of the most important elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Aristotle argued that a style should not have antforce. "We can now see that a good writer can produce a style that is distinguished without being obtrusive, and is at the same time clear."⁴⁴ Here he related clearness with antforce (the avoidance of forced interpretation). On the matter of *facilitas* Aristotle stated that a writer should use a facile method for his readers' benefit. "It is a general rule that a written composition should be easy to read and therefore easy

⁴¹ *Rhetoric*, III.2.33, p. 172.

⁴² *Rhetoric*, III.2.6, p. 167.

⁴³ *Rhetoric*, III.2.20, p. 167.

⁴⁴ *Rhetoric*, III.2.36, p. 168.

to deliver (easy to understand)."⁴⁵

Like Aristotle Calvin also argued that the chief excellency of an expounder consisted in perspicuous brevity (*perspicua brevitate*). In order for his readers more easily to understand, Calvin interpreted Scripture with the familiar style of common people. His effort appeared in his commentaries and sermons. As Aristotle used the mean between prolixity and excessive conciseness, Calvin also adopted the middle way (*via media*) in the interpretation of Scripture over against Melanchthon's *loci* method⁴⁶ and Bucer's prolixity. Calvin pointed out that an interpreter's twisting of the true

⁴⁵ *Rhetoric*, III.5.11. p. 176.

⁴⁶ Melanchthon's *loci* method derived from Aristotle's *topoi*. On this method, William M. D. Grimaldi, "The Aristotelian Topics," in *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*, pp. 176-193, says: "In other words, the *topoi*, which are the sources for intelligent discussion and reasoning in dialectic and rhetoric, are concerned with both the material and formal element in such discussion. As sources for the content of discussion (the ordinary meaning of *loci communes*: persons, places, things, properties, accidents, etc., the *peristaeis*, or aspects of the subject pertinent to discussion) they ultimately provide the material by means of which general or particular propositions are enunciated. As sources for the forms of discussion they are axiomatic forms, or modes of inference, in which syllogistic (or what is called 'enthymematic' in the *Rhetoric*) reasoning naturally expresses itself. Neither aspect can be neglected. For, granted that the *topoi* are concerned with propositions (a point obvious to one acquainted with the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*), it must not be forgotten that propositions consist of terms which must be clearly defined and determined before they can be used in meaningful discussion, or in intelligent, convincing, although probable, inference. There must be a precise apprehension of the subject as far as is possible, and there must be reasonable, inferential modes in which to develop the subject further. In the methodology of the topics Aristotle was apparently concerned with both ideas" (Ibid., p. 178).

meaning of the text might lose the natural sense of a passage. For him the natural meaning was the genuine sense. Calvin maintained that an exegete should not force the real meaning. He pointed out that Origen's allegorical interpretation came from forcing the passage. Aristotle and Calvin both agreed that a writer and an interpreter should allow their expression to be easily understood. Calvin made every effort for his readers to understand Scripture more easily.

It is undeniable that Calvin's method dated back to Aristotle.⁴⁷ We have observed several very close parallels between the insights of Aristotle and Calvin. The continuity between them shone dimly in Aristotle's indirect influence on Calvin's usage of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin as a humanist used Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*. After his conversion Calvin used a rhetorical term of Aristotle in his commentary on Acts 1:3.

Therefore, that the truth hereof might not be called in question, he saith that it was proved by many signs and token. Those which Erasmus, following an old interpreter, doth call arguments, I have translated proofs. For Aristotle doth call that *tekmérion*, in the first book of his *Rhetorics*, which is necessary in signs. This is, therefore, that which I said before, that Christ did make manifest his resurrection unto his apostles by evident tokens, which did serve instead of necessary proofs, lest they should doubt of the same.⁴⁸

According to Aristotle, the proof is a necessary sign which

⁴⁷ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 86.

⁴⁸ *Comm. on Ac. 1:3*, p. 36.

cannot be refuted. The following statement of Aristotle shows us that Calvin employed the rhetorical method of Aristotle.

Of signs, one kind bears the same relation to the statement it supports as the particular bears to the universal, the other the same as the universal bears to the particular. The infallible kind is a 'complete proof' (*tekmérion*); the fallible kind has no specific name. By infallible signs I mean those on which syllogisms proper may be based: and this shows us why this kind of sign is called 'complete proof': when people think that what they have said cannot be refuted.⁴⁹

Considering that he directly quoted the passage of Aristotle, we suppose he probably knew the concepts of Aristotle relating to the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

c. Cicero

Marcus Tullius Cicero was born in 106 B.C. in Arpinum. Renaissance humanists regarded Cicero as "a man who was able to integrate devotion to *litterae humaniores* and public service."⁵⁰ His rhetorical treatises are *Rhetorica ad Herennium*⁵¹, *De Inventione*, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, *Topica*,

⁴⁹ *Rhetoric*, I.2.5, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Harold C. Gotoff, *Cicero's Elegant Style: An Analysis of the Pro Archia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 4.

⁵¹ For the first time Lorenzo Valla doubted that *Ad C. Herennium* was the writing of Cicero. In 1491 Raphael Regius positively separated that work from Cicero's name. Who was the real author? We have no evidence to answer that question. This work is traditionally attributed to Cicero. But all the recent editors disagree with this view. John Ferguson and John P. V. Dacre Balsdon include this work among Cicero's writings ("Cicero" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th.). Charlton T. Lewis and Short also categorize it in Cicero's writings, even though it's author is not clear. Cf. Lewis and Short,

De Fato, Paradoxa Stoicorum, De Partitione Oratoria, Brutus, and Orator.

Cicero was Calvin's chief philosophical source in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*. Calvin used all rhetorical writings including the *Ad Herennium*, accepted as Cicero's in the editions Calvin used.⁵² Except for the *Ad Herennium*, these writings of Cicero do not offer a systematic scheme of rhetorical terminology.

In fact, of Calvin's rather few citations of Cicero's rhetorical treatises, only a fraction have to do with the technical vocabulary of rhetoric. Yet, indirectly, these works and Cicero's other works undergird Calvin's whole sense of style and his rhetorical skill.⁵³

Cicero's influence upon Calvin's method of hermeneutics was substantial. For example, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin undertook to reflect on man's natural knowledge of God and turned to Cicero for far-reaching support.⁵⁴ But in selecting and recording Cicero's insights, Calvin edited them for his own specific Christian use.⁵⁵ Calvin used Cicero's thought, and at the same time developed

"Abbreviations," in *A Latin Dictionary Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. viii.

⁵² "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, edited and translated by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, P. 81.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

⁵⁴ Egil Grisliis, "Calvin's Use of Cicero in the *Institutes* I:1-5 - A Case Study in Theological Method," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 62 (1971): 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

his own theological models from the standpoint of Scripture.

Cicero revealed clearly the concept of *brevitas et facilitas* in his writings. He argued that the form of narrative which contained an exposition of a case in law ought to have three qualities: "it should be brief, clear, and plausible (*ut brevis, ut aperta, ut probabilis sit*)."⁵⁶ In the *Orator* Cicero repeated this rule - to set forth the facts briefly, clearly and plausibly (*breviter exponere et probabiliter et aperte*).⁵⁷ These three elements became the framework of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin also showed that his method followed Cicero's statement. Cicero's three qualities appeared clearly in Calvin's writings where Calvin interpreted the text of Scripture with the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

First, Cicero, who had influence on the philological insights of Erasmus and the Reformers, described how to employ *brevitas* as follows:

It (the form of narrative) will be brief if it begins with what needs to be said, and is not carried back to the most remote events; if it does not include details when

⁵⁶ Cicero, *De Inventione* I.20.28, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 57. The author of *Ad Herennium* explained to us "A statement of facts should have three qualities: brevity, clarity, and plausibility (*ut brevis, ut dilucida, ut veri similis sit*) in *Ad C. Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 24-25. The rule is Isocratean or even older. Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* 4.2.31-2 mentioned three elements. But Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3.16, "scorned the injunction of brevity in favor of the proper mean" (*Ad Herennium*, p. 25).

⁵⁷ *Orator*, 35.122, p. 397.

it is sufficient to have stated the substance of the story - for often it is sufficient to say what happened, so that you do not need to tell how it happened - and if the narrative is not carried farther than is needed, and if it does not digress to another story.⁵⁸

The employment of *brevitas* consists in this. His description reminds us of Calvin's method. Cicero added some important factors in connection with *brevitas*. These are technical elements. According to Cicero, *brevitas* can be gained "if the story is told in such way that at times something which has not been mentioned can be gathered from what has been said; also, if not only what is prejudicial is omitted but also what is neither prejudicial nor helpful; and if each thing is mentioned once and once only, and if it does not begin all

⁵⁸ *De Inventione*, I. 20.28, pp. 57-59. "*Brevis erit, si unde necesse est inde initium sumetur et non ab ultimo repetetur, et si, cuius rei satis erit summam dixisse, eius partes non dicentur - nam saepe satis est quid factum sit dicere, ut ne narres quemadmodum sit factum, - et si non longius, quam quo opus est, in narrando procedetur, et si nullam in rem aliam transibitur.*" Cf. *Ad Herennium* clearly shows how to use *brevitas*: "We shall be able to make the statement of facts brief if we begin it at the place at which we need to begin; if we do not try to recount from the remotest beginning; if our statement of facts is summary and not detailed; if we carry it forward, not to the furthest point, but to the point to which we need to go; if we use no digressions and do not wander from the account we have undertaken to set forth; and if we present the outcome in such a way that the facts that have preceded can also be known, although we have not spoken of them. (*Rem breviter narrare poterimus si inde incipiemus narrare unde necesse erit; et si non ab ultimo initio repetere volemus; et si summam, non particulatim narrabimus; et si non ad extremum, sed usque eo quo opus erit persequemur; et si transitionibus nullis utemur, et si non deerrabimus ab eo quod coeperimus exponere; et si exitus rerum ita ponemus ut ante quoque quae facta sint sciri possint, tamentsi nos reticuerimus.*)" *Ad Herennium*, I.9.14-15. pp. 25-26.

over again at the point at which it has just stopped."⁵⁹ He also warned against not being deceived by a false brevity. "Many are deceived by an appearance of brevity so that they are prolix when they think they are brief."⁶⁰ He stated that this occurred when speakers tried to "say many things in a brief compass, rather than saying very few or not more than is necessary."⁶¹ According to him, *brevitas* is "secured when no word is used unless necessary (*Brevitas est, cum nisi necessarium nullum assumitur verbum*)."⁶²

Secondly, Cicero showed us how to obtain clarity in a narrative. Calvin applied this to the clarity of Scripture and the clarity of the interpretation of Scripture. Cicero exhibited the principle of clarity:

It will be possible to make the narrative clear if the events are presented one after another as they occurred, and the order of events in time is preserved so that the story is told as it will prove to have happened or will seem possible to have happened. On this point care must be taken not to say anything in a confused and intricate style, not to shift to another subject, not to go back to ultimate beginnings nor to go on far, and not to omit

⁵⁹ *De Inventione*, I. 20.28. p. 59.

⁶⁰ *De Inventione*, I. 20.28, p. 59. He gave an example: "Many, for example, think that one is speaking briefly who speaks as follows: 'I went to his house, I called the slave. He answered. I asked for his master. He said that he was not at home.' Here, although so many things could not be said more briefly, still because it was sufficient to say, 'He said he was not at home,' it is made too long by the abundance of details. Therefore in this section of the speech too, a false brevity is to be avoided, and one must refrain no less from an excess of superfluous facts than from an excess of words."

⁶¹ *De Inventione*, I. 20.28, p. 59.

⁶² *De Inventione*, I. 22.32, p. 65.

anything pertinent to the case.⁶³

He maintained the relation between brevity and clarity. "In general the rules about brevity are to be followed in seeking clarity also."⁶⁴ Because misunderstanding came from the excessive length of a narrative, he insisted that the diction should be perspicuous.⁶⁵ In order to be perspicuous in an argument, the form should have a partition: "In an argument a partition correctly made renders the whole speech clear and perspicuous (*Recte habita in causa partitio illustrem et perspicuam totam efficit orationem*)."⁶⁶

The word *perspicuitas* used by Cicero is closely related to the terms *facilitas* and *simplicitas*. They are almost synonymous from the hermeneutical perspective. Cicero regarded the principle of *facilitas* as something easier to follow.⁶⁷

⁶³ *De Inventione*, I. 20.29, p. 59. "Aperta autem narratio poterit esse, si ut quidque primum gestum erit ita primum exponetur, et rerum ac temporum ordo servabitur, ut ita narrentur ut gestae res erunt aut ut potuisse geri videbuntur. Hic erit considerandum ne quid perturbate, ne quid contorte dicatur, ne quam in aliam rem transeat, ne ab ultimo repetatur, ne ad extremum prodeatur, ne ab ultimo repetatur, ne ad extremum prodeatur, ne quid quod ad rem pertineat praetereatur." Cf. *Ad Herennium*, IV. 12.17, p. 271. "Clarity renders language plain and intelligible. It is achieved by two means, the use of current terms and of proper terms. Current terms are such as are habitually used in everyday speech. Proper terms are such as, or can be, the designations specially characteristic of the subject of our discourse".

⁶⁴ *De Inventione*, I. 20.29, p. 59.

⁶⁵ *De Inventione*, I. 20.29, p. 61.

⁶⁶ *De Inventione*, I. 21.31, p. 63.

⁶⁷ *De Inventione*, I. 27.41, p. 81.

According to him, a speaker must use the word with simple lucidity (*plane et dilucide*).⁶⁸ Calvin tried to use this method in order to help his readers understand the text more easily. In contrast with Bucer's highly academic interpretation, Calvin gave a practical interpretation meant for common readers.

Perspicuitas contrasts with *ambiguitas*. *Perspicuitas* can be obtained words with unambiguous meanings. *Ambiguitas* occurs when what is written has two or more meanings.⁶⁹ According to Cicero, ambiguity causes controversy: "A controversy arises from ambiguity when there is doubt as to what the writer meant, because the written statement has two or more meanings."⁷⁰ Calvin, like Cicero, avoided the ambiguous interpretation which could confuse his readers' understanding of Scripture. While Calvin dealt with ambiguity from the perspective of Scriptural interpretation, Erasmus applied it to understanding the original text of Scripture.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *De Oratore*, I. 32.144, p. 101.

⁶⁹ *De Inventione*, I. 13.17, p. 35.

⁷⁰ *De Inventione*, II. 34.116, p. 285.

⁷¹ With his effort's to overcome the obscurity in Scripture Erasmus opened the new era of textual criticism in Scriptural interpretation. Cf. Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus*, p. 175. "Obscurities in Scripture arise, according to Erasmus, not only from the nature of its tropes but also from technical problems like incorrect translations; incorrect ideas about antiquity; mistaking the meanings of words with similar sound; confusing the things expressed by the same noun; incorrect punctuation; incorrect pronunciations; contradictions, untruths, absurdities; and difficulties of telling in whose name a

Further, Cicero insisted that the narrative should be plausible in order to persuade the audience. Calvin applied suitability or plausibility to the intention of the author of Scripture and the context of the present passage. He regarded the true meaning of a passage of Scripture as the suitable agreement with the intention of the author. Cicero explained the principle of plausibility as follows:

The narrative will be plausible if it seems to embody characteristics which are accustomed to appear in real life; if the proper qualities of the character are maintained, if reasons for their actions are plain, if there seems to have been ability to do the deed, if it can be shown that the time was opportune, the space sufficient and the place suitable for the events about to be narrated; if the story fits in with the nature of the actors in it, the habits of ordinary people and the beliefs of the audience. Verisimilitude can be secured by following these principles.⁷²

According to Cicero, a plausible statement is "supported by the opinion of the auditor without corroborating evidence: for

discourse proceeds."

⁷² *De Inventione*, I. 21.29. p. 61. "*Probabilis erit narratio, si in ea videbuntur inesse ea quae solent apparere in veritate; si personarum dignitates servabuntur; si causae factorum exstabunt; si fuisse facultates faciendi videbuntur; si tempus idoneum, si spatii satis, si locus opportunus ad eandem rem qua de re narrabitur fuisse ostendetur; si res et ad eorum qui agent naturam et ad vulgi morem et ad eorum qui audient opinionem accommodabitur. Ac veri quidem similis ex his rationibus esse poterit.*" Cf. *Ad Herennium*, I. 9.16, p. 29. "Our statement of the facts will have plausibility if it answers the requirements of the usual, the expected, and the natural; if account is strictly kept of the length of time, the standing of the persons involved, the motives in the planning, and the advantages offered by the scene of action, so as to obviate the argument in refutation that the time was too short, or that there was no motive, or that the place was unsuitable, or that the persons themselves could not have acted or been treated so."

example, There is no one who does not wish his children to be safe and happy."⁷³

d. Quintilian

Marcus Fabius Quintilian, the author of *Institutio Oratoria*, was born, like Seneca, about 35 A.D. at Calagurris in northern Spain (modern Calahorra). His father was a successful rhetorician in Rome so that Quintilian was sent to Rome for his education. He had good teachers like "the famous grammaticus Remmius Palaemon, and the no less distinguished rhetorician Domitius Afer."⁷⁴ Quintilian practiced for a time as an advocate in the law courts, and taught rhetoric, combining this with advocacy in the law courts. He followed the rhetorical theory of Cicero. "There are many references to the rhetorical theory of *On the Orator* and *The Orator* and to other works of Cicero and there are more illustrations of technique taken from Cicero's speeches than from any other source."⁷⁵ His purpose in the *Institutio* is as follows:

It will be his aim not only to instruct students in the science which some regard as the whole of rhetoric - he has perhaps the pedantic Pliny in mind, but probably also numerous other technical handbooks - but he will try to

⁷³ *De Inventione*, I. 30.48, p. 89.

⁷⁴ "Introduction," in *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, vol.1, trans. by H. B. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. vii.

⁷⁵ George Kennedy, *Quintilian* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1969), p. 55.

nourish eloquence and cover the bare bones with flesh.⁷⁶

In his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* the source for Calvin's rhetorical terminology was Quintilian's *Institutio*, cited by name countless times for a variety of purposes.⁷⁷

According to Battles, Quintilian was perhaps second to Cicero in the formation of Calvin's sense of style and critical insight.⁷⁸ He goes on to describe Quintilian's influence on Calvin's rhetorical learning as follows:

Yet he provided Calvin with more than technical learning: Calvin drew moral teaching and pedagogical insights, and a great deal more, from him. In some instances, citations of Cicero have come by way of Quintilian, especially illustrations of rhetorical figures drawn from Cicero's speeches. In one place Calvin prefers Quintilian's use of a term over Cicero's.⁷⁹

Following Cicero's tradition, Quintilian systematized the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the rhetorical expression of wishing, detestation, entreaty, or anxiety:

We shall also find it a useful device for wakening the attention of our audience to create the impression that we shall not keep them lying and intend to stick closely to the point. The mere fact of such attention undoubtedly makes the judge ready to receive instruction from us, but we shall contribute still more to this effect if we give a brief and lucid summary of the case (*si breviter et dilucide summam rei*) which he has to try.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷⁷ "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, edited and translated by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, p. 82.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 1.34, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), P. 25.

The motif of *breviter et dilucide summam* appeared in Calvin's own method of Scriptural interpretation in the preface of his *Commentary on Romans* (*praecipuam interpretis virtutem in perspicua brevitate esse positam*).⁸¹ In his *Institutes* he followed the ideal of *brevitas* over against scholastic prolixity.

Quintilian recognized that statements should have the following characteristics: "Most writers, more especially those of the Isocratean school, hold that it should be lucid, brief and plausible (for it is of no importance if we substitute clear for lucid, or credible or probable for plausible)."⁸² He used the words lucidity, simplicity, and facility more than the term brevity, while Cicero used *brevitas* several times. This shows that Quintilian emphasized the hermeneutical interest of the text and the practical perspective of the audience. Cicero focused on the orator and his style of delivery while Quintilian stressed the audience's facile understanding.

First, Quintilian described how to make the statement of facts lucid:

We shall achieve lucidity and clearness in our statement of facts, first by setting forth our story in words which are appropriate, significant and free from any taint of meanness, but not on the other hand farfetched or unusual, and secondly by giving a distinct account of

⁸¹ CO 10.402-3.

⁸² *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.31, pp. 66-7. Cf. "*Eam plerique scriptores, maxime qui sunt ab Isocrate, volunt esse lucidam, brevem, verisimilem.*"

facts, persons, times, places and causes, while our delivery must be adapted to our matter, so that the judge will take in what we say with the utmost readiness.⁸³

While Cicero began to present the order of events in order to make the narrative clear, Quintilian emphasized the exposition of a story with the appropriate and significant words, referring to the historical accounts of facts, persons, times, places and causes. Quintilian's perspectives made his method historical and hermeneutical. Calvin applied clarity or perspicuity to the principle of *facilitas*, seeking simplicity or the easy understanding of the text. Against the allegorical interpretation of Origen and its ambiguity, he insisted on a clear interpretation as Scripture is clear.

Secondly, Quintilian explained how the statement of facts could be brief:

The statement of facts will be brief, if in the first place we start at that point of the case at which it begins to concern the judge, secondly avoid irrelevance, and finally cut out everything the removal of which neither hampers the activities of the judge nor harms our own case. For frequently conciseness of detail is not inconsistent with length in the whole.⁸⁴

His view on brevity is similar to that given in Calvin's

⁸³ *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.36. pp. 69-71. "Erit autem narratio aperta atque dilucida, si fuerit primum exposita verbis propriis et significantibus et non sordidis quidem, non tamen exquisitis et ab usu remotis, tum distincta rebus, personis, temporibus, locis, causis, ipsa etiam pronuntiatione in hoc accommodata, ut iudex quae dicentur quam facillime accipiat."

⁸⁴ *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.43, pp. 72-3. "Brevis erit narratio ante omnia, si inde coeperimus rem exponere, unde ad iudicem pertinet; deinde, si nihil extra causam dixerimus; tum etiam, si reciderimus omnia, quibus sublatis neque cognitioni quidquam neque utilitati detrahatur."

definition. Calvin, following him, applied these elements to his ideal of *brevitas*, revealing the intention of the author, concerning him with the nature of the text, and reducing long explanations. On the use of brevity, Quintilian expressed as follows:

Personally, when I use the word brevity, I mean not saying less, but not saying more than occasion demands. As for repetitions and tautologies and diffuseness, which some writers of textbooks tell us we must avoid, I pass them by; they are faults which we should shun for other reasons beside our desire for brevity. But we must be equally on our guard against the obscurity which results from excessive abridgment, and it is better to say a little more than is necessary than a little less. For though a diffuse irrelevance is tedious, the omission of what is necessary is positively dangerous.⁸⁵

His description of brevity is indicative of the relationship between the rule of rhetoric in general and the procedure that Calvin usually suggested to his readers in order to understand a passage. Using Quintilian's method, Calvin made his interpretation easy and simple, not boring his readers.

Thirdly, Quintilian argued that a statement of fact should be credible or plausible (*credibilis* or *verisimilem*).

The statement of fact will be credible, if in the first place we take care to say nothing contrary to nature, secondly if we assign reasons and motives for the facts on which the inquiry turns (it is unnecessary to do so with the subsidiary facts as well), and if we make the characters of the actors in keeping with the facts we desire to be believed.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.43-44, pp. 73-75.

⁸⁶ *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.52. pp. 78-9. "*Credibilis autem erit narratio ante omnia, si prius consuluerimus nostrum animum, ne quid naturae dicamus adversum, deinde si causas ac rationes factis praeposuerimus, non omnibus sed de quibus quaeritur, si personas convenientes iis, quae facta*

In the explanation of plausibility Quintilian did not touch on the life of ordinary people, which Cicero detailed. He, however, maintained that in order for the narrative with argument to be credible, it should be short and simple (*simplici et brevi*).⁸⁷

2. Scripture

For Calvin Scripture was not complicated, but simple. Scripture was simply the eloquent speech of the Holy Spirit for his simple people.⁸⁸ Therefore, to vitiate the simplicity of Scripture was to destroy the whole of Scripture. Calvin criticized Origen for his torturing Scripture allegorically. Origen vitiated the simplicity of Scripture.⁸⁹ For Calvin the simplicity of Scripture was immediately connected with his hermeneutical method. This supplied Calvin with the foundation for the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as his hermeneutical ideal.

Recently Battles and Gamble suggest that Calvin exhibited Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. According to Battles, Calvin commended "the Biblical writers in general for their clarity, simplicity, and brevity,

credivolemus."

⁸⁷ *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.54. p. 79.

⁸⁸ Richard C. Gamble, "*Brevitas et Facilitas*," p. 14.

⁸⁹ *Comm. on Gen.* 21:12, p. 545.

qualities that he especially prized and sought to attain".⁹⁰ Calvin tried to "write in such a way as to communicate his whole thought clearly and with no waste of words."⁹¹ According to Gamble, Calvin, rejecting frivolous rhetoric (the rhetoric of the world), had high regard for the simplicity of Scripture and attempted to imitate that style as his own.⁹² This simplicity (or *facilitas*) was "particularly noticeable in his commentaries and even more markedly so in his sermons".⁹³ I agree with Gamble's statement: "The ultimate presupposition of this hermeneutic is the clear brevity of the Scriptures".⁹⁴

Calvin regarded Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* in the *Institutes*, and his commentaries. Calvin pointed out that even Christ used a simple interpretation: "I think that the written law, as well as the exposition of it, will come to an end; but, as I am of opinion that Christ spoke more simply, I do not choose to feed the ears of readers with such amusements."⁹⁵ Calvin, therefore, saw that Scripture contained the simple words of Christ.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Ford Lewis Battles, "Introduction," in *Inst.*, pp. lxix-lxx.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. lxx.

⁹² Richard C. Gamble, "*Brevitas et Facilitas*," p. 15.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 32.

⁹⁵ *Comm. on Mt.* 5:18, p. 278.

⁹⁶ *Comm. on Mk.* 14:24, p. 215.

In his *Institutes* Calvin argued that the simplicity (or *facilitas*) of Scripture, even though it was largely in mean and lowly words, could inspire in us greater reverence than any eloquence of rhetoricians: "Now since such uncultivated and almost rude simplicity (*simplicitas*) inspires greater reverence for itself than any eloquence, what ought one to conclude except that the force of the truth of Sacred Scripture is manifestly too powerful to need the art of words?"⁹⁷

Calvin recognized that the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero could allure, delight, and enrapture us in wonderful measure. For him, however, the power of the biblical rhetoric peculiar to Scripture was "clear from the fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably."⁹⁸ On the difference between 'the writings of the world' and Scripture Calvin explained as follows:

Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle, and others of the tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them to this sacred reading. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your very marrow, that, compared with its deep impression, such vigor as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. Consequently, it is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *Inst.* 1.8.1, p. 82.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

In his *Commentary on Genesis* Calvin showed that Moses adhered to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* for the benefit of his people. According to Calvin, Moses taught his people simply.

We have elsewhere said, that Moses, by a homely and uncultivated style, accommodates what he delivers to the capacity of the people; and for the best reason; for not only had he to instruct an untaught race of men, but the existing age of the Church was so puerile, that it was unable to receive any higher instruction.¹⁰⁰

Calvin pointed out that Moses declared God's Word in a homely style.¹⁰¹ For Calvin the style of Moses was not ornamented and academic, but simple and ordinary. According to Calvin, Moses accommodated his terms to his untaught common people. "For he knew whom he was appointed to instruct, and therefore he always accommodated his words to the rude capacity of the people; and this is his common custom in reference to the names of places, as I have previously intimated."¹⁰² Calvin insisted that Moses did not speak scientifically, but in a popular style.¹⁰³ According to Woudstra, Calvin's sensitivity to Moses' simple style led him to make a material point of exegesis from which admonitions can be drawn for contemporary

¹⁰⁰ *Comm. on Gen.* 3:1, p. 141.

¹⁰¹ *Comm. on Gen.* 3:21, p. 181.

¹⁰² *Comm. on Gen.* 14:1, pp. 381-2.

¹⁰³ *Comm. on Gen.* 24:4, p. 15.

readers.¹⁰⁴

For Calvin, the prophet Isaiah also strived for accommodation to the common people: "This mode of expression, therefore, Isaiah accommodated to the capacity of the people, that they might know that the covenant into which God entered with the fathers was firm, sure, and eternal, and not changeable or temporary."¹⁰⁵ Calvin observed Jeremiah, who had his own habitual mode of speaking.

There is therefore no wonder that he often uses expressions to which he had been accustomed; for education in a great measure forms the language of men. Though then the Prophet speaks according to the usual phraseology of Scripture, there is yet no doubt but that he retained, as it has been said elsewhere, his own habitual mode of speaking.¹⁰⁶

Calvin often remarked that prophets like Jeremiah, rejecting the elevated style of 'world rhetoricians', used their own ordinary style for the profit of God's people.

But we must ever bear in mind what we have often stated, that the prophets, when they thus speak in astonishment, do not adopt an elevated style as rhetoricians do, to shew their eloquence, but have always a regard to what is profitable.¹⁰⁷

Calvin saw the language style of Ezekiel as accommodating itself to the exiles. He agreed with Ezekiel's own adoption of a homely style.

¹⁰⁴ Marten H. Woudstra, "Calvin Interprets what 'Moses Reports': Observations on Calvin's Commentary on Exodus 1-19," *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Comm. on Isa*, 55:3, p. 161.

¹⁰⁶ *Comm. on Jer*. 50:19, p. 153.

¹⁰⁷ *Comm. on Jer*. 49:25, p. 100.

This is a repetition of the same doctrine; for we said that our prophet is more verbose than Isaiah, and even than Jeremiah, because he had accustomed himself to the form of speech which was then customary among the exiles. He is not, therefore, either so restricted or so polished; but we must understand that he accommodated his language to learners, because he had to do with a people not only rude and dull, but also obstinate. And then they had degenerated as much from the purity of their language as from that of their faith; hence the prophet purposely bends aside from elegance of language. Whatever repetition he might use with men so dull and slothful, it was not superfluous.¹⁰⁸

Calvin pointed out that Ezekiel, who was accustomed to homely language, did not use an elegant and polished style, since those who were in exile naturally contracted many faults of language.¹⁰⁹

Calvin believed that Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel employed a simple and easy style in order for ordinary people to understand God's Word more easily. This made him believe that the style of Scripture had its orientation in *brevitas et facilitas*.

Consequently Calvin, influenced by rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian in his ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, confirmed that the authors of Scripture demonstrated this ideal. Calvin made this ideal a part of his own hermeneutical method.

¹⁰⁸ *Comm. on Eze.* 3:10-11, p. 139.

¹⁰⁹ *Comm. on Eze.* 2:3, p. 110.

C. The Employment of *Brevitas et Facilitas* in Calvin's Writings

Calvin presented the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as a hermeneutical key to Scriptural exegesis in his various writings.

1. Calvin's *Institutes*

First, Calvin continued to employ this method from the first Latin edition of the 1536 *Institutes* to the final Latin edition in 1559. For example, in the *Institutes* of 1536 he used it criticizing the Scholastic doctrine of penance:

Now I come to discuss what the Scholastic Sophists have taught concerning repentance. This I will run through in as few words as possible because it is not my intention to pursue everything, lest this little book of mine which I mean to keep to the brevity of a handbook (*enchiridii brevitatem exegere volo*), burst all bounds. They have involved this matter, otherwise not very complicated, in so many volumes that there would be no easy way out if you were to immerse yourself even slightly in their slime.¹¹⁰

As opposed to the verbosity of the Scholastic Sophists, he emphasized the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. In the 1559 *Institutes* Calvin replaced *brevitatem* with *compendium*. T.

¹¹⁰ *Inst.* (1536) 133. Cf. OS 1.173. For the 1559 version, see *Inst.* 3.4.1. Cf. CO 2.455-456. "Nunc venio ad excutienda ea quae de poenitentia scholastici sophistic tradiderunt, quae quam paucissimis fieri poterit percurram, quia omnia persecui animus non est, ne hic liber, quem ad docendi compendium aptare studeo, in immensum extrahatur. Et illi rem alioqui non valde implicitam tot voluminibus involverunt, ut non futurus sit facilis exitus, si te paulum in eorum faeces immerseris."

H. L. Parker also identifies *brevitas* with *compendium*, and says that both words "concern the subsequent teaching and not the preliminary understanding."¹¹¹ In the following statement his thinking on this principle emerges clearly:

Now, in setting forth how the life of a Christian man is to be ordered, I am not unaware that I am entering into a varied and diverse subject, which in magnitude would occupy a large volume (*et quod magnitudine sua longum volumen explere possit*), were I to try to treat it in full detail. In composing exhortation on but a single virtue, the ancient doctors, as we see, became very prolix (*prolixitatem*). . . . But I do not intend to develop, here, the instruction in living that I am not about to offer to the point of describing individual virtues at length, and of digressing into exhortations (*et in exhortationes exspatietur*). Such may be sought from others's writings, especially from the homilies of the fathers. . . . By nature I love brevity (*Amo natura brevitatem*); and perhaps if I wished to speak more amply (*si copiosius loqui vellem*) it would not be successful. But though a more extended form of teaching (*prolixior docendi ratio*) were highly acceptable, I would nevertheless scarcely care to undertake it. Moreover, the plan of the present work demands that we give a simple outline of doctrine (*simplicem doctrinam*) as briefly (*brevitate*) as possible.¹¹²

Calvin understood the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as

¹¹¹ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 87.

¹¹² *Inst.* 3.6.1. Cf. CO 2.502. "Porro dum vitam christiani hominis formandam suscipio, argumentum me ingredi non ignoro varium et copiosum, et quod magnitudine sua longum volumen explere possit, si numeris suis omnibus ipsum absolvere libeat. Videmus enim in quantam prolixitatem diffundantur veterum pareneses de singulis tantum virtutibus compositae. . . . Mihi vero animus non est, quam me traditurum nunc profiteor vitae institutionem eo usque extendere, ut et peculiariter singulas prosequatur virtutes, et in exhortationes exspatietur. . . . Amo natura brevitatem; et forte si copiosius loqui vellem, non succederet. Quod si maxime plausibilis esset prolixior docendi ratio, experiri tamen vix liberet. Praesentis autem operis ratio postulat ut simplicem doctrinam quanta licebit brevitatem perstringamus."

an escape from prolixity. These elements are closely connected with his idea that readers should be able to understand Scripture easily. Using phrases such as *amo brevitatem*, *amore compendii*, *compendium studeo*, and *brevitati studeo*, Calvin indicated that this method was an important feature of his approach. Calvin often criticized the prolixity of the exegesis of the ancient doctors and insisted on the necessity of his method.

The ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* in the *Institutes* includes several elements. First, Calvin mentioned the principle of brevity. In mentioning man's corruption in Romans 3, Calvin tried to explain the meaning as briefly as possible: "That condemnation of the heart when it is called 'deceitful and corrupt above all else' (Jer. 17:9) is no less severe, But because I am striving for brevity (*Sed quia brevitati studeo*), I shall be content with but one passage."¹¹³ Calvin also said that Scripture imputed to God all that was for our benefit: "Well, then since we are now at the principal point, let us undertake to summarize the matter for our readers by but a few, and very clear, testimonies of Scripture."¹¹⁴ Calvin did not waste much time explaining others' views and directly

¹¹³ *Inst.* 2.3.2. Cf. CO 2.210. "*Nihilo levior est cordis condemnatio, quum faradulemtum dicitur (Ier. 17, 9) prae omni re et perversum. Sed quia brevitati studeo, contentus ero uno tantum loco.*"

¹¹⁴ *Inst.* 2.3.8. CO 2.217. "*Et quoniam in praceipuo cardine iam versamur, agedum summam rei paucis ac apertissimis tantum scripturae testimoniis probatam tradamus lectoribus.*"

expressed his own opinion:

We have said that observance of the law is impossible. Since this is commonly looked upon as a very absurd opinion- Jerome does not hesitate to anathematize it - we ought at once to explain and confirm it in a few words. I do not tarry over what Jerome thinks; let us rather inquire what is true. Here I shall not weave long circumlocutions of various kinds of possibilities.¹¹⁵

Another example: In explaining the different meanings of the word "faith" in Scripture, Calvin strove after brevity: "But now we ask, of what sort is that faith which distinguishes the children of God from the unbelievers, by which we call upon God as Father, by which we cross over from death into life, and by which Christ, eternal salvation and life, dwells in us? I believe that I have briefly and clearly (*breviter et dilucide*) explained the force and nature of faith."¹¹⁶

With great brevity Calvin also interpreted the body of Christ in heaven related with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper: "But because nothing will be more effective to strengthen the faith of the pious than to have learned that the doctrine which we have put forward has been drawn from the pure Word of God, and rests upon its authority - I shall also

¹¹⁵ *Inst.* 2.7.5. Cf. CO 2.256. "Quod autem impossibilem legis observationem diximus, id est paucis verbis explicandum simul et confirmandum. Solet enim vulgo absurdissima sententia videri, ut Hieronymus non dubitarit anathema illi denuntiare. Quid visum sit Hieronymo, nihil moror; nos quid verum sit inquiramus. Non texam, hic longas ambages de variis possibilitatis generibus."

¹¹⁶ *Inst.* 3.2.13. Cf. CO 2.409. "Sed nunc quaerimus quid sit fides quae filios Dei ab incredulis distinguit, qua Deum invocamus patrem, qua transimus a morte in vitam, et qua Christus, aeterna salus et vita, in nobis habitat. Eius autem vim et naturam breviter et dilucide explicuisse videor."

make this plain with as much brevity (*brevitate*) as I can."¹¹⁷ Calvin did not want his interpretation to depart from the present subject of the text. Instead, he sought to concentrate on the present matter only.

That gentleman had conceived something bordering on Manichaeism, in his desire to transfuse the essence of God into men. From this arises another fiction of his, that Adam was formed to the image of God because Christ had already been destined as the prototype of human nature before the Fall. But because I am striving for brevity, I must concentrate on the present matter (*Sed quia brevitati studeo, in praesenti causa insistam*).¹¹⁸

As Calvin said in the dedicatory preface in the *Commentary on Romans*, he insisted on an exegete's revealing the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*), and warned an interpreter not to lead the readers away from it and wander out of bounds ("*Et sane quum hoc sit prope unicum illius officium, mentem scriptoris, quem explicandum sumpsit, patefacere: quantum ab ea lectores abducit, tantundem a scopo suo aberrat, vel certe a suis finibus quodammodo evagatur*").¹¹⁹

Secondly, Calvin mentioned antiprolivity as one of the elements of *brevitas et facilitas*. One of the reasons why Calvin rejected the interpretations of the Fathers was their

¹¹⁷ *Inst.* 4. 17.26. Cf. CO 2.1025. "*Sed quia nihil ad confirmandam piorum fidem magis valebit, quam ubi didicerint, quam posuimus doctrinam ex puro Dei verbo sumptam esse, eius que autoritati inniti, hoc quoque qua potero brevitate planum faciam.*"

¹¹⁸ *Inst.* 3.11.5. Cf. CO 2.536.

¹¹⁹ *Romanos*, p. 1.

prolixity in the exegesis of Scripture.¹²⁰ The prolixity is the result of repeating the same thing: "I shall not weary my readers with repeating the same thing."¹²¹ Since Calvin believed prolix exegesis wearied his readers, he avoided prolixity to understand the meaning easily and briefly. "Let my readers pardon me if I do not expressly examine the Schoolmen's follies, for I would lighten their burden. It would surely not be very difficult for me, and a praiseworthy thing, to expose to ridicule, to their great shame, what they have heretofore boasted of as mysteries; but because my purpose is to teach profitably, I pass them over."¹²² In order for his readers not to be burdened, Calvin said: "If I wanted to weave a whole volume from Augustine, I could readily show my readers that I need no other language than his. But I do not want to burden them with wordiness (*prolixitate*)."¹²³ For the benefit of his readers Calvin was careful in bringing forth an explanation of the doctrine, and stated: "Not to

¹²⁰ *Inst.* 3.4.1.

¹²¹ *Inst.* 3.2.35.

¹²² *Inst.* 3.4.39. Cf. CO 2.490. "*Quod autem in eorum ineptias non tam argute exquiro, ignoscant lectores, quos volo molestia levare. Mihi certe nec valde laboriosum, et tamen plausibile esset traducere cum maximo probro quae antehac pro mysteriis iactarunt; sed quia fructuose docere propositum est, supersedeo.*"

¹²³ *Inst.* 3.22.8. CO 2.694. "*Si ex Augustino integrum volumen contexere libeat, lectoribus ostendere promptum esset, mihi non nisi eius verbis opus esse; sed eos prolixitate onerare nolo.*"

weary you, I shall bring forth only one example."¹²⁴

Thirdly, Calvin viewed the principle of simplicity as one of the elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin believed the simplest of all interpretations could agree with the truth of Scripture. For example, in the explanation of repentance as the prior condition of forgiveness Calvin stated: "Truly, they who are held by a real loathing of sin cannot do otherwise. For no one ever hates sin unless he has previously been seized with a love of righteousness. This thought, as it was the simplest (*simplicissima*) of all, so has it seemed to me to agree with the truth of Scripture (*ita mihi cum scripturae veritate optime consentire visa est*)."¹²⁵

Calvin viewed the simple meaning as the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*). He insisted that the view of the author of Scripture was simple: "Let us take the apostle's view, which is simple and open (*Facessant igitur hoc genus nugamenta, et ipsam apostoli mentem accipiamus, quae simplex est et aperta*)"¹²⁶ Calvin described the plain meaning as that which could be easily understood. This is the principle of *facilitas*. In the explanation of the phrase "Scriptural confession before God" Calvin strove for *facilitas*: "But, to

¹²⁴ *Inst.* 3.10.20. Cf. *Inst.* 3.3.29, 3.4.39.

¹²⁵ *Inst.* 3.3.20. Cf. CO 2.451. "*Nemo enim peccatum unquam odit nisi prius iustitiae amore captus. Haece sententia, ut erat simplicissima omnium, ita mihi cum scripturae veritate optime consentire visa est.*"

¹²⁶ *Inst.* 3.4.6. Cf. CO 2:461.

make the whole matter plainer and easier, we will first faithfully relate what kind of confession we are taught in the Word of God (*Verum, ut res tota planior et expeditior fiat, primum bona fide referemus quod genus confessionis verbo Dei nobis traditum sit*)."¹²⁷ In the interpretation of Christ's promise of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter, Calvin rejected the forced interpretation of Scripture, and viewed the natural meaning as the plain meaning: "I shall bring to this an interpretation not subtle, not forced, not distorted; but natural, fluent, and plain. (*Adferam interpretationem non argutam, non coactam, non detortam, sed germanam, fluentem, obviam*)."¹²⁸ In the commentary on Acts 19:2-7 Calvin denied that Paul had rebaptized those who had once been baptized with John's baptism, and at the same time insisted on what he thought to be the simple interpretation of the text: "What, then, do the words, 'They were baptized in the name of Jesus,' mean? Some interpret it to mean that they were only instructed with genuine doctrine by Paul; but I prefer to understand it more simply (*Sed simplicius intelligere*), that it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that is, the visible graces of the Spirit given through the laying on of hands."¹²⁹

Fourthly, one of the aspects of the ideal of *brevitas et*

¹²⁷ *Inst.* 3.4.9. Cf. CO 2.463.

¹²⁸ *Inst.* 3.11.1. Cf. CO 2.892.

¹²⁹ *Inst.* 4.15.18. Cf. CO 2.972, *Inst.* 4.16.25: "I therefore simply understand. . ."

facilitas was a dislike of forced interpretation, which Calvin strongly criticized, as it appeared in the interpretation of Osiander, and the Roman Catholic church. Calvin insisted that to force the meaning of Scripture was detrimental to the Christian community.

In refuting Osiander's doctrine of essential righteousness, Calvin maintained that Osiander twisted the text of Rom. 5:19 so as to suggest that Jesus Christ is our righteousness solely by his divine nature, through which he imparts to us essential righteousness. This could be regarded as invalidating the Reformation doctrine of Christ's sacrifice and the agony of the cross.¹³⁰ Calvin continued to criticize Osiander:

When it comes to Scripture, Osiander completely corrupts every passage he cites. In Paul's statement that "faith is reckoned as righteousness" not for the "one who works" but for the "one who believes in him who justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:4-5 p.), Osiander explains "justify" as "to make righteous." With the same rashness he corrupts that whole fourth chapter of Romans. And he does not hesitate to tinge with the same deceit a passage that we have recently cited: "Who will accuse God's elect? It is God who justifies" [Rom. 8: 33]. There it is plain that the question is simply one of guilt and acquittal, and the meaning of the apostle depends on this antithesis. Therefore, both in that reason and in citing Scriptural evidence, Osiander proves himself an incompetent interpreter.¹³¹

Calvin thought that the Roman Catholic church twisted texts in order to establish its own doctrine. Whenever Calvin attacked the doctrines of the Roman church, he first pointed

¹³⁰ *Inst.* 3.11.5. From the footnote, p. 729.

¹³¹ *Inst.* 3.11.6. Cf. CO 2.537-8.

to a mistaken interpretation, thereby holding to Scripture as the final authority in doctrinal matters. On the doctrine of transubstantiation he followed the principle of antiforce:

And (as one error arises from another) a passage of Jeremiah is so absurdly twisted to prove transubstantiation that I dislike to mention it. The prophet complains that wood is put into his bread [Jer. 11:19, Vg.], signifying that by the enemies' cruelty his bread was infected with bitterness. So David by a similar figure of speech deploras that his bread was corrupted by gall and his drink with vinegar [Ps. 69:21]. These adversaries of ours would hold that Christ's body was allegorically affixed to the wood of the cross. Indeed, they say, some of the ancient writers thought so. As if we ought not rather to pardon their ignorance and bury their disgrace than to add the shamelessness of compelling them still to fight as enemies against the prophet's true meaning.¹³²

On the doctrine of transubstantiation Calvin criticized the method of interpretation used by the Roman church: "Other, in interpreting the particule *est* as meaning 'to be transubstantiated', take refuge in a more forced and violently distorted gloss. There is therefore no reason why they should pretend to be moved by reverence for words. For it is something unheard of in all nations and languages that the word *est* should be taken to mean 'to be converted into something else.'¹³³ In conclusion he insisted on the impossibility of the purely literal interpretation of the

¹³² *Inst.* 4.17.15. Cf. CO 2.1015.

¹³³ *Inst.* 4.17.20. Cf. CO 2.1018. "*Alii, dum particulam EST pro transsubstantiari positam interpretantur, ad glossam suffugiunt magis coactam et violentur detortam. Ideoque non est cur se verborum reverentia moveri obtendant. Est enim hoc gentibus ac linguis omnibus inauditum, ut verbum EST in hunc sensum usurpetur, nempe pro converti in aliud.*"

Lord's body, and let his readers judge "what an unjust wrong these syllable-snatchers do us by imbuing the simple-minded with the notion that we discredit Christ's words, when we have actually proved that they madly pervert and confound them but that we faithfully and rightly expound them."¹³⁴

Fifthly, one of the aspects of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* (in the *Institutes*) was antidisputation. This principle means that Calvin avoided disputation with others and unnecessary controversy as much as possible, and if possible, did not spend much time to refute the views of others. Attacking the Roman Catholic church's notion of implicit faith, Calvin said: "But let us not tarry longer over refuting them; we merely admonish the reader to compare these doctrines with ours. The very clarity of truth itself will of itself provide a sufficiently ready refutation."¹³⁵

Calvin adopted a positive attitude in order to overcome a controversy. He tried to solve a debate by expounding the correct definition: "Now, for my part, when there is a dispute concerning anything, I am stupid enough to refer everything back to the definition itself, which is the hinge and

¹³⁴ *Inst.* 4.17.23. Cf. CO 2.1022. "*Iam lectoribus iudicare promptum erit, quam iniustam nobis iniuriam faciant isti syllabarum aucupes, dum simplices imbuunt hac opinione, fidem nos detrahere Chrii verbis, quae furiose ab illis perverti ac confundi, a nobis autem fideliter ac dextre explicari demonstravimus.*"

¹³⁵ *Inst.* 3.2.3. Cf. CO 2.399. "*Quibus refutandis ne longius immoremur, tantum admonemus lectorem ut ipsa cum nostris conferat: ipsa enim veritatis perspicuitas satis expeditam per se refutationem suggeret.*"

foundation of the whole debate."¹³⁶ Calvin disliked spending unnecessary time in unnecessary debates.¹³⁷ Calvin said:

We do not even tarry over the subtlety of Thomas, that foreknowledge of merits is not the cause of the predestination on the side of the predestinator's act but that on our side it may in a way be so called: namely, according to the particular estimate of predestination, as when God is said to predestine glory for man on account of merits, because he has decreed to bestow upon him grace by which to merit glory.¹³⁸

In the *Institutes* Calvin employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* having a few elements such as brevity, and simplicity. He, however, was opposed to forced interpretations, prolixity, and unnecessary argumentation.

2. Calvin's Treatises

Calvin adhered to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his treatises. In 1545 Calvin edited the *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* as a brief summary of religion (*Nam quum ante annos septem edita a me esset brevis religionis summa sub*

¹³⁶ *Inst.* 3.4.1. Cf. CO 2.457. "Ego certe pro mea crassitie, quum de re aliqua disputatur, ad ipsam definitionem omnia refero, quae est totius disputationis cardo ac fundamentum." For an examination on the method of Calvin's solution on a debate, see *Inst.* 3.19.3. "But for the discussion of this question, the higher topics upon which the whole controversy rested had to be considered."

¹³⁷ *Inst.* 3.5.8. Cf. CO 2.497.

¹³⁸ *Inst.* 3.22.9. Cf. CO 2.695. For the study of Aquinas on God's foreknowledge of man's merits, see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* I. Xli. 1, art. 3; *Summa Theol.* I. xxiii. 5; sec. 3, quoted in the footnote, *Inst.*, p. 943.

catechismi nimine).¹³⁹ Calvin hinted that he would use the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his *Catechism*. In fact Calvin used expressions like "Explain this more clearly (*Expone hoc clarius*),"¹⁴⁰ "This needs a rather clearer explanation (*Hoc clariori etiamnum expositione indiget*),"¹⁴¹ and "This is put here to express more clearly. . . (*Ad exprimendam clarius*)".¹⁴² Calvin recommended this method in his criticisms of the Council of Trent.

Let Archpresbyters also, Curates, Parsons parochial, or otherwise holding a cure of souls, by whatever tenure they hold their churches, personally, or if under lawful impediment, by fit persons, at least on the Lord's day, and on solemn feast days, feed the people committed to them, according to their ability, with saving words, by teaching them those things which all must know in order to salvation, and announcing to them with brevity and plainness of speech the vices to be shunned and the virtues to be followed, in order to escape eternal punishment and gain celestial glory.¹⁴³

3. Calvin's Sermons

Calvin also applied the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* to his sermons. His preaching method was always to communicate the Word of God with simplicity and brevity. His

¹³⁹ CO 6.7-8.

¹⁴⁰ *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, p. 98. Cf. CO 6.28.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102. Cf. CO 6.38.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 103. Cf. CO 6.38.

¹⁴³ "Canon and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 3. p, 83.

method of preaching was influenced by rhetoricians like Quintilian and Cicero. But like other Reformers such as Melanchthon, Bucer, and Bullinger, Calvin employed the rhetorical method "rather as a tool in the interpretation of documents than for a conscious directive in his own writing."¹⁴⁴ Calvin preached about eight times every two weeks in Geneva.¹⁴⁵ He seemed to follow the approach of Augustine and John Chrysostom. Calvin would "speak clearly to the common people by following the form of the revealed text and avoiding the temptation of excessive rhetoric."¹⁴⁶ According to Parker, Calvin regarded the familiar style as the most suitable.¹⁴⁷ In order for his common congregation not to be confused by similarity of sound, he even wanted to preach with a simple word for a quite different word.¹⁴⁸ In order for them to understand his preaching easily, Calvin used the simple word and the simple sentence in accordance with the principle of

¹⁴⁴ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1992), p. 131.

¹⁴⁵ W. Robert Godfrey, "John Calvin, the Preacher," in *Sermons on Galatians* by Calvin (Audubon: Old Paths Publications, 1995), p. ix.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, p. 139.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 141. Cf. D. M. Miles, "Calvin's New Testament Sermons: A Homiletical Survey" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1975), p. 82, quoted in T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, p. 141.

simplicity.¹⁴⁹ Harold Dekker says: "The outstanding quality of Calvin's style is its clarity and simplicity, together with its directness and earnestness. This quality is especially notable when compared with the fashion of his day."¹⁵⁰

Calvin's style of preaching was "never merely ornamental or colloquial, but was devised for nothing more nor less than to communicate the Word of God."¹⁵¹ Calvin used simplicity, clarity and forcefulness for this exacting purpose.¹⁵²

For example, in the *Sermons from Job*, after commenting on the long explanation of other exegetes, Calvin stated:

Concerning the following saying: "I will wait until the day of my changing may come." Some expounded it that if

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 141-149. Calvin's sermons are "not mealy mouthed commonplaces or sermons which he had up his sleeve to make them serve all passages of the Scripture, like a shoe for all feet, but expositions, true, pure, plain, and proper for the text which he had to explain." (*Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. xiv) For the study of Calvin's preaching, see V. E. d'Assonville, "Calvyn as prediker," in *Die Kerblad* 66 (1963), 3-4; H. D. A. Du Toit, "Calvyn en die prediking," in *Nederduitse Gereformeerde teologiese tydskrif* 5 (1964): 142-149; A. M. Hunter, Calvin as a Preacher, in *Expository Times* 30 (1918-19): 562-564; Erwin Mülhaupt, *Die Predigt Calvins, ihre Geschichte, ihre Form und ihre religiösen Grundgedanken* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931); Leory Nixon, *John Calvin. Expository Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950); T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947); R. Stauffer, *L'homiletique de Calvin* (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1953), and "Les Sermons Inédits de Calvin sur le Livre de la Genèse," in *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 98 (1965): 26-36.

¹⁵⁰ Harold Dekker, "Introduction," in *Sermons from Job*, ed. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. xxiv.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. xxvii.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Job thought that God would raise the dead, and that there was some hope of the resurrection and renewal, he would wait with for that day. But it must be taken more simply; namely, "Lord, comfort me; for I am now confounded, I see Thou usest nothing but force, I see Thou executest nothing but violence against me; and so must I still fight and strain myself, and I have no other comfort except to wait for the day of my change."¹⁵³

Using the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin made his preaching practical.¹⁵⁴

Recently Farley noticed the principle of naturalness in Calvin's sermons on the Ten Commandments. This principle of naturalness used by rhetoricians means that an exegete interpreted the text naturally, not forcedly or ambiguously.

For Calvin the true meaning was the natural one:

Among Calvin's preferred principles of interpretation is his quest for a text's "true and natural sense." We meet the phrase "*le vrey sens . . . et naturel du passage*" (CO 26:310), or similar forms of it, throughout the Sermons on the Ten Commandments. For example: "*Voila le vrey sens et naturel de Moyse*: (CO 26:244); or again, "*Tant y a que c'est le vray sens, et naturel du passage*" (CO 26:310); and still again, "*si nous voulons avoir le sens naturel de ce passage*" (CO 26:335), and finally: "*Or donc maintenant nous avons le vray sens naturel du passage*" (CO 26:376). Obviously, these passage have to be

¹⁵³ *Sermons from Job*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁴ *Sermons from Job*, p. 163. For the study of Calvin's sermons on Job, see Susan E. Schreiner, "Through a Mirror Dimly: Calvin's Sermons on Job," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 175-169. She argues that Calvin shared more concerns with the Thomistic line of interpretation than with the Gregorian because Gregory emphasized the moral and allegorical senses, while Thomas undertook a literal exposition of the text. (pp. 176-177) She goes on to say: "But Calvin rejected allegory. Anxious to 'bridle' the mind, he strove after the 'plain' or 'simple' sense of the text. (CO 33:272, 443, 448, 700, 757; 34:51, 68, 82, 261, 346, 366, 416, 575; 35:246, 259, 261, 464, 477)" Cf. John I. McIndoe, "John Calvin, Preface to the Homilies of Chrysostom," in *Hartford Quarterly Review* 5 (1965): 19-26.

explored within their context to grasp the principle's true forcefulness, but it is one of Calvin's oft-repeated explanations as to why he is required to infer the message he draws.¹⁵⁵

4. Calvin's Commentaries

Calvin's commentaries revealed his position on this method. He stated his love of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the dedicatory preface to the *Commentary on Romans* in 1539 and he again praised this method in the preface to the *Commentary on Psalms* in 1557. We must recognize that this ideal, as the central principle of Calvin's hermeneutics, becomes very clear from a comparison of Calvin's commentaries with Luther's commentary on Genesis and Bucer's commentary on Romans. I shall examine this ideal in Calvin's commentaries later.

¹⁵⁵ B. W. Farley, "Recurring Hermeneutical Principles in Calvin's Sermons, Polemical Treatises and Correspondence," in *Calvin as Exegete*, ed. Peter De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1995), p. 70.

CHAPTER 6

THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN CALVIN'S HERMENEUTICS

As a great interpreter of Scripture Calvin had his own theological presuppositions for establishing his own distinctive principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the hallmark of his hermeneutical method as many scholars have already recognized. In this chapter I shall discuss two important theological presuppositions related to his hermeneutics. Especially I shall prove that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* derived from Calvin's view on the role of the Holy Spirit in the authors' writing Scripture and in our interpretation of it,¹ and his treatment of the principle

¹ For the studies of this issue, John W. Wyckoff, "The Relationship of the Holy Spirit to Biblical Hermeneutics" (Ph.D. Baylor University, 1990); Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 155-74; Daniel P. Fuller, "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gague and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978): 189-198. Roy B. Zuck, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 41 (1984): 120-130, formulates fourteen exegetical principles: (1) The Spirit's ministry in Bible interpretation does not mean that He gives new revelation; (2) The role of the Spirit in interpreting the Bible does not mean that one's interpretations are infallible; (3) The work of the Spirit in interpretation does not mean that He gives some interpreters a mental acuity for seeing truths under the surface that are not evident to any other dedicated Bible students; (4) The role of the Holy Spirit in Bible interpretation means that the unregenerate do not welcome and apply God's truth, though they are able to

scriptura sui ipsius interpres.

A. The Role of the Holy Spirit

The presupposition that the Holy Spirit has a role in the interpretation of Scripture has provoked intense theological debate.² Modern liberal interpreters³ have not stressed the role of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin, however, the Holy Spirit's role in the interpretation of Scripture was a *sine*

comprehend many of its statements cognitively; (5) The Spirit's role in hermeneutics does not mean that only Bible scholars can understand the Bible; (6) The Holy Spirit's role in interpreting Scripture requires spiritual devotion on the part of the interpreter; (7) The Holy Spirit in interpretation means that lack of spiritual preparedness hinders accurate interpretation; (8) The role of the Spirit in interpretation is no substitute for diligent study; (9) The Spirit's work in biblical interpretation does not rule out that the use of study helps such as commentaries and Bible dictionaries; (10) The ministry of the Holy Spirit in Bible interpretation does not mean that interpreters can ignore common sense and logic; (11) The place of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible means that He does not normally give sudden intuitive flashes of insight into the meaning of Scripture; (12) The Spirit's ministry in interpreting the Bible is included in but not identical with illumination; (13) The role of the Spirit in scriptural interpretation does not mean that all parts of the Bible are equally clear in meaning; (14) The Spirit's work in interpretation does not result in believers having a comprehensive and completely accurate understanding of the entire Scriptures.

² On this issue, Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 85-114, deals with the views of K. Barth, Heinrich Ott, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Gerhard Ebeling, T. F. Torrance, Fuchs, and Helmut Thielicke.

³ Cf. E. P. Groenewald, "Krisis in die Interpretasie van die Heilige Skrif," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 10 (1969): 2-12.

qua non. A few scholars from the Reformed tradition have emphasized that the Holy Spirit has a significant role in the interpretation of Scripture.⁴ John H. Gerstner says, "the Holy Spirit's role is not to change the evidence (from unsatisfactory to satisfactory) but to change the attitudes of men from resistance to truth to submission to it. . . . The Holy Spirit causes the elect to taste the Bible as the Word of God knowing that it is divine."⁵

Calvin, as called 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit' by B. B. Warfield,⁶ showed great interest in the work of the Holy Spirit.⁷ B. B. Warfield says,

⁴ L. Floor, "Calvyn se Hermeneutiek in Vergelyking met Ebeling en Fuchs," in *Aspekte van die Nuwe-Testamentiese hermeneutiek*, ed. A. B. du Toit (Pretoria: Universiteit van Pretoria, 1970), pp. 94-107. He says, "It will be a good thing if there will be more attention for the Holy Spirit in the theological hermeneutic. . . . But the work as such of the Holy Spirit in the process of understanding should always be retained" (p. 107). Jacobus Johannes Müller, "Geestesbesit as hermeneutiese prinsiep," in *Aspekte van die Nuwe-Testamentiese hermeneutiek*, pp. 41-51. He stresses the illumination by the Holy Spirit as "an absolute necessity for any true exegesis which is labouring to interpret to us the message of the Spirit in meaningful human words" (p. 51). Packer argues that the Holy Spirit is the interpreter of Scripture; see J. I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 109-114.

⁵ John H. Gerstner, "The Church's Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 37.

⁶ B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p. 484. Cf. A. Bekesi, "Kalvin, a Szentlélek theologusa," *Theological Szemle* 2 (1952): 50-52; John Murray, *Calvin as Theologian and Expositor* (London: The Evangelical Library, 1964), p. 10.

⁷ For the studies of Calvin's view of the Holy Spirit, see Simon van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943), and Calvijns

We may say that the doctrine of sin and grace dates from Augustine, the doctrine of satisfaction from Anselm, the doctrine of justification by faith from Luther, - we must say that the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is a gift from Calvin to the Church. It was he who first related the whole experience of salvation specifically to the working of the Holy Spirit, worked it out into its details, and contemplated its several steps and stages in orderly progress as the product of the Holy Spirit's specific work in applying salvation to the soul. Thus he gave systematic and adequate expression to the whole doctrine of the Holy Spirit and made it the assured possession of the Church of God.⁸

Calvin also stressed the illumination of the Holy Spirit in its relevance for hermeneutics. Brevard S. Childs says,

To suggest that the task of theological reflection takes place from within a canonical context assumes not only a received tradition, but a faithful disposition by hearers who await the illumination of God's Spirit. This latter point has been developed so thoroughly by Calvin as to make further elaboration unnecessary (*Institutes*, I, Ch. VII).⁹

In his letter to Sadoleto, Calvin emphasized the authority of the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ and maintained that the Holy Spirit enlightened the church in interpreting Scripture.

Had you known, or been unwilling to disguise the fact, that the Spirit goes before the Church, to enlighten her

leer van de Heilige Geest," *Theologia Reformata* 14 (1) (1971): 15-31; Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957).

⁸ B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p. 485.

⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in A Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 12.

¹⁰ Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 1, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 247, says, "Calvin developed his doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit in opposition to the thesis that the Church alone guaranteed the authority of Scripture. This was completely correct: there is no sense in which the Church has power over Scripture."

in understanding the Word, while the Word itself is like the Lydian stone, by which she tests all doctrines, would you have taken refuge in that most perplexing and thorny question?"¹¹

One of the problems of the Roman Catholic church's teachings was that it placed its own authority and tradition above the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

1. The Necessity of the Illumination of the Holy Spirit

One of Calvin's theological presuppositions starts with the correlation between man and Scripture written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is, therefore, very important for us to see what Scripture is and what we are. From this perspective the knowledge of God and ourselves (*Dei cognitio et nostri*), a central theme of Calvin's theology, is closely related to Calvin's method of theological interpretation. Thus those who have not known both God the Creator and themselves, are unable to understand His Word showing us who God and man respectively are. Therefore, in order to interpret Scripture correctly, we need to know ourselves before God. For Calvin this theological presupposition was very important because he thought the theological understanding of man could ensure a correct interpretation of Scripture. From this perspective we can see

¹¹ *John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoleto: A Reformation Debate*, ed. John C. Olin (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 61.

that Calvin's hermeneutics was based on his theology.

Calvin declared that man was corrupted through natural vitiation.

The apostle states: "We are all by nature children of wrath." (Eph. 2:3) How could God, who is pleased by the least of his works, have been hostile to the noblest of all his creatures? But he is hostile toward the corruption of his work rather than toward the work itself. Therefore if it is right to declare that man, because of his vitiated nature, is naturally abominable to God, it is also proper to say that man is naturally depraved and faulty.¹²

Calvin's view on the corruption of mankind, influenced by Augustine, was one of the most important themes of his theology. In his *Commentary on Eph. 5:8* Calvin called the natural man 'darkness': "Darkness is the name here given to the whole nature of man before regeneration; for, where the brightness of God does not shine, there is nothing but fearful darkness."¹³ The whole life of man is a ruinous labyrinth of wanderings until they are converted to Jesus Christ. Man, without being born again by the Holy Spirit, is under sin and darkness. Calvin thought that mankind after the fall of Adam was totally corrupt (*corruptio hominis*). L. Floor applies this anthropological background to Calvin's hermeneutics.

The theological background to Calvin's very strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit with regard to the understanding of the Bible is undoubtedly his faith in the *corruptio hominis*, the corruption of mankind.¹⁴

¹² *Inst.* 2.1.11, p. 254.

¹³ *Comm. on. Eph.* 5:8, p. 309.

¹⁴ L. Floor, "The Hermeneutics of Calvin," p. 186.

Therefore, the natural man under sin can never understand the spiritual truth of Scripture as the special revelation of God, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. "Flesh is not capable of such lofty wisdom as to conceive God and what is God's, unless it be illumined by the Spirit of God."¹⁵ Calvin described man's spiritual blindness with the explanation of John 1:4-5 "Life was in God from the beginning and that life was the light of men; this light shines in the darkness, but the darkness comprehends it not."

He shows that man's soul is so illumined by the brightness of God's light as never to be without some slight flame or at least a spark of it; but that even with this illumination it does not comprehend God. Why is this? Because man's keenness of mind is mere blindness as far as the knowledge of God is concerned. For when the Spirit calls men "darkness," he at once denies them any ability of spiritual understanding. Therefore he declares that those believers who embrace Christ are "born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). This means: Flesh is not capable of such lofty wisdom as to conceive God and what is God's, unless it be illuminated by the Spirit of God. As Christ testified, the fact that Peter recognized him was a special revelation of the Father (Matt. 16:17).¹⁶

For Calvin *corruptio hominis* requires the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture.¹⁷ B. S. Childs

¹⁵ *Inst.* 2.2.19, p. 278.

¹⁶ *Inst.* 2.2.19, p. 278. Cf. A. D. R. Polman, "Calvin on the Inspiration of Scripture," in *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet*, ed. Jacob T. Hoogstra (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), pp. 109-111.

¹⁷ Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard Childs* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 300, says, "Calvin's views on illumination are tightly bound up with a number of other doctrines, especially his particularity severe views on human corruption."

says,

Although God has made himself clearly known in the scriptures, human sinfulness has prevented his revelation from being understood. Thus it is only by the illumination of divine grace, by the 'inner witness of the Holy Spirit', that the word is heard and understood (Inst.I.8.12).¹⁸

Calvin thought that human reason before regeneration could not understand the Scriptures clearly. The light of human reason differed little from darkness. The true principles "held by the human mind resemble sparks, but these are choked by the depravity of our nature."¹⁹ We, therefore, are not even competent to think aright. In all our reasoning faculties we fail miserably.²⁰ Our own reason will beget nothing but mere vanity unless "we have divine teaching to enlighten us."²¹ Calvin said that we should learn that "the gospel can be understood by faith alone - not by reason, nor by the perspicacity of human understanding."²² He also pointed out that even Christ commanded us not to depend on human reason.²³

Calvin thought that in order to be a good interpreter of Scripture, one had to be born again. Without regeneration by

¹⁸ B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, p. 48.

¹⁹ *Comm. on Eph. 4:17*, p. 290.

²⁰ *Comm. on Jn. 1:5*, p. 32.

²¹ *Comm. on Ex. 25:31*, p. 162.

²² *Comm. on Col. 2:2*, p. 174.

²³ *Comm. on Jn. 22:29*, p. 278.

the Holy Spirit, we do not know Him or His work. "We have nothing of the Spirit, however, except through regeneration."²⁴ Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand the true meaning of Scripture. Because Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit, the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture is decisive. The Holy Spirit "triumphs over the natural resistance of the human heart."²⁵ Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit "would govern the human process of interpretation and render his *sensus proprius* intelligible, provided that such a process of interpretation is carried out by faithful men, seriously searching for the pure teaching of God in Scripture."²⁶ Because of man's ultimate inadequacy, we need God's ultimate remedy to understand Scripture.²⁷ In connection with the role of the Holy Spirit, K. Kantzer says the following:

It is rather a work of illumination subjectively to enable the sinner to see that which previously he had been unable to see - namely, the objective truth of God. This "seeing" of the truth, however, is not due to the Spirit's enablement of the human mind now for the first time to draw the correct conclusions on the basis of a proper evaluation of the evidence. It is rather the Spirit's working immediately upon the mind and heart of the elect to form within the human soul and to seal upon

²⁴ *Inst.* 2.3.1, p. 289.

²⁵ J. A. Heyns, "Calvinus Reformator Hodie," in *Calvinus Reformator*, p. 319.

²⁶ H. W. Rossouw, "Calvin's Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture," in *Calvinus Reformator*, p. 172.

²⁷ Kenneth Sealer Kantzer, "John Calvin's Theory of the Knowledge of God and the Word of God" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1950), pp. 397-405.

it His own divine judgment as to the truth and authority of Scripture.²⁸

Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit could enlighten our minds, but also influence the consent of our hearts.²⁹ "It will not be enough for the mind to be illumined by the Spirit of God unless the heart is also strengthened and supported by his power."³⁰ Calvin explained that the illumination of the Holy Spirit constituted our mental eyes.³¹ Calvin insisted

that there is a heavenly and secret wisdom that is contained in the gospel, which cannot be apprehended by any acuteness or perspicacity of intellect, or by any perception of sense, and is not influenced by human reasonings, and needs no meretricious ornament of words or embellishment, but simply by the revelation of the Spirit comes to be known by the understandings of men, and is sealed upon their hearts.³²

We cannot gain anything by interpreting Scripture unless God shines in us by the light of His Spirit.³³ "No man will ever be able to comprehend it by his own understanding till the Lord correct and form him anew by his Spirit."³⁴

²⁸ Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scripture," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), p. 133.

²⁹ *Comm. on Ps.* 143:10, p. 257.

³⁰ *Inst.* 3.2.33, p. 581.

³¹ *Inst.* 3.1.4, p. 542.

³² "The Argument," in *Comm. on 1 Cor.* p. 41.

³³ Cyris Hee-Suk Moon, "The Spirit as the Interpreter," *The Ecumenical Review* 39 (1987): 42-3. Cf. H. Jackson Forstman, *Word and Spirit: Calvin's Biblical Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 74-79.

³⁴ *Comm. on Isa.* 53:3, p. 114.

In his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1545) Calvin explained the relationship between our mind and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Our mind is too rude to be able to grasp the spiritual wisdom of God which is revealed to us through faith; and our hearts are too prone to distrust or to pervert confidence in ourselves or other creatures to rest of their own accord in God. But the Holy Spirit by his illumination makes us capable of understanding those things which would otherwise far exceed our grasp, and brings us to a sure persuasion by sealing the promises of salvation in our hearts.³⁵

Calvin believed that we could "only properly read and understand through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."³⁶

2. The Word and the Holy Spirit in Calvin

According to Dowey, the word-pair "Word and Spirit" expresses "the heart of Calvin's doctrine of special revelation, as far as he treats of it with reference to the revelation of God the Creator."³⁷ Calvin pointed out the wrong

³⁵ "The Catechism of the Church of Geneva (1545)," in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 105.

³⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, p. 154.

³⁷ Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 117. For the studies for understanding the relationship between the Word and the Holy Spirit, see Felicity Edwards, "The Relation between Biblical Hermeneutics and the Formulation of Dogmatic Theology: An Investigation in the Methodology of John Calvin," pp. 52-60; Richard Gamble, "Calvin's Theological Method: Word and Spirit, A Case Study," in *Calvinian: Ideas and Influence of John Calvin*, ed. Robert V. Schnucker. Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, no. 10 (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1988); Jack B. Rogers & Donald K. McKim,

views of the relationship between God's Word and the Holy Spirit. There were the fanatics, the Anabaptists, and the Papists whom Calvin criticized for their incorrect understanding of the relationship between the Word and the Holy Spirit.

In his *Institutes* 1.9.1-3 Calvin dealt with the fanatics "abandoning Scripture . . . , and casting down all the principles of godliness."³⁸ They had, according to him, contempt for God's Word as the dead and killing letter, but with great haughtiness exalted the teaching office of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Calvin criticized the fanatics for their disregard of the Word. "Let us learn, too, that we do not condemn the external word, and take pleasure only in secret inspirations, like many fanatics, who do not regard themselves spiritual, except they reject the word of God, and substitute in its place their own wild speculations."⁴⁰ He emphasized that God manifested Himself through His Word.⁴¹ "The light of the truth revealed in God's word, is so distinct that the very first sight of it illuminates the mind."⁴² Calvin identified the

The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach, pp. 103-106.

³⁸ *Inst.* 1.9.1, p. 93.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Comm. on Ps.* 119:17, p. 413.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Comm. on Ps.* 119:130, p. 10.

voice of God with the Holy Spirit. But he did not accept the identification of the Holy Spirit with the Word. The Holy Spirit did "nothing other than certify the Word contained in the Scriptures."⁴³ In the commentary on Is. 59:21 Calvin argued that Isaiah did not bind "the ancient folk to outward doctrine as if they were learning their ABC's; rather, he teaches that under the reign of Christ the new church will have this true and complete happiness: to be ruled no less by the voice of God than by the Spirit."⁴⁴ Calvin maintained that even Paul, who was brought up to the third heaven, urged Timothy to give heed to reading.⁴⁵ For Calvin, therefore, without the Word of God, the emphasis on the inner light of the Holy Spirit was dangerous. Calvin succinctly explained the work of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore the Spirit, promised to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard-of revelation, or of forging a new kind of doctrine, to lead us away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but of sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel.⁴⁶

On the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, Frame comments correctly,

Calvin denies that this doctrine leads to what we would today call subjectivism. He opposes those "fanatics" who forsake Scripture for alleged new revelation of the Spirit. Word and Spirit go together, so that the Spirit

⁴³ F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 157.

⁴⁴ *Inst.* 1.9.1, p. 93.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 94.

is recognized in His agreement with Scripture.⁴⁷

Calvin avoided the radical view on the inner light of the Holy Spirit, and emphasized the mutual bond between the Word and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

In the polemic against the Anabaptists, Calvin gave us "an especially well-balanced account of the relations which in his view obtain between the revelation of God and the witness of the Spirit."⁴⁸

Against the enthusiasm of the Anabaptists who ignored the Word and thought that they possessed new revelation, Calvin bound the operation of the Holy Spirit to Scripture.⁴⁹

According to Balke, Calvin insisted

that the opinion of the Holy Spirit is revealed in Scripture and that the Holy Spirit is not imparted except through the Scriptures. Revelation is no ongoing

⁴⁷ John M. Frame, "The Spirit and the Scriptures," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), p. 220; William G. Young, "The Holy Spirit and the Word of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 34-59.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ J. A. Cramer, *De Heilige Schrift bij Calvijn* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek: 1926), p. 69, says, "Calvijn bindt hierom de werking van den Heiligen Geest aan de Schrift, *Spiritus efficacia a praedicatione Evangelii non separanda est*, omdat hij het noodig acht ernstig te waarschuwen tegen de geestdrijverij der Anabaptisten, die met verachting van het Woord zich beroemden op het bezit des Geestes en hoog opgaven van hun nieuwe openbaringen, *turtent inani fiducia suarum imaginationum*." Cf. James R. Tolley, "John Calvin's Views of Revelation and Inspiration of the Scriptures" (S.T.B. diss., Biblical Seminary in New York, 1929), pp. 57-65. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 58, says, "the operations of the Word and the Holy Spirit never oppose each other."

process. Revelations beyond Scripture can just as well originate in the spirit of Satan as in the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit, to whom all things are subjected, is Himself subjected to Scripture. It is, however, no offense to the Holy Spirit to be compared with Himself. Any utterance that is presented as being from the Holy Spirit must be tested by the criterion of the Word, lest Satan sneak in under the guide of the Spirit.⁵⁰

Calvin insisted that "God works in his elect in two ways (*bifariam Deus in electis suis operatur*): within, through his spirit (*intus, per spiritum*); without, through his Word (*extra per verbum*)."⁵¹ For Calvin these two elements cannot be separated from one another.⁵² By the Holy Spirit, "illuminating their minds and forming their hearts to the love and cultivation of righteousness, he (God) makes them a new creation."⁵³ By his Word, God "arouses them to desire, to seek after, and to attain that same renewal."⁵⁴ On the mutual connection of Word and Spirit Calvin said,

For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Willem Balkler, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, p. 98.

⁵¹ *Inst.* 2.5.5, p. 322. Cf. CO 2.233.

⁵² Edward A. Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, P. 117. Cf. K. V. Warren, "Luther and Calvin on the Doctrine of Scripture," *Vox Reformata* 40 (1983): 3-33.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Inst.* 1.9.3, p. 95.

Calvin advised Sadoleto to hear Chrysostom's admonishment. "Well, then, does Chrysostom admonish us to reject all who, under the pretence of the Spirit, lead us away from the simple doctrine of the gospel- the Spirit having been promised not to reveal a new doctrine, but to impress the truth of the gospel on our minds."⁵⁶ Calvin warned Sadoleto not to separate the Holy Spirit from the Word.⁵⁷ "You, Sadoleto, by stumbling on the very threshold, have paid the penalty of that affront which you offered to the Holy Spirit when you separated Him from the Word."⁵⁸ According to B. A. Gerrish, Calvin did not hold "Word and Spirit together in a kind of dynamic relationship- as though authority were vested, not in the Scriptures *per se*, but rather in the Spirit speaking through the Scripture."⁵⁹

Calvin's view of the Spirit's operation in the confirmation of the revealed Word might seem to derogate the work of the Holy Spirit, but he strongly stressed that the Holy Spirit did not work independently, outside the Word.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *A Reformation Debate*, p. 61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ B. A. Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and the Continental Reformation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 10 (1957): 355. According to him, Calvin simply insisted that the Holy Spirit "is always bound to Scripture as the medium of His revelation." (*Ibid.* 359).

⁶⁰ Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptists Radicals*, p. 99. Cf. Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 1, p. 242.

Warfield correctly interprets Calvin when he states.

Nor is it derogatory to the Spirit to confine His operations now to the confirmation of the revealed Word. While on the other hand to attribute to Him (the Holy Spirit) repeated or new revelations to each of the children of God, as the mystics do, is derogatory to the Word, which is His inspired product. To lay claim to the possession of a different Spirit from that which dwelt in Christ and the Apostles- for their Spirit honored the Word- and a different Spirit from that which was promised by Christ to His disciples- for this Spirit was "not to speak of Himself."⁶¹

Warfield suggests that "the Word supplies the objective factor; the Spirit the subjective factor; and only in the union of the objective and subjective factors is the result accomplished."⁶² When the Word and the Spirit unite, "knowledge is not only rendered possible to man: it is rendered certain."⁶³ Calvin said, "Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing."⁶⁴ For him the Word of God is "the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers."⁶⁵

3. The Illumination of the Holy Spirit

According to Calvin, in order to interpret Scripture man should be illuminated by the Holy Spirit who protects him from

⁶¹ Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p. 82.

⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 82-3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶⁴ *Inst.* 3.2.33, p. 580.

⁶⁵ *Inst.* 1.9.3, p. 96.

his sin and guides him to understand the true meaning of the text. We, however, question the relationship of the illumination of the Holy Spirit to man's understanding the text.⁶⁶ That is how the Holy Spirit plays a role in interpreting Scripture. Although Calvin did not fully explain the way in which the illumination of the Holy Spirit works, we can see a few essential elements in the activities of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture.⁶⁷

First, Calvin emphasized that the Holy Spirit was the true interpreter of Scripture. Thus the initiative of interpretation lies not with man, but with the Holy Spirit. In order to interpret Scripture man needs the help of the Holy Spirit. Bromiley also states that the Holy Spirit, the author

⁶⁶ Cf. Gottfried W. Locher, *Testimonium internum: Calvins Lehre vom Heiligen Geist und das hermeneutische Problem*. Theologische Studien, no. 81 (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1964).

⁶⁷ P. T. Fuhrmann, "Calvin, the Expositor of Scripture," *Interpretation* 6 (1952): 194, also regards this principle as one of the principles of interpretation in Calvin. Lake argues that Calvin stressed the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture; see Donald M. Lake, "The Reformation Contribution to the Interpretation of the Bible," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, eds. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 194-195. Cf. Gordon R. Payne, "Augustinianism in Calvin and Bonaventure," *Westminster Theological Journal* 44 (1982): 14-15; John W. Wyckoff, "The Relationship of the Holy Spirit to Biblical Hermeneutics," pp. 45-51. Here he argues that the work of the Holy Spirit, according to Calvin, was interpretation. Cf. Jackson Forstman, *Word and Spirit: Calvin's Doctrine of Biblical Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 75-6; Phyllis A. Bird, "The Authority of the Bible," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1, eds. Leander E. Keck, etc., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 51-2.

of Scripture, is essential for its proper understanding.⁶⁸ G.

C. Berkouwer states as follows.

The personification of Scripture as interpreter (Gal. 3:8, 22; Rom. 9:17) intends more than a half-serious attempt which was not to be taken as a piece of actual and living interpretation. Rather, it includes the awareness that here no dead letter is at stake, but Scripture in its witness by the hand of the Spirit. Thus conceived, the phrase "is its own interpreter" draws a clear boundary which has been very important for the Reformation.⁶⁹

Luther applied this motto to the Holy Spirit. He did not "exclude the fact that the Spirit causes us to understand the mysteries of God that we as yet do not grasp, if we, without his light, force our way into Scripture."⁷⁰ "At the same time, the reference to the Spirit as 'a unique interpreter' is not a detour around Scripture."⁷¹ With the phrase 'the Holy Spirit is his own interpreter' Calvin expressed a theological presupposition of his hermeneutics. "The Spirit of God, from whom the doctrine of the gospel comes, is its only true interpreter, to open it up to us. Hence in judging it, men's minds must of necessity be in blindness until they are enlightened by the Spirit of God."⁷² He said, "the Spirit, who

⁶⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Interpretation of the Bible," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed, Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), P. 71.

⁶⁹ G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. and ed. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1975), p. 127.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* on Gal. 3:22, p. 236.

⁷² *Comm. on 1 Cor. 2:14*, p. 117.

spoke by the prophets, is the only true interpreter of himself."⁷³ The Holy Spirit who spoke by David is 'an assured interpreter.'⁷⁴ H. W. Rossouw defends this view of Calvin against a spiritualistic misrepresentation of it by saying:

Calvin's doctrine that the Spirit is the only true interpreter of Himself could easily be taken to mean that the mediation of a correct understanding of Scripture is a purely mystical event in which the human activity of exegesis has no role to play. Such a spiritualistic interpretation of his view would, however, render inexplicable Calvin's own concern with, and extensive contribution to the exegesis of the scriptural text.⁷⁵

Calvin stated that although man interpreted Scripture, the true authority in the interpretation of Scripture was not man, but the Holy Spirit who was "the best master of the language."⁷⁶ For him the Holy Spirit is the inner teacher,⁷⁷ and a faithful interpreter.

Calvin's view, 'the Holy Spirit is the only true interpreter,' never ignores the human side in the interpretation of Scripture. He clearly maintained that the author of Scripture was the Holy Spirit. Calvin said that Moses did not have "any intention of boastfully celebrating his own virtues, but that the Holy Spirit dictated what would

⁷³ *Comm. on 2 Pe.* 1:20, p. 389.

⁷⁴ *Comm. on Ps.* 32:1, p. 523.

⁷⁵ H. W. Rossouw, "Calvin's Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture," pp. 171-2.

⁷⁶ *Comm. on Da.* 4:35. p. 298.

⁷⁷ *Inst.* 3.1.4, p. 541.

be useful to us, and, as it were, suggested it to his mouth."⁷⁸ The apostles were "sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit (*certi et authentici Spiritus sancti amanuenses*)."⁷⁹ Calvin, therefore, insisted that their writings should be considered oracles of God."⁸⁰ For Calvin the authors - the prophets and the apostles - were the instruments of the Holy Spirit. In his comments on the literary style of Scripture Calvin argued that "the human authors' minds remained active in the production of Scripture."⁸¹ Calvin also believed that the total personalities of the authors of Scripture were involved.⁸²

Consequently, we should not depend upon ourselves in interpreting Scripture, but rather on the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit as a faithful interpreter who can open up to us the true meaning of Scripture.

Secondly, understanding Scripture in the illumination by the Holy Spirit is closely related to faith. Recently Leith has argued that Calvin failed to define the analogy of

⁷⁸ *Comm. on Ex. 3:1*, p. 59.

⁷⁹ *Inst. 4.8.9*, p. 1157.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, p. 27.

⁸² *Ibid.*

faith.⁸³ He goes on to say, "Calvin's failure to define more specifically the analogy of faith ultimately prevented him from dealing adequately with the unity of the Bible in his theology as he had emphasized it."⁸⁴ According to him, "Calvin's failure to develop either an analogy of faith or an analogy of love led to serious difficulties in his theology while Bullinger developed the analogy of faith or the analogy of love."⁸⁵ Leith, therefore, does not think that Calvin interpreted the text of Scripture with the analogy of faith. Contrary to this, Tappeiner insists that Calvin used the analogy of faith given by the Holy Spirit. Concerning the understanding of the sacraments, he says,

The specific theological basis of what Calvin does with the sacramental texts could be treated under the concept of *phraseologia sacramentalis* which is itself based upon the theological notion of *unio sacramentalis*. But this actually falls under the hermeneutical rule of the analogy of faith, since it is but a formalization of the analogy of faith in connection with a specific issue-

⁸³ The analogy of faith derived from the phrases in Romans 12: 3-6. Here Paul used the expressions like 'a measure of faith' (*metron pisteos*) and 'in proportion to his faith' (*kata ten analogian tes pisteos*). For the definition of the analogy of faith, see Henri Blocher, "The 'Analogy of Faith' in the Study of Scripture," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 5 (1987): 17-38; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Putting It All together: The Theological Use of the Bible," in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, pp. 193-206.

⁸⁴ John H. Leith, "John Calvin: Theologian of the Bible," *Interpretation* 25 (1971): 341.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 342.

sacramentalism.⁸⁶

He concludes that Calvin used the analogy of faith as a principle of interpretation. Whose one is the correct view? I think that Tappeiner's statement is more correct than Leith's opinion.⁸⁷ Leith's argument does not give a sufficient proof. In fact, Calvin showed this approach in many places. Calvin said, "Faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit. . . . by faith alone he leads us into the light of the gospel."⁸⁸ Scripture can be understood when it is believed. According to Calvin, "understanding cannot be separated from faith, because

⁸⁶ Daniel A. Tappeiner, "Hermeneutics, the Analogy of Faith and New Testament Sacramental Realism," *Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1977): 47.

⁸⁷ According to P. T. Fuhrmann, "Calvin, the Expositor of Scripture," 200, one of Calvin's merits was to interpret Scripture "according to the analogy of faith, that is, according to the example and attitude of faith which always look at the promises." I agree with his statement. On the definition of the analogy of faith employed by Calvin, John Owen, who translated and edited Calvin's commentary on Romans, *Comm. on. Rom.* p. 457, says: "The expression 'the measure of faith,' *metron pisteos*, in differently explained. Some, as Beza and Pareus, consider 'faith' here as including religion or Christian truth, because faith is the main principle, 'as God has divided to each the measure of Christian truth or knowledge.' Others suppose with Mede, that 'faith' here is to be taken for those various suppose with Mede, that 'faith,' here is to be taken for those various gifts and endowments which God bestowed on those who believed or professed the faith of the gospel; 'as God has divided to each the measure of those gifts which come by faith, or which are given to those who believe.' The last view is most suitable to the context. We may, however, take 'faith' here for grace, and consider the meaning the same as in Eph.iv.7. The subject there is the same as here, for the Apostle proceeds there to mention the different offices which Christ had appointed in his Church."

⁸⁸ *Inst.* 3.1.4, p. 541.

faith only generates understanding."⁸⁹ Calvin emphasized that we should have faith through the Holy Spirit, not human reason, in order to interpret Scripture. "Yea, seeing that the true knowledge of God is a singular gift of his, and faith (by which alone he is rightly known) cometh only from the illumination of the Spirit, it followeth that our minds cannot pierce so far, having nature only for our guide."⁹⁰ Calvin believed that faith should go before understanding. "It is true, indeed, that our faith begins with obedience to God, goes before understanding, in such a manner that it illuminates our minds by certain knowledge."⁹¹ By faith we can understand "those things which the eye has never seen, the ear never heard, and which far surpass our hearts and minds."⁹² Faith can kindle in our hearts more and more the light of understanding. But the work of faith is not done by our power, but the power of the Holy Spirit who enlightens us.⁹³ When we interpret Scripture according to our faith, the Holy Spirit wants to protect us from our fleshly reason and guide us to understand God's Word.

Thirdly, Calvin emphasized that in order to interpret Scripture, we should pray for the illumination of the Holy

⁸⁹ L. Floor, "The Hermeneutics of Calvin," p. 187.

⁹⁰ *Comm. on Ac.* 17:27, p. 167.

⁹¹ *Comm. on Isa.* 41: 22, p. 270.

⁹² "Argument," in *Comm. on Gen.* p. 63.

⁹³ *Comm. on Isa.* 43:10, p. 331.

Spirit. For example Calvin prayed as follows: "Grant, Almighty God, that as there is in us so little of right judgment, and as our minds are blind even at mid-day, O grant, that thy Spirit may always shine in us, and that being attentive to the light of thy word."⁹⁴ Calvin showed us to pray for our being ruled by the counsel of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁵ By praying, we "may be governed by the spirit of sound understanding."⁹⁶ Childs also shows that our prayer for the illumination by the Holy Spirit is indispensable for a proper interpreting of Scripture.⁹⁷ Many scholars, unlike Calvin and Childs, have not recognized the significance of prayer for the interpretation of Scripture. Calvin insisted that we should pray for the inward light of the Holy Spirit, that we "may not labour in the unprofitable task of learning only the letter."⁹⁸ It is well known that there was "a link between Calvin's prayer life and his belief in the Holy Spirit."⁹⁹ Calvin believed that the interpreter of Scripture should pray for being aware of his poverty and blindness, and for understanding the Word of the Holy Spirit.

⁹⁴ *Comm. on Hab. 2:19*, p. 124.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Comm. on Ps. 86:11*, p. 887.

⁹⁷ Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs*, p. 290.

⁹⁸ *Comm. on Ps. 86:11*, p. 887.

⁹⁹ L. Floor, "The Hermeneutics of Calvin," p. 190.

4. The Relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Ideal of *Brevitas et Facilitas*

Calvin regarded the role of the Holy Spirit as an important factor establishing the principles of the *brevitas et facilitas*. In this connection it was his view that the intention of the Holy Spirit to clarify the Word was reflected in the literary style used in the Holy Scripture.

According to Calvin's statement on the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, the first work of this ideal was to reveal the intention of the author of Scripture (*Et sane, quum hoc sit prope unicum illius officium mentem scriptoris quem explicandum sumpsit patefacere*).¹⁰⁰ The intention of the author, according to Calvin, meant that of the Holy Spirit because he thought the Holy Spirit was the true author and interpreter of Scripture. Martin Luther stressed the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰¹ Calvin also followed Luther's emphasis upon the need for the Holy Spirit's help in understanding Scripture. But Calvin formulated his own theological hermeneutical ideal beyond the perspective of simple understanding.

Calvin regarded the intention of the Holy Spirit as one

¹⁰⁰ CO 10.402.

¹⁰¹ LW 22.8. Here in the interpretation of John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word", Luther says, "No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit. It is as impossible of comprehension by reason as it is inaccessible to the touch of the hand." Cf. LW 13.16-7; Lw 23.175.

of the most important theological presuppositions of a hermeneutics of Scripture.¹⁰² For Calvin the intention of the Holy Spirit is closely related to the interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰³ He maintained that an interpreter should seek the intention of the Holy Spirit in interpreting Scripture. We, according to Calvin, never understand the true meaning of Scripture without knowing the intention of the Holy Spirit. "I reply, we shall never gain access to a true understanding of them unless we turn our eyes to the purpose to which the Spirit addresses his words."¹⁰⁴ No other interpreters emphasized the intention of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture more than Calvin. "Interpreters have touched neither heaven and earth in their explanation of this prophecy, for they have not regarded the design of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁵ He tried to understand the Holy Spirit's intention in the verses of Scripture.¹⁰⁶ The fact that Calvin stressed the intention of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture made his commentaries sound.

What is the intention of the Holy Spirit for Calvin?

¹⁰² Cf. H. W. Rossouw, "Calvin's Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture," p. 152, says, "the Reformers agreed. . . that the intended meaning of the scriptural text was that of the Holy Spirit. A correct understanding of Scripture is therefore an understanding of its *sensus spiritualis*."

¹⁰³ *Comm. on Jer.* 49:3, p. 39.

¹⁰⁴ *Inst.* 3.18.6, p. 827.

¹⁰⁵ *Comm. on Zec.* 5:1, pp. 126-27.

¹⁰⁶ *Comm. on Da.* 11:26, p. 312.

Calvin did not regard it as the new inner revelation in our hearts as the Anabaptists maintained. According to him, the Holy Spirit's intention was not to be found on the outside of Scripture, rather it lay in the text which the author wrote through the Holy Spirit's guidance. Calvin identified the intention of the Holy Spirit with the intention of the authors of Scripture because the Holy Spirit spoke to the authors - the prophets and the apostles. Calvin saw the plain meaning of Scripture as the intention of the Holy Spirit. For him to seek the intention of the Holy Spirit meant to interpret the plain or natural sense of the text: "We must first explain the Prophet's design, and lay open the plain and natural meaning of his words."¹⁰⁷ This means that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* were based on the fact that an interpreter should attempt to reveal the simple and true sense of the author through the work of the Holy Spirit.

From the perspective of the linguistic styles of Scripture and the expressions of its authors, Calvin showed us the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his *Institutes, Concerning Scandals*, and his commentaries.

He maintained that the authors of Scripture had their own distinctive language and exhibited a biblical rhetoric through the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. Calvin's emphasis on the divine character of Scripture over against the world's

¹⁰⁷ *Comm. on Isa. 44:4*, p. 361.

rhetorical writings is directly concerned with the role of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin even the logic and the methodical plan of philosophers could not be compared with the style of the Holy Spirit.

As Philosophers have fixed limits of the right and the honorable, whence they derive individual duties and the whole company of virtues, so Scripture is not without its own order in this matter, but holds to a most beautiful dispensation, and one much more certain than all the philosophical ones. The only difference is that they, as they were ambitious men, diligently strove to attain an exquisite clarity of order to show the nimbleness of their wit. But the Spirit of God, because he taught without affectation, did not adhere so exactly or continuously to a methodical plan; yet when he lays one down anywhere he hints enough that it is not to be neglected by us.¹⁰⁸

Calvin derived his ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* from the fact that the Holy Spirit used both a rude and refined style, and the uncultivated and even barbarous language in which Amos, Jeremiah, and Zechariah spoke.¹⁰⁹ Calvin's mention is that Moses also "clearly expresses this in a few words (*Ea vero paucis a Mose verbis dilucide exprimitur*): The secret things, he says, belong to . . . our God, but he has manifested them to us and to our children (Deut. 29:29)."¹¹⁰

In his *Concerning Scandals* Calvin described the important perspective on the linguistic style of Scripture as related to the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. He maintained that in Scripture the Holy Spirit employed popular, unpretentious

¹⁰⁸ *Inst.* 3.6.1, p. 685.

¹⁰⁹ *Inst.* 1.8.2, p. 83.

¹¹⁰ *Inst.* 3.21.3, p. 924. Cf. CO 2.681.

language in order for common people to understand the text more easily.¹¹¹ Its style was "unpolished and free from embellishments."¹¹² Calvin thought that Moses and a great many of the prophets were "just as accomplished in their own language as any of the Greek and Roman philosophers and orators who are read with the greatest admiration and approval."¹¹³ He said that their language was by no means on the same level of brilliance: "the style of Jeremiah smacks of the countrymen, and Amos's is redolent of the herdsman."¹¹⁴ Here Calvin pointed out that the authors of Scripture did not use academic words, but rather the common style of language in their circumstances. This led Calvin to confirm Scripture as the source of *brevitas et facilitas*. He said; "no orators can influence us more forcibly than Scripture with its plain, unvarnished style."¹¹⁵ The Holy Spirit worked in the authors who wrote the Holy Scriptures in the simple and common style. The foundation of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* was based on the fact that in order for common people to understand easily, the Holy Spirit made the authors of Scripture employ the clear and simple style of language.

¹¹¹ *Concerning Scandals*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 15.

¹¹² *Ibid.* on Rom. 2:1, p. 86. Cf. *Romans*, 2:1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* on Rom. 2:18, p. 91.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* on Rom. 5:13, p. 208.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* on Rom. 6:15, p. 222.

In his *Commentary on Romans* and *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* Calvin took an example from Paul's style to exhibit the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin demonstrated that Paul set forth his argument in a simple and plain style (*iam planior facilliorque est deductio*).¹¹⁶ He argued that the Apostolic writings, from which eloquence could be learned, conveyed spiritual wisdom in a plain and simple style.¹¹⁷ Calvin believed that Paul spoke the truth in a humble style through the working of the Holy Spirit. "The highest mysteries have been delivered to us in the garb of a humble style, in order that our faith may not depend on the potency of human eloquence, but on the efficacious working of the Spirit alone."¹¹⁸ By the work of the Holy Spirit Paul could strengthen his argument in plain words.¹¹⁹ Calvin indicated that Paul used a simple style of speech to express the heavenly wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

He says then that he adapts spiritual things to spiritual, in accommodating the words to the subject; that is, he tempers that heavenly wisdom of the Spirit with a simple style of speech, and of such a nature as carries in its front the native energy of the Spirit. In the meantime he reproves others, who, by an affected elegance of expression and show of refinement, endeavor to obtain the applause of men, as persons who are either devoid of solid truth, or, by unbecoming ornaments,

¹¹⁶ *Comm. on Rom.* 2:1, p. 84. Cf. *Romanos*, 2:1, p. 37.

¹¹⁷ *Comm. on Rom.* 2:8, p. 91.

¹¹⁸ *Comm. on Rom.* 5:15, p. 206.

¹¹⁹ *Comm. on Rom.* 6:5, p. 222.

corrupt the spiritual doctrine of God.¹²⁰

The work of the Holy Spirit was very important in bringing about the simple style of Scripture and Calvin asserted that the Holy Spirit was the best master of language.¹²¹ In his *Commentary on 2 Cor. 2:13* Calvin explained.

The words taught by the Spirit, on the other hand, are such as are adapted to a pure and simple style, corresponding to the dignity of the Spirit, rather than to an empty ostentation. For in order that eloquence may not be wanting, we must always take care that the wisdom of God be not polluted with any borrowed and profane lustre.¹²²

Calvin said that even Scripture, as given by the Holy Spirit, revealed to us a pure and simple style, the principle of *facilitas*.

Calvin's theological presupposition that the Holy Spirit illuminated an interpreter sufficiently reflects the fact that one of the foundations of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* derived from the intention of the Holy Spirit and the linguistic style of Scripture.

B. *Scriptura Sui Ipsius Interpres*

Verbum supra ecclesiam. Ecclesia nata est ex Dei verbo.

With these slogans the Reformers affirmed the priority and superiority of Scripture to the visible Church, the Roman

¹²⁰ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 2:13*, p. 114.

¹²¹ *Comm. on Da. 4:35*, p. 298.

¹²² *Comm. on 1 Cor. 2:13*, p. 114.

Catholic church.¹²³ The Reformers' new emphasis on the authority of Scripture gave them not only a theological key against the authority and the tradition of the Roman Catholic church, but also produced one of the most important principles of the interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin followed the other Reformers who propagated the Reformation with slogans like *sola Scriptura* and *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.¹²⁴ For him the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* was one of the most important theological principles in the interpretation of Scripture.

1. *Sola Scriptura*

The hermeneutical principle of the Reformers, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, was directly related to one of the great Reformation slogans, *sola Scriptura* which "stands for the Reformers' total view of how the Bible should function as an authority in the conscience of the individual and in the

¹²³ John T. McNeill, "The Significance of the Word of God for Calvin," *Church History* 28 (1959): 131.

¹²⁴ J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed., D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 350. Here he says, "Scripture should be interpreted by Scripture, just as one part of a human teacher's message may and should be interpreted by appeal to the rest. . . . Scripture must be approached as a single organism of instruction, and we must look always for its internal links and topical parallels, which in fact are there in profusion, waiting to be noticed."

church's corporate life."¹²⁵ The slogan *sola Scriptura* was a mighty weapon of the Reformers.¹²⁶ With this slogan the Reformers fought the authority and the tradition of the Roman Catholic church, and placed the authority of Scripture over them.¹²⁷ This principle *Scriptura Scripturae interpres* did not render an interpretation subordinated to the dogma of the church (*ecclesia Scripturae interpres*).¹²⁸ The term *sola Scriptura*, therefore, played a decisive role in the Reformers' whole understanding of Christianity.¹²⁹ J. I. Packer says,

¹²⁵ J. I. Packer, "Sola Scriptura in History and Today," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), p. 43.

¹²⁶ H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Bd. 1, (Kampen: J, H, Kok, 1928), p. 449, says, "Inderdaad hebben de kerken der Hervorming tegenover Rome geen machtiger wapen dan de Schrift."

¹²⁷ The Roman Catholic church accepted the authority of Scripture, but put Scripture next to the church. Cf. C. J. Wethmar, *Dogma en Verstaanshorison: 'n Histories-sistematiese ondersoek in verband met die hermeneutiese funksie van die kerklike dogma met besondere verwysing na die teologie van Gerhard Ebeling* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1977), p. 177, says, "Die Rooms-Katholieke kerk wil die Skrifgesag aan kerk bind deur die uitleg van die Skrif as prerogatief van die kerklike oorlewering daarvan voor te behou. Aan die kerklike tradisie word, ten opsigte van die Heilige Skrif, sowel 'n interpretatiewe as 'n aanvullingsfunksie toegeken."

¹²⁸ E. P. Groenewald, *Die Eksegese van die Nuwe Testament* (Pretoria: Universiteit van Pretoria, 1938), p. 8.

¹²⁹ For example, Martin Bucer, *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, trans., and ed. D. F. Wright (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), p. 187, says: "By what reasoning, then, will these theologians defend the propriety of asserting that 'the Church gives Scripture its authority, has power over Scripture, can change Scripture,' etc.? Can it be said that an ambassador imparts authority to his prince's mandate, or to the brief that records it, or that he has power over it, or can change anything in it? It is not rather the case that the

The Reformers' whole understanding of Christianity, then, depended on the principle of *sola Scriptura*: that is, the view that Scripture, as the only Word of God in this world, is the only guide for conscience and the church, the only source of true knowledge of God and grace, and the only qualified judge of the church's testimony and teaching, past and present.¹³⁰

For the Reformers Scripture was the only authority against the authority which the Roman Catholic church accorded its tradition in determination of the interpretation of Scripture.¹³¹ In Luther's statement of *sola Scriptura*,¹³² the strong claim of the *sola* already had the power of an hermeneutical principle of Scripture, namely, that Scripture interprets itself "without the imposition of exterior norms or

brief vindicates the trustworthiness of the ambassador, and that he should be so closely bound to his brief that whatever he says that is not explicitly stated in it, whatever exposition he gives of its implications, must be in complete harmony with its express contents, assuming he intends faithfully to discharge his commission?" He rejected the authority of the Roman church's pope, but rather the work of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Peter Matheson, "Martin Bucer and the Old Church," in *Martin Bucer Reforming Church and Community*, ed. D. F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 5-16.

¹³⁰ J. I. Packer, "*Sola Scriptura* in History and Today," pp. 48-9.

¹³¹ For the studies on the Reformers' hermeneutics of Scripture, see Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers," pp. 121-152; Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, pp. 152-174. McGrath says, "The Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* is rendered either meaningless or unusable without a reliable hermeneutical programme" (p. 152).

¹³² WA 7.95-101.

tradition."¹³³ The Roman Catholic church's view that Scripture should be interpreted by the teaching office of the church was based upon the theological presupposition that Scripture is obscure. The Reformers rejected this. They based their assertion on the fact that Scripture is clear.¹³⁴ H. Bavinck saw the perspicuity of Scripture as the strong bulwark of the Reformation.¹³⁵ On account of this perspicuity Scripture has the capacity of interpreting itself.¹³⁶ This discovery of the

¹³³ Gordon Clarke Chapman Jr., "The Hermeneutics of Hermann Diem: A Renewed Conversation between Existentialist Exegesis and Dogmatic Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University: Boston, 1963). pp. 7-8. H. W. Rossouw, "Calvin's Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture," in *Calvinus Reformator*, pp. 151-2, says, "The significance which the *sola scriptura* had for the Reformation movement can, however, only be adequately grasped if the hermeneutical relevance of the *sola* is taken into account. Such an understanding of the *sola scriptura* would at the same time reveal that the Reformers' conception of the exclusive authority of Scripture entailed a new view of the nature of this authority and of the way in which it is actually exercised. For the Reformers the confession of the *sola scriptura* originated in the context of a dispute which was primarily of a hermeneutical nature; that is, a dispute in which the real issue at stake was the correct interpretation and understanding of the Biblical message."

¹³⁴ For example, Zwingli argued that Jesus Himself conferred the clarity of Scripture on us. Cf. Gottfried W. Locher, *Die Zwinglische Reformation im Rahmen der europäischen Kirchengeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 212-3. For the study of the clarity of Scripture, see Gregg Robert Allison, "The Protestant Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture: A Reformulation on the Basis of Biblical Teaching" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995).

¹³⁵ H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Bd. 1, p. 449.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 450. For the study of the relationship between the perspicuity of Scripture and the interpretation of Scripture, see Hendrik Willem Rossouw, *Klaarheid en Interpretasie. Enkele probleemhistoriese gesigspunte in verband met die leer van die duidelikheid van die Heilige*

Reformers opened up a new approach to the interpretation of Scripture. The Reformers applied the *sola Scriptura* to their theological interpretation of Scripture.¹³⁷

G. C. Berkouwer says:

Nowhere was the relationship between authority and interpretation so clearly expressed as in the Reformation confession of Scripture, which, based on *sola Scriptura*, offered a perspective on the real relationship between authority and interpretation, and expressed it in its hermeneutical rule: *sola scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter).¹³⁸

2. Luther's Method

The history of theology is the record of how the church has interpreted Scripture. In fact, the interpretation of Scripture has played a great role in forming the theology of the Christian community. From this perspective we cannot

Skrif (Amsterdam: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij Jacob van Campen N. V., 1963), pp. 246-270. Cf. P. C. Potgieter, "Perspicuitas - Vir Wie?" in 'N Woord op sy tyd: 'n Teologiese Feesbundel aangebied aan Professor Johan Heyns ter herdenking van sy sestigste verjaarsdag, eds. C. J. Wethmar and C. J. A. Vos (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1988), pp. 89-96.

¹³⁷ Gerhard Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutic," in *The New Hermeneutic*, vol. 2, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York, Harper & Row, 1964), p. 79. Ebeling points out the following. "Now although the exclusive particle *sola scriptura* was directed against this Catholic view of tradition, yet the so-called Scripture principle of the Reformers did not really consist in a reduction of the sources of revelation, a quantitatively narrower definition of the norm. Rather the *sola Scriptura*, as opposed to the hermeneutical sense of the Catholic principle of tradition, was itself already a hermeneutical thesis."

¹³⁸ G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 127.

neglect the significance of Martin Luther's interpretation of Scripture in the Reformation.¹³⁹ If we ask ourselves how Luther's doctrine of justification by faith began, we cannot help but recognize that his Reformation came from his new interpretation of Scripture over against the Roman Catholic church's.¹⁴⁰ Paul Althaus comments on Luther's interpretation of Scripture:

His theology is nothing more than an attempt to interpret the Scripture. Its form is basically exegesis. He is no "systematician" in the scholastic sense, and he is no dogmatician - either in the sense of the great medieval systems or in the sense of modern theology.¹⁴¹

Therefore his theology was formed by his attempt to interpret Scripture from a new perspective, not according to the Roman Catholic church's method. At the Diet of Worms he did not

¹³⁹ Gerhard Ebeling, "New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," pp. 34-46. Here he emphasizes the hermeneutical revolution which occurred in Luther's thinking. Karl Bauer, *Die Wittenberger Universitätstheologie und die Anfänge der deutschen Reformation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928), p. 145, emphasizes that Luther became the Reformer through his new hermeneutics: "Aber zum Reformator ist er weder durch seinen Nominalismus, noch durch die Anregungen, die ihm vom Humanismus kamen, sondern durch seine neue Hermeneutik."

¹⁴⁰ A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 6. Here he also states that the real significance of the tower discovery of M. Luther lies in the realm of interpretation, and that his hand at last grasped the key with which the Scriptures could be unlocked. A. E. McGrath also points out that the broad features of Luther's doctrine of justification are to be attributed to a new manner of interpreting the Bible, especially the Pauline writings, Cf. A. E. McGrath, "Luther," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 415.

¹⁴¹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans., Robert S. Schultz, p. 3.

accept the authority of popes and councils because his conscience was captive to the Word of God. He asserted *sola Scriptura*.¹⁴² This motto included the fact that Scripture interprets itself because it has its own self-authentication.

For Luther *sola Scriptura* became an important hermeneutical principle, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.¹⁴³ This method appeared in his writings as early as 1519 and continued to play an important role in his interpretation of Scripture.¹⁴⁴ For Luther the principle of the self-interpretation of Scripture came from his emphasis of the authority and clarity of Scripture.¹⁴⁵ In the Leipzig Disputation with Eck in July 1519,¹⁴⁶ Luther emphasized the

¹⁴² David W. Lotz, "Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority," *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 258-73.

¹⁴³ WA 10.3.238.

¹⁴⁴ Ralph A. Bohlmann, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confession*, p. 89. Cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, pp. 76-78.

¹⁴⁵ For the studies of the relationship of the clarity of Scripture to Luther's hermeneutics, see Erling T. Teigen, "The Clarity of Scripture and Hermeneutical Principles in the Lutheran Confessions," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 46 (1982): 147-166; Bernhard Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift*, Teil 1: Martin Luther, Die wiederentdeckten Grundlagen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

¹⁴⁶ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, pp. 47-8. Here he gives us a brief background of the Leipzig Debate: "Originally, the debate was planned as a disputation between Eck and Luther's colleague Karlstadt, but Eck's preparatory theses were primarily addressed to Luther. As a result, the leading champions on each side debated one another in Leipzig. They also took the leadership in the controversies of the following decades. It was Eck's intention to reveal Luther as a heretic and he succeeded in doing so. Luther revealed his heresy by denying that the

authority of Scripture:

I regret that the holy doctor penetrates the Scripture as deeply as a spider does the water. In fact, he runs away from them as the devil from the cross. Therefore, with all my regard for the fathers, I prefer the authority of the Scriptures, which I commend to those who will judge me.¹⁴⁷

Over against Erasmus' view that Scripture was a dark book that needed interpretation by the teaching office of the church, Luther defended his thesis on the clarity of Scripture.¹⁴⁸ We can easily find the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* from Luther's Catechisms. In his *Ten Sermons on the Catechism* (1528) Luther said that the interpretation of Scripture was in itself.¹⁴⁹

In Luther's Catechisms there are various patterns that

decisions of a council were infallible. This became particularly clear when he asserted that many of the teachings of Huss condemned by the Council of Constance were good Christian teaching. Luther thus established a clear opposition between the authority of Scripture and the authority of the church. Luther did not understand the authority of the Scripture in a legalistic way but rather felt that only those teachings that were based on Scripture could be considered binding in the church. Luther cited John Gerson and Augustine in support of this way of thinking although he admittedly did not do full justice to their position." Cf. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 299-348.

¹⁴⁷ WA 2.282, quoted in A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁸ Hermann Sasse, "Luther and Word of God," in *Accent in Luther's Theology*, ed Heino O. Kadai (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 67. Luther discussed the clarity of Scripture particularly in *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), p. 71, pp. 123-132. Cf. WA 18.609, 653.

¹⁴⁹ LW 5.186.

use this method. The first pattern is a simple quotation of Scripture. For example, in the section on the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Luther used this pattern of *sola Scriptura*.

For without the Word of God the water is merely water and no Baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul wrote to Titus (3:5-8), "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure."¹⁵⁰

The reason why Luther did not explain the quoted text is that the text itself has a clear meaning without an exegete's interpretation. Luther also showed this pattern in explaining the fourth commandment in the *Large Catechism*:

St. Paul also highly exalts and praises this commandment, saying in Eph. 6:2, 3, "This is the first commandment with a promise: that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth."¹⁵¹

A second pattern is Luther's use of illustrations from Scripture. This pattern involves using people and events from Scripture to explain points in the catechisms. In his explanation of the first commandment, Luther used the illustration of Saul and David.¹⁵²

Thirdly, Luther interpreted the text by the context. In the interpretation of the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," Luther said the following commandment is

¹⁵⁰ SC 349.

¹⁵¹ LC 383.

¹⁵² LC 370-71.

more easily understood from the preceding one (the fifth commandment, "you shall not kill").¹⁵³

Fourthly, Luther interpreted the meaning of a text from the meaning of the whole of Scripture. For example, Luther said, "in the Scriptures, to have long life means not merely to grow old but to have everything that pertains to long life—health, wife and child, livelihood, peace, good government, etc., without which this life can neither be heartily enjoyed nor long endure."¹⁵⁴ Here the phrase "in the Scriptures" means the meaning of a text in the light of the whole of Scripture as related to it. This pattern embodied an approach towards Biblical Theology.

Fifthly, one of the distinctive expressions of this principle is "Christ himself says" or "Christ teaches." For example, he said,

But the right way to deal with this matter would be to observe the order laid down by the Gospel, Matthew 19:2, where Christ says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."¹⁵⁵

For Luther, Christ is the interpreter of the law. The statement that "Christ himself says" goes beyond the simple quotation. This pattern shows that Luther highly respected Christ's interpretation in using the *sola Scriptura* principle.

¹⁵³ LC 392.

¹⁵⁴ LC 383.

¹⁵⁵ LC 402.

3. The Relationship of the Principle *Scriptura Sui Ipsius Interpres* to the Ideal of *Brevitas et Facilitas*

Since Calvin was a theologian of Scripture, he intended to formulate his hermeneutics as well as his theology by means of the Reformation principle *sola Scriptura*.¹⁵⁶ *The Genevan Confession* shows us Calvin's understanding of *sola Scriptura*.

First we affirm that we desire to follow Scripture alone as rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any other thing which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is conveyed to us by the same Word without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord.¹⁵⁷

His firm faith in Scripture alone made him use a theological principle of Scriptural interpretation, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. This principle was closely related to his doctrine of Scripture. The fact that all Scripture is inspired by God Calvin accepted.¹⁵⁸ Thus the real author of Scripture was not human, but God.¹⁵⁹ Calvin's view of the divine inspiration of

¹⁵⁶ John H. Leith, "John Calvin. Theologian of the Bible," *Interpretation* 25 (1971): 330.

¹⁵⁷ *The Genevan Confession (1536)*, in *Calvin: Theological Treatises, The Library of Christian Classics*, trans., J. K. L. Reid (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 26.

¹⁵⁸ On the Calvin's view of the inspiration of Scripture see John Murray, "Calvin's Doctrine of Scripture," in *Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. 4, Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), pp. 156-175.

¹⁵⁹ *Inst.* 1.7.1, p. 74. "Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard." This statement means that the ultimate proof of the authority of Scripture is that God himself addresses us in Scripture.

Scripture appears in his interpretation of 2 Timothy. 3:16

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God".

First, he commends the Scripture on account of its authority. . . . In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he declares that it is divinely inspired; for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit. . . . Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spake. . . . This is the first clause, that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.¹⁶⁰

For him only Scripture was authoritative because it was dictated by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶¹ The principle *sola Scriptura*

¹⁶⁰ *Comm. on 1 Ti. 3:16*, pp. 248-9.

¹⁶¹ For the studies on Calvin's view of the inspiration of Scripture, see A. D. R. Polman, "Calvin on the Inspiration of Scripture," in *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet*, ed., Jacob T. Hoogstra (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959): 97-112; J. I. Packer, "Calvin's View of Scripture," in *God's Inerrant Word*, pp. 101-112; R. C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," in *Inerrancy*, ed., Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), pp. 337-354; John Murray, "Calvin and the Authority of Scripture," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 4, *Studies in Theology*, pp. 176-190; Douwe Johannes de Groot, *Calvijns opvatting over de inspiratie der Heilige Schrift* (Zutphen: N.V. Nauta & Co's Drukkerij, 1931); Donald K. McKim, "Calvin's View of Scripture," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, pp. 43-68; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "The Inspiration of Scripture in the English Reformers Illuminated by John Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 23 (1960-1): 140; Werner Krusche, *Das*

is based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore Scripture as the Word of God has its own authority.¹⁶²

Calvin followed Luther's view that Scripture is its own interpreter, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.¹⁶³ Calvin, developed this slogan and used it in his commentaries.¹⁶⁴ For him this is one of the most important theological principles. Wallace states:

In the task of interpreting Holy Scripture, the Word itself must be allowed always to control and reform all our presuppositions, theological or otherwise. It is most significant that Calvin allowed the use of theological presuppositions in face of Holy Scripture only in order to allow us "access" to the meaning of Scripture.¹⁶⁵

Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin, pp. 161-84; Leon McDill Allison, "The Doctrine of Scripture in Theology of John Calvin and Francis Turretin" (Th.M. thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1958).

¹⁶² Von Hans Helmut Eßer, "Die Lehre vom *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* bei Calvin innerhalb seiner Lehre von der Heiligen Schrift," *Verbindliches Zeugnis: Schriftauslegung-Lehramt-Rezeption*, eds. W. Pannenberg und Th. Schneider (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), pp. 246-258.

¹⁶³ A. Ganoczy, "Calvin als paulinischer Theologe," in *Calvinus Theologus*, ed. W. H. Neuser (Neukirchener: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), p. 50.

¹⁶⁴ C. Schwöbel, "Calvin," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 99, says, "Although the *sola scriptura* principle points to the common ground in the Reformers' understanding of scripture, this should not disguise the distinctiveness of their respective approaches to the theology of the Word of God and to the practice of biblical interpretation. Calvin's understanding of biblical exegesis is based on Luther's theology of the Word of God and developed against the back-drop of an intimate knowledge of the theory and practice of biblical interpretation of other Reformation theology."

¹⁶⁵ Ronald S. Wallace, "Calvin the Expositor," *Christianity Today* 18 (1964): 9.

For him this principle means that the true meaning of Scripture must be found in Scripture alone.¹⁶⁶ It also entails a literal interpretation, rejecting the fourfold sense of Scripture of the Medieval Ages.

Now let us see how Calvin used the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. The strong point of Calvin's own interpretation is that when he interpreted one passage, he did it with the help of other passages as far as possible. For example, in the interpretation of the one verse of Rom. 9:5 Calvin used five passages from the Old Testament.¹⁶⁷

First, Calvin interpreted an expression in the light of the same meaning which it has in other passages of Scripture. It is the general method he followed. In the explanation of a word, Calvin applied this principle. "*abbirim* is translated strong by some commentators; I have preferred to follow those who explain it to mean bulls, which it means also in Ps. 50:13, though in this passage the Prophet employs the word bulls to denote metaphorically those who are very strong and powerful."¹⁶⁸ He also interpreted the passage "That I might obtain some fruit," in Rom. 1:13 with the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. "He (Paul) no doubt speaks of the fruit, for the gathering of which the Lord sent his Apostles, 'I have

¹⁶⁶ P. C. Potgieter, "Calvin as Scriptural Theologian," in *Calvinus Reformator*. p. 129.

¹⁶⁷ *Comm. on Rom.* 9:5, p. 341.

¹⁶⁸ *Comm. on Isa.* 34:8, p. 51.

chosen you, that ye may go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit may remain.' (John 15:16)."¹⁶⁹ In the interpretation of Isa. 18:2 "To a people terrible from their beginning hitherto", he connected this sentence with Deut. 28:37 and Jer. 18:16. Calvin said:

He calls it terrible, because so great calamities would disfigure it in such a manner that all who beheld it would be struck with terror. I cannot approve of the exposition given by some, that this relates to the signs and miracles which the Lord performed amongst them, so as to render them an object of dread to all men; for the allusion is rather to that passage in the writings of Moses, 'The Lord will make thee an astonishment and a terror.' Deut. 28:37. In like manner it is said elsewhere, 'for the shaking of the head and mockery.' (Jer. 18:16, and 19:9, 13, 18). He therefore means that they are a nation so dreadful to behold as to fill all men with astonishment, and we know that this was foretold and that it also happened to the Jews.¹⁷⁰

With this principle he also interpreted the expression of Isa. 27:9 "in the day of the east wind". "When the prophet spoke of 'the day of the east wind,' he had his eye on the situation of Judea, to which, as we learn from other passages, that easterly wind was injurious."¹⁷¹ Calvin interpreted the passage "Thou wretched" in Isa. 54:11 in the light of the same meaning in Hag. 2:10: "All this was expressed by Haggai in a single word, when he said, 'The Glory of the latter temple shall be greater than the glory of the former,'"¹⁷² On the

¹⁶⁹ *Comm. on Rom. 1:13*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁰ *Comm. on Isa. 18:2*, p. 37.

¹⁷¹ *Comm. on Isa. 27:9*, p. 258.

¹⁷² *Comm. on Isa. 54:11*, p. 144.

passage "spreadeth it out as a tent" in Isa. 40:22, Calvin said, "David also employs the same form of expression (Ps. 104:2), and both speak of the aspect and spreading out of the heavens with respect to us; for they do not mean that God spreads out the heavens, that he may dwell in them, but rather that there may be given to us a place of habitation under them."¹⁷³ In the interpretation of Isa. 51:6 "My salvation shall endure for ever.", he used the same sentence of Ps. 102:26.27.¹⁷⁴ In the interpretation of Christian doctrine, e.g., election, Calvin did not force the passages into doctrines, but rather recommended his readers to consider other passages related to the subject. In the passage "even to them who are called according to his purpose" in Rom. 8:25, Calvin explained the word purpose as follows;

The word purpose distinctly excludes whatever is imagined to be adduced mutually by men; as though Paul had denied, that the causes of our election are to be sought anywhere else, except in the secret good pleasure of God; which subject is more fully handled in the first chapter to the Ephesians, and in the first of the second Epistle to Timothy; where also the contrast between this purpose and human righteousness is more distinctly set forth. Paul, however, no doubt made here this express declaration, - that our salvation is based on the election of God.¹⁷⁵

Secondly, Calvin interpreted an obscure passage with reference to a clear passage. In the interpretation of Isaiah

¹⁷³ *Comm. on Isa.* 40:22, p. 227.

¹⁷⁴ *Comm. on Isa.* 51:7, p. 72. Calvin said, "And with this sentiment agree the words of the Psalmist, 'The heavens shall wax old and vanish away: but thou, Lord, art always the same, and thy years are not changed.' (Psalm cii. 26, 27)."

¹⁷⁵ *Comm. on Rom.* 8:29, p. 316.

17:9, Calvin used this principle. "This passage will be made more plain by the writings of Moses, whom the prophets follow; for in the promises he employs this mode of expression, 'One of you shall chase a thousand,' (Lev.xxvi 8; Joshua xxiii. 10) and in the threatenings, on the other hand, he says, 'One shall chase a thousand of you.' (Deut. xxxii 30)."¹⁷⁶ By using this principle, Calvin viewed his interpretation more sound than others'.

But the Sophists are wrong in their exposition; for, while they acknowledge that famine, barrenness, war, pestilence, and other scourges, come from God, they deny that God is the author of calamities, when they befall us through the agency of men. This is false and altogether contrary to the present doctrine; for the Lord raises up wicked men to chastise us by their hand, as is evident from various passages of Scripture. (1 Kings xi. 14, 23) The Lord does not indeed inspire them with malice, but he uses it for the purpose of chastising us, and exercises the office of a judge, in the same manner as he made use of the malice of Pharaoh and others, in order to punish his people (Exod, i. 11 and ii. 23).¹⁷⁷

The principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* is closely related to the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Since the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* is to seek the meaning of a text with simplicity and naturalness, it is very important for an interpreter to use the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. With this principle, Calvin correctly found the simple and natural meaning of a passage. Whenever we find the simple and natural view, the meaning of a passage becomes clear. In the interpretation of Isaiah 34:11, for example, "He

¹⁷⁶ *Comm. on Isa.* 27:9, p. 28.

¹⁷⁷ *Comm. on Isa.* 45:8, p. 403.

shall stretch over it the cord of emptiness.", Calvin stated,

Some view the phrase 'an empty cord' as bearing an opposite sense, and apply it to the Jews; but I take a more simple view, and think that, like all the preceding statements, it must relate to the Edomites. And to make it more clear that this is Isaiah's natural meaning, we read the same word in the Prophet Malachi, who lived a long time afterwards. That passage may be regarded as an approbation of this prophecy. . . . What Isaiah had foretold more obscurely, Malachi explains with greater clearness.¹⁷⁸

Calvin also maintained that the interpretation of a passage could be evident from the whole of Scripture or the whole context.¹⁷⁹ He showed us how to apply this principle.

The Gentiles were entirely shut out from his (God) kingdom, as is sufficiently evident from the whole of Scripture. Paul says, 'Ye were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now by Christ Jesus, ye who formerly were far off have been made nigh by the blood of Christ.' (Eph. 2:12,13).¹⁸⁰

Calvin believed that one passage could help in the understanding of other passages by comparing the two passages. This method has some value for the solution of a difficult exegetical problem.¹⁸¹

Thirdly, by using the expression of the author and the

¹⁷⁸ *Comm. on Isa.* 34:11, p. 53.

¹⁷⁹ *Comm. on Isa.* 5:20, p. 186. "Through some limit this statement to judges, yet if it be carefully examined, we shall easily learn from the whole context that it is general." Cf. *Comm. on Rom.* 5:5, p. 192. "I do not refer this only to the last sentence, but to the whole of the preceding passage."

¹⁸⁰ *Comm. on Isa.* 56:3, p. 179.

¹⁸¹ *Inst.* 4.16.23, p. 1346.

common usage of Scripture,¹⁸² Calvin employed the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. In the passage "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will do this." in Isa. 37:32, Calvin interpreted with the help of an expression which the author of Isaiah had already employed in Isa. 9:7. "The same mode of expression was employed by him on a similar occasion (Isa. 9:7)."¹⁸³ He insisted on our considering the ordinary language of the author. "But I think that the former meaning is more agreeable to the context and to the prophet's ordinary language; and we ought carefully to observe those forms of expression which are peculiar to the prophets, that we may become familiar with their style."¹⁸⁴ In the interpretation of Eze. 3:3 "Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness", he mentioned that Jeremiah used the same expression elsewhere (Jer. 15:16).¹⁸⁵

Calvin interpreted a passage by referring to a general usage of Scripture. D. C. Puckett also mentions that Calvin interpreted the text by referring to the ordinary usage of the word. "Frequently Calvin justifies a translation by appealing to the ordinary usage of the word in the Old Testament, yet often without specifying the texts upon which he bases his

¹⁸² *Comm. on Rom. 4:17*, p. 175. Calvin interpreted the word call according to the usage of Scripture.

¹⁸³ *Comm. on Isa. 37:32*, p. 141.

¹⁸⁴ *Comm. on Isa. 62:3*, p. 323.

¹⁸⁵ *Comm. on Eze. 3:3*, p. 130.

judgement."¹⁸⁶ In the interpretation of Hos. 9:14 "Give them, O Lord: what will thou give? Give them a miscarrying and dry breasts.", Calvin rejected other interpreters' view because they did not comprehend the design of the prophet. He argued,

Christ says, that when the last destruction of Jerusalem should come, the barren would be blessed, (Luke 23:29) and this he took from the common doctrine of Scripture, for many such passages may be observed in the prophets."¹⁸⁷

Pointing to the weakness of other interpreters with their forced interpretations, Calvin referred to a mode of expression frequently employed in Scripture. In connection with the passage "Behold, I will bring a wind upon him." in Isa. 37:7, Calvin stated:

Others translate it, 'I will put my Spirit in him,' as if the prophet were speaking of a secret influence of the heart; but that is a forced interpretation. It is a highly appropriate metaphor that there is in the hand of God a wind or whirlwind to drive Sennacherib in another direction. To compare wicked men to 'straw or chaff' (Ps. 1:4) is a mode of expression frequently employed in Scripture, because God easily drives them wherever he thinks proper, when they think that they are standing very firm.¹⁸⁸

Calvin's ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* was intended as a safeguard against forced interpretation. The method of referring to the common usage of Scripture prevents an exegete from twisting the meaning of a text. The principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* is indispensable to the ideal of *brevitas*

¹⁸⁶ David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, p. 62.

¹⁸⁷ *Comm. on Hos. 9:14*, p. 341.

¹⁸⁸ *Comm. on Isa. 37:7*, p. 113.

et facilitas. Calvin argued that a simple interpretation suitable to the sense, and less forced, was closely related to the form of speech used in Scripture.

With regard to the present passage, I simply understand it to mean, he raised his face towards God. That I might inquire, says he, by supplication and prayers. Some translate, that I might seek supplication and prayer. Either is equally suitable to the sense, but the former version is less forced, because the Prophet sought God by supplication and prayers. And this form of speech is common enough in Scripture, as we are said to seek God when we testify our hope of his performing what he has promised.¹⁸⁹

In the interpretation of the names of Sodom and Gomorrah, Calvin attempted to interpret them in the light of the common mode of speaking adopted by the prophets.¹⁹⁰ According to the common usage of Scripture, Calvin interpreted a text with the help of the same word as used by other authors.¹⁹¹ He also recommended the reader to observe the usual phrase of Scripture.¹⁹² "To recompense into the bosom is a phrase frequently employed in Scripture."¹⁹³ He said, "We ought, therefore, to notice this mode of speaking, which occurs everywhere in Scripture, - the same thing is ascribed to God and to his servants."¹⁹⁴ Calvin believed that the usual mode

¹⁸⁹ *Comm. on Dan.* 9:3, p. 142.

¹⁹⁰ *Comm. on Jer.* 49:18, p. 86.

¹⁹¹ *Comm. on Rom.* 5:4, p. 191.

¹⁹² *Comm. on Rom.* 7:5, p. 249.

¹⁹³ *Comm. on Isa.* 65:6, p. 384.

¹⁹⁴ *Comm. on Jer.* 36:8, p. 334.

of speaking in Scripture was the key to the principle
Scriptura sui ipsius interpres.¹⁹⁵

Calvin recognized that good interpretations were more customary in Scripture. In the explanation of the passage "For he hath smeared their eyes." in Isa. 44:18, Calvin stated this principle.

Here some interpreters supply the word "God," and others supply the words "false prophets," and say that the people were blind, because the false prophets led them astray; for they would never have plunge into such disgraceful errors if they had not been deceived by the impostures of those men, their eyes being dazzled by wicked doctrines. Others do not approve of either of these significations, and it might also refer to the devil. But as a different exposition is more customary in Scripture, I rather adopted, namely, that God hath blinded them by a righteous judgment; if it be not thought preferable to view it as referring to themselves, because they voluntarily shut both their minds and their eyes; in which case there would be a change of number, which frequently occurs among Hebrew writers. I have stated, however, what I prefer; and it is exceedingly customary among Hebrew writers, when they speak of God, not to mention his name."¹⁹⁶

In order to define a meaning of a word correctly, Calvin referred to the customary mode of Scripture. "It is customary in the Scriptures to employ the word *conceptions* for denoting the designs and efforts of men (Job 15:35; Ps. 7:14; Isa. 26:17, and 59:4). The metaphor is taken from pregnant women."¹⁹⁷

When many interpretations occurred due to not knowing the

¹⁹⁵ *Comm. on Rom.* 8:17, p. 302.

¹⁹⁶ *Comm. on Isa.* 44:18, pp. 376-7.

¹⁹⁷ *Comm. on Isa.* 33:11, p. 22.

correct meaning of a word, Calvin chose the interpretation corresponding to the sense which was commonly found in Scripture.¹⁹⁸ In the interpretation of the passage "Then shall break forth as the dawn thy light," in Isa. 58:8, Calvin applied this principle to his explanation. "By the word light he means prosperity, as by the word 'darkness' is meant a wretched and afflicted life; and this mode of expression occurs frequently in Scripture."¹⁹⁹ Calvin maintained that certain interpretations were unnatural and inconsistent with the style of the authors, the modes of expression which were customary among the prophets. He stated,

We must therefore observe carefully those modes of expression which are customary among the prophets, that we may understand their meaning, and not break off sentences, or torture them to meanings different from what was intended. Exceedingly unnatural and inconsistent with the style of the prophets is the interpretation of those who explain 'the land' to mean heaven and the blessed life; for the land Canaan was given to the children of God with this intention, that, being separated from the whole world, and having become God's heritage, they might worship him there in a right manner; and consequently, to dwell in the land by right of inheritance means nothing else than to remain in the family of God.²⁰⁰

According to Calvin, Ezekiel and Paul were examples of good interpreters who did not cross the boundaries of Scripture.²⁰¹ He tried to go if Scripture would go, and to

¹⁹⁸ *Comm. on Isa.* 52:15, p. 108.

¹⁹⁹ *Comm. on Isa.* 58:9, p. 235.

²⁰⁰ *Comm. on Isa.* 60:21, p. 299.

²⁰¹ *Comm. on Eze.* 1:25-26, p. 102.

stop if Scripture would stop. Calvin did his best to interpret Scripture by the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

The clarity of Scripture offered the Reformers the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. Calvin confirmed that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* derived from the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

In this chapter I deal with the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central features of Calvin's scriptural hermeneutics. I have investigated the hermeneutical efficacy of this principle from the point of other scholars' definitions of *brevitas et facilitas*. Following this analysis I shall identify the date, and reconstruct several elements of Calvin's hermeneutics.

A. Brevity

The ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* is central to Calvin's hermeneutics. *Brevitas* implies interpreting the text in as brief a manner as possible. If we compare the size of Calvin's commentaries to that of others, we will find consistently superior to this principle. Gresham says of this subject:

As one looks at the long shelf of Calvin's biblical commentaries, one might wonder about his brevity. At a point of comparison, we could stand Calvin's single-volume Genesis commentary up against Luther's eight-volume commentary on the same book. Or we could compare Calvin's one-volume Romans commentary with Bucer's huge four-volume work. By these terms Calvin is

CHAPTER 7

THE IDEAL OF *BREVITAS ET FACILITAS*

In this chapter I deal with the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central features of Calvin's Scriptural hermeneutics. I have investigated the hermeneutical writings of Calvin from the point of other scholars' definitions of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Following this analysis, I shall now classify the data, and construct several elements of Calvin's method.

A. Brevity

One of the features of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* is, of course, brevity. Brevity implies interpreting the text in as brief or concise a manner as possible. If we compare the size of Calvin's commentaries to that of others', we will find him consistently adhering to this principle. Gamble says on this subject:

As one looks at the long shelf of Calvin's biblical commentaries, one might wonder about his brevity! But for a point of comparison, we could stand Calvin's large single-volume Genesis commentary up against Luther's eight-volume commentary on the same book. Or we could compare Calvin's one-volume Romans commentary with Bucer's huge four-volume work, By these terms Calvin is,

in fact, brief.¹

In the interpretation of Jer. 10:1-2, for example, Calvin remarked that "More things might be said, but I study brevity as far as I can; and I trust that I have briefly included what is sufficient for the understanding of this passage."²

Calvin suggested a few guidelines as to what he understood by brevity in the interpretation of a text. To make the exposition of a text brief does not mean to reduce the size of the interpretation of the passage without any goal in mind. It relates to the mode of interpretation and the true meaning of the author of Scripture. Calvin based the principle of brevity on the fact that the author of Scripture used this concise brevity. "This concise brevity is more emphatic than if he (Isaiah) had made a long discourse."³ Calvin noted that the author of Scripture spoke "in a concise manner of expression."⁴ First, in order to interpret the text in a brief manner, Calvin presented only a few of many testimonies. "Those who are moderately versed in the Scriptures see that

¹ R. C. Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete," p. 189.

² *Comm. on Jer. 10:1-2*, p. 12. CO 38.61. "*Possent plura dici: sed ego brevitati studeo, quantum in me est: et videor breviter comprehendisse quod ad loci huius intelligentiam sufficeret.*"

³ *Comm. on Isa. 8:1*, p. 261. CO 36.165. "*Concisa haec brevis magis emphatica est quam si prolixè concionatus esset.*"

⁴ *Comm. on Isa. 26:3*, p. 213. CO 36.427. "*Sed quia non apponitur nota dativi casus, sed concise dicit propheta.*"

for the sake of brevity I have put forward only a few of many testimonies."⁵ Secondly, Calvin argued that brevity was closely related to the genuine sense of the author. He referred to brevity as "his own custom": "Interpreters differ widely about these words, and I will not bring forward all their opinions, otherwise it would be necessary to refute them. I should have no little trouble in refuting all their views, but I will follow my own custom of shortly expressing the genuine sense of the Prophet, and all difficulty will be removed."⁶ Thirdly, for brief interpretation Calvin passed over anything perplexed, ambiguous, or obscure. In his Genesis dedication in 1563, Calvin stated,

Since in my progress I have often despaired of life, I have preferred giving a succinct exposition to leaving a mutilated one behind me. Yet sincere readers, possessed of sound judgment, will see that I have taken diligent care, neither through cunning nor negligence, to pass over anything perplexed, ambiguous, or obscure. Since, therefore, I have endeavoured to discuss all doubtful points, I do not see why any one should complain of brevity, unless he wishes to derive his knowledge exclusively from commentaries.⁷

Calvin used this principle of brevity to clear up obscure and perplexing matters. Calvin said,

⁵ *Inst.* 1.18.1, p. 231. CO 2.168. "*Qui mediocriter exercitati sunt in scripturis, vident me ex multis pauca tantum proferre testimonia, ut brevitati consulam.*"

⁶ *Comm. on Da.* 7:25, p. 68. CO 41.79. "*Mihi vero parum esset negotii, si vellem singulas opiniones refutare: sed ego sequar meum morem, hoc est, breviter complectar genuinum sensum prophetae: et ita nulla difficultas restabit.*" See *Comm. on Ps.* 11:2.

⁷ "The Author's Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Gen*, p. liii.

I have dwelt a little longer on this doctrine, because there are many who are not versed in the writings of the Fathers, and cannot easily satisfy themselves, and these are knotty points; yet I have endeavoured so to clear up a matter which seems obscure and perplexing, as shortly as possible, that any one of moderate capacity and judgment can easily understand what I have said.⁸

Calvin's interpretation was not always short. Whenever any important doctrines relating to a text occurred, Calvin did a longer commentary. Then brevity, according to Calvin, did not necessarily mean reduced length. Although his exposition became a little longer, Calvin tried to interpret a text in order for his readers to understand his exegesis easily and clearly.⁹

B. Reduction

The principle of reduction aims at reducing prolix interpretation and instead interpreting a text in as few words

⁸ *Comm. on Eze. 1:25-6*, p. 102. CO 40.57. "Ego Paulo fui in hac doctrina longior, quia multi qui non versati sunt in lectione patrum, non tam facile se expedirent: et quaestiones istae sunt satis spinosae: tamen ego conatus sum quanta potui brevitate rem quae videtur obscura et perplexa, ita expedire, ut quisvis mediocri ingenio et iudicio praeditus, facile intelligat quod dixi."

⁹ For the study of the principle of brevity (Kürze), see Alexandre Ganoczy und Stefan Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins: Geistesgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen und Grundzüge*, pp. 120-26. They deal with this point (p. 126). Also M. C. Armour, "Calvin's Hermeneutic and the History of Christian Exegesis," p. 83, argues that brevity was not "a matter of page counts". L. Battles, "Introduction," p. lxx, in *Inst.*, says: "With few exceptions his sentences and paragraphs are packed with thought and have all the condensation possible without sacrifice of the constituent matter."

as possible. Calvin criticized Erasmus, the Scholastic Sophists, and Bucer for the prolixity of their Scriptural interpretation. In his *Commentary on Romans* Calvin pointed out Erasmus' verbosity. "The less excusable is Erasmus, who labours much in palliating a notion so grossly delirious."¹⁰ In his *Institutes* Calvin criticized the Scholastic Sophists for being prolix in their interpretation.¹¹ Calvin argued that Bucer's interpretation did not help the readers understand Scripture easily because of the verbosity of the interpretation. Calvin proposed to touch only briefly on the words in order not to become too tedious to his readers (*ego volui totum hunc contextum breviter perstringere, ne abrumperem*).¹² In the interpretation of Ps. 38:1 "O Jehovah! rebuke me not in thy wrath, and chasten me not in thy anger," he said, "As I have already expounded this verse in the beginning of the sixth Psalm, where it occurs, and that I may not prove tedious to the reader. I shall notice it more briefly here."¹³ His purpose in using the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* was to give the readers the true meaning

¹⁰ *Comm. on Rom. 5:14*, p. 205. CO 49.97. "*Quo minus excusabilis est Erasmus, qui in excusando tam crasso delirio nimium laborat.*"

¹¹ *Inst. 3.6.1*. p. 685. Cf. OS 3.6, 24-28. Cf. *Inst. 1.13.3*, 1.9.3.

¹² *Comm. on Jer. 3:25*. p. 95. CO 37.571.

¹³ *Comm. on Ps. 38:1*, p. 54. CO 31.386. "*Quia sextus quoque Psalmus ab hoc versu incipit, ubi eum exposui: ne frustra lectores onerem, nunc ero brevior.*"

of an author as briefly as possible. He detested 'vain prattle' and went straight to the point with simplicity.¹⁴ In the *Sermons on Job* he spoke out against verbosity and briefly gave his message.¹⁵

Calvin did not interpret the text with unnecessary verbosity when the text clearly explained itself. "But we have no need of a long dispute, because Scripture everywhere declares with sufficient clearness that God has determined what shall happen to us: for he chose his own people before the foundation of the world and passed by others. (Eph. 1:4)"¹⁶

Calvin showed us how to interpret a text as briefly as possible. In the interpretation of Rom. 1:4 "And declared to be the Son of God with Power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead", Calvin used the reducing principle of Scriptural interpretation.

Though some indeed find here three separate evidences of the divinity of Christ - "power", understanding thereby miracles - then the testimony of the Spirit - and, lastly, the resurrection from the dead - I yet prefer to connect them together, and to reduce these three things to one, in this manner - that Christ was declared the Son of God by openly exercising a real celestial power, that is, the power is comprehended, when a conviction of it is imprinted on our hearts by the same Spirit. The language

¹⁴ Benjamin Wirt Farley, "John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments" (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, 1976), p. 56.

¹⁵ *Sermons on Job*. p. 102, p. 164, p. 173.

¹⁶ *Comm. on Eze. 18:32*, p. 265. CO 40.458. "*Sed nihil opus est longa disputatione, quia scriptura ubique satis clare praedicat constitutum esse Deo quid de nobis futurum sit.*"

of the Apostle well agrees with this view; for he says that he was declared by power, because power, peculiar to God, shone forth in him, and incontestably proved him to be God; and this was indeed made evident by his resurrection.¹⁷

Calvin argued that his brief interpretation agreed with the sense of the author. Calvin used the reducing principle in three ways. First, he intentionally avoided introducing the opinions of other interpreters whenever possible. While reducing other's views of the interpretation of a text, Calvin directly presented his own exposition to the readers. In the interpretation of Rom. 7:13 "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful", Calvin said: "With no intention to offend others, I must state it as my opinion, that this passage ought to be read as I have rendered it, and the meaning is this (*Salva aliorum pace, sic legendum arbitror ut posui: itaque hunc esse sensum*)."¹⁸ The reason why Calvin omitted many interpretations in the interpretation of

¹⁷ *Comm. on Rom. 1:4*, pp. 45-6. CO 49.10. "Quaquam autem seorsum tria hic specimina divinitatis Christi quidam faciunt: per virtutem miracula intelligentes, deinde testimonium spiritus, postremo resurrectionem mortuorum: ego simul coniungere malo, et ad unum haec tria referre, hoc modo, Christum esse definitum filium Dei exserta palam vere coelesti et eadem spiritus potentia, quum a mortuis resurrexit: sed eam potentiam comprehendi dum cordibus obsignatur per eundem spiritum. Cui interpretationi bene suffragatur apostoli phrasis: dicit enim declaratum fuisse in potentia, quod scilicet potentia in eo refulserit quae esset Dei propria, ipsumque esse Deum indubie probaret. Ipsa vero enituit quidem in illius resurrectione."

¹⁸ *Comm. on Rom. 7:13*, p. 258. CO 49.127

Scripture was to show the genuine meaning of the text. In the interpretation of Rom. 9:28 "For I will finish and shorten the matter," he stated, "Omitting various interpretations, I will state what appears to be the real meaning (*Omissa interpretationum varietate, mihi germanus sensus hic videtur*)."¹⁹ Avoiding many interpretations, Calvin wanted to interpret the pure sense of the text. "Passing by the diversity of expositions, which we have received in consequence of the obscurity of the passage, I shall only state what appears to me to be in accordance with Christ's true meaning."²⁰ Calvin was always cautious of the readers' getting tired of long explanations of a text. "I shall not engage the reader long in reciting and disproving the opinions of others. Let every one have his own view; and let me be allowed to bring forward what I think."²¹ He did not mention others' views on an unimportant matter since the argument of other interpreters made his readers waste time. He said, "As there is some difficulty in Paul's words, interpreters differ as to the meaning. I shall not spend time in setting aside the interpretations of others, nor indeed is there any need for

¹⁹ *Comm. on Rom. 9:28*, p. 374. CO 49.191.

²⁰ *Comm. on Jn. 16:8*, p. 137. CO 47.358. "*Omissa expositionum varietate, quam nobis peperit loci obscuritas, tantum afferam quod mihi videtur ex genuino esse Christi sensu.*"

²¹ *Comm. on Rom. 10:14*. p. 396. CO 49.203. "*Non occupabo hic diu lectorem referendis simul ac refellendis aliorum opinionibus, sit salvum cuique iudicium: mihi vero libere proferre liceat quod sentio.*"

this, provided only we are satisfied as to the true and proper meaning."²² He thought that it was not necessary for him to spend time in mentioning others' views.²³

Secondly, the principle of reduction included avoiding any unnecessary disputation, argument, or controversy. Calvin argued that disputes between interpreters were "unnecessary", and served "no good purpose."²⁴ Calvin avoided the arguments of other interpreters in some cases because their views did not directly relate to the text. "But I do not get into that argument, for it does not affect this passage. Paul simply means. . . (*Sed ego in illam disputationem non ingredior: quia nihil facit ad praesentem locum. Nam simpliciter intelligit Paulus. . .*)"²⁵ In the interpretation of 1 Pet. 4:6 "That they might be judged," Calvin pointed out that others' interpretations were 'remote' from the mind of the author. "I omit the explanations of others, for they seem to me to be very remote from the Apostle's meaning (*Aliorum expositiones*

²² *Comm. on 2 Cor. 1:11*, p. 123. CO 50.15-16. "*Quia in verbis Pauli nonnihil est perplexum: variant in sensu interpretes. Ego aliorum expositionibus refellendis non insistam: neque sane opus est, modo de vera et genuina nobis constet.*"

²³ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 5:9*, p. 190. CO 49.383. "*Caeterum hic locus propter obscuritatem ad varios sensus torquetur: quibus refellendis non puto mihi necesse esse immorari, si eum, qui mihi genuinus videtur esse, protulero.*"

²⁴ *Comm. on Ps. 9, (pre.)* p. 109. CO 31.95-6.

²⁵ *Comm. on Gal. 2:6*, pp. 54-5. CO 50.187.

omitto, quia mihi videntur a mente apostoli procul remotae)." ²⁶ Calvin did not dispute with others on unnecessary matters irrelevant to the author's design. "I shall not enter into any dispute as to whether the things that Paul enumerates are effects of repentance, or belong to it, or are preparatory to it, as all this is unnecessary for understanding Paul's design, for he simply proves the repentance of the Corinthians from its signs, or accompaniments." ²⁷ Calvin thought that the duty of an interpreter was not to argue the statement of the author, but simply to interpret the meaning of focussing on the text by means of the intention of the author.

Thirdly, the reducing principle was to avoid the repetition of the same interpretation of various texts. He often suggested that the readers consulted his other commentaries and *Institutes* or other interpreters' writings. In the interpretation of Gal. 3:11 "the just shall live by faith," Calvin recommended his readers to consult his *Commentary on Romans*. "As we had occasion to expound this passage where it occurs in the Epistle to the Romans, it will be unnecessary to repeat the exposition of it here (*quia locum hunc exposuimus in epistola ad Romanos, nunc repetere non erit*

²⁶ *Comm. on 1 Pet.* 4:6, p. 126. CO 55.274.

²⁷ *Comm. on 2 Cor.* 7:11, p. 275. CO 50.90. "Non disputabo sintne haec, quae Paulus enumerat, poenitentiae effectus, an partes, an praeparationes: quia id totum necesse non est ad intelligendam Pauli mentem. Tantum enim Corinthiorum poenitentiam probat a signis vel annexis."

opus quidquid ad eius expositionem pertinet)."²⁸ He disliked repeating the interpretation of the same content in different texts. For more study on a subject he suggested that the reader might consult his other commentaries. "If the reader desires more full information on this subject, he may consult what I have written on the conclusion of the Epistle to the Romans (*Plura ex fine epistolae ad Romanos petant lectores, si velint*)."²⁹ He also mentioned that some issues he would afterwards consider 'in the proper place' (*Rationem postea dicemus suo loco*).³⁰ Calvin often insisted that the readers considered his *Institutes* which was written as a guideline for understanding Scripture. "For a fuller solution, however, of this question, consult my *Institutes* (*Verum huius quaestionis solutio plenior ex Institutione nostra petatur*)."³¹ On doctrinal issues he liked to employ this method. For example, he stated, "As to the reward of works, consult my *Institutes* (*De operum mercede, lege Institutionem meam*)."³² On the doctrine of the rite of excommunication, Calvin suggested, "Should any one wish to have anything farther in reference to the rite of excommunication, its causes, necessity, purposes, and limitation, let him consult my *Institutes* (*De*

²⁸ *Comm. on Gal. 3:11*, p. 90. CO 50.208.

²⁹ *Comm. on Gal. 4:4*, p. 118. CO 50.226.

³⁰ *Comm. on Gal. 4:1*, p. 117. CO 50.226.

³¹ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 4:17*, p. 214. CO 50.59.

³² *Comm. on 1 Cor. 3:9*, p. 132. CO 49.352.

excommunicationis ritu, causis, necessitate, finibus, moderatione si quis habere plura volet, petat ex Institutione nostra).³³ He especially applied this principle when he criticized the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church. On the doctrine of the authority of the Pope as the successor of Peter Calvin said: "This, however, is not the place to treat of these points. Consult my *Institutes (Sed iis tractandis non est hic locus: legatur Institutio nostra)*."³⁴ The fact that he did not combine his interpretation with doctrinal explanation gave a certain objectivity to his hermeneutical method in the interpretation of Scripture. In order to avoid repetition of the same interpretation in different passages, Calvin proposed that the readers should consider the explanation of other interpreters. Although Calvin did not entirely follow Augustine's method of interpretation, he still consulted Augustine's writings on matters of doctrine and issues of the Christian life.³⁵ For example, he recommended his readers to consult Augustine's *On the Advantage of Marriage*.³⁶ On the

³³ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 5:5*, p. 186. CO 49.381.

³⁴ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 9:5*, p. 292. CO 49.440.

³⁵ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 5:5*, p. 185. CO 49.381. "*Est enim apta loquutio tradere Satanae pro excommunicare: quia sicut in ecclesi regnat Christus, ita Satan extra ecclesiam: quemadmodum etiam annotavit Augustinus, sermone De verbis apostoli 68, ubi locum hunc exponit.*"

³⁶ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 7:6*, p. 231. CO 49.405-6. "*Sed contra etiam contendo, quidquid est vitii aut turpitudinis sic tegi coniugii honestate, ut vitium esse desinat, vel saltem desinat a Deo imputari. Quemadmodum eleganter disserit Augustinus in libro de bono coniugii, et alibi saepe.*"

teaching method of teachers, Calvin suggested his readers to read Augustine's 98th homily on John.³⁷ Calvin suggested that his readers should consult the writings of Augustine in order to understand easily the truth of Christianity.

C. Retention

Calvin did not want to change the original text, but rather to retain it as he interpreted. He thought that inserting anything into the passage was neither natural nor simple. Calvin rejected Erasmus' interpretation of texts by the insertion of words, prepositions, or anything else. Calvin had various reasons preferring retention to insertion. First, he thought that inserting something into the original text for purposes of interpretation led to forced interpretations.

I acknowledge, indeed, that it is sometimes employed in this sense, but never in the construction that Paul has here made use of, for the idea of Erasmus, as to supplying a preposition, is exceedingly forced. On the other hand, the meaning that I adopt is easy, and has nothing of intricacy.³⁸

Here Calvin correctly pointed out that Erasmus' insertion did not provide the simplest and easiest interpretation of the

³⁷ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 3:2*, 122. CO 49.347. "*Sed nihilo minus quidquid cognitu necessarium est continebunt haec rudimenta quam absolutior doctrina, quae robustioribus traditur. Qua de re lege Homiliam Augustini in Iohan. 98.*"

³⁸ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 10:16*, p. 334. CO 49.464. "*Fateor quidem interdum hoc sensu poni: sed nunquam in ea constructione qua hic usus est Paulus. Nam quod Erasmus praepositionem subaudit, nimis est coactum, Sensus autem, quem sequor, facilis est, nec quidquam habet implicitum.*"

text. The second reason for resisting such insertion was that the meaning of the changed passage was often not natural.

What Erasmus has followed among the various readings I know not; but he has mutilated this sentence, which, in Paul's words, is complete; and in stead of the relative article he had improperly introduced *alius* - one, "One indeed believes." That I take the infinitive for an imperative, ought not to appear unnatural nor strained, for it is a mode of speaking very usual with Paul.³⁹

Calvin wanted to interpret the meaning of the passage in a unstrained manner. Thirdly, Calvin noted that the meaning of a text became ambiguous when words were inserted "*Itaque non prorsus male Erasmus probandi verbum posuit: sed quia ambiguum esse poterat. Verbum intelligendi retinere malui.*"⁴⁰ Calvin tried to find the true meaning of a passage without supplying the words. The reason why he liked to retain the original text itself was that he believed that retention was the suitable method for understanding the real sense of the author of Scripture. Whenever he interpreted a difficult passage, Calvin respected the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*). That Calvin always tried to follow the intention of the author in the context of the passage was one of the great contributions of his hermeneutics. Calvin rejected Erasmus' insertion of extra words into the original text because, in

³⁹ *Comm. on Rom. 14:2*, p. 493. CO 49.258. "In diversa lectione quid sequutus fuerit Erasmus, non video. Mutilam enim sententiam reddidit, quum plena sit in verbis Pauli: et pro articulo relativo improprie posuit alius quidem credit. Nec illud asperum aut coactum videri debet, quod infinitivum pro imperativo accipio: quoniam ista loquendi formula Paulo usitatissima est."

⁴⁰ CO 49.130. Cf. *Comm. on Rom. 7:15*, p. 264.

his view, it departed from the author's original meaning (*apostoli mentem*). "But I have retained the words of Paul; for bolder than what is meant is the version of Erasmus: Until the sons of God shall be manifest; nor does it sufficiently express the meaning of the Apostle."⁴¹ He certainly believed that retention revealed the true meaning of a passage. For example, he said,

It has not escaped my notice, that the phrase, *eis auton*, to him, is sometimes taken for *en autō*, in or by him, but improperly: and as its proper meaning is more suitable to the present subject, it is better to retain it, than to adopt that which is improper.⁴²

He maintained that in many cases Erasmus did not give the reader a suitable rendering. In the interpretation of Rom. 15:30 "that ye strive together with me" Calvin rejected Erasmus' rendering because he preferred to give a literal rendering."⁴³

D. Respect for the Context

⁴¹ *Comm. on Rom. 8:19*, p. 303. CO 49.152. "*Retinui autem Pauli verba, quia mihi audacior quam par sit visa est Erasmi versio: donec palam fiant filii Dei: neque tamen satis exprimere apostoli mentem.*"

⁴² *Comm. on Rom. 11:36*, p. 448. CO 49.232. "*Non me fugit particulam **eis auton**, pro **en autō** interdum accipi, sed abusive. Quum autem proprius significatus magis praesenti argumento quadret, eum retinere praestat quam ad improprietatem confugere.*"

⁴³ *Comm. on Rom. 15:30*, p. 539. CO 49.282. "*Erasmus non male reddidit: ut laborantem adiuvetis: sed quia loquutio graeca Pauli plus habet energiae, reddere ad verbum eam malui.*" Cf. *Comm. on Rom. 1:14, 6:11, 7:21, 8:2.*

Calvin limited the scope of his interpretation on issues related to the passages of Scripture. He tried not to depart from the central message of a text and to wander outside the key point of the subject. Whenever he felt that he was dealing with an issue not directly related to a passage, Calvin attempted to return to the key point of the text. Calvin pointed out that other interpreters often departed from the text of Scripture. His *Commentary on Gal. 1:10* is a case in point.

Others interpret the words "God" and "men," as meaning divine and human concerns. This sense would agree very well with the context, if it were not too wide a departure from the words. The view which I have preferred is more natural.⁴⁴

Calvin understood that an interpretation departing from the passage was not in accordance with the context. One of the reasons why Calvin rejected Erasmus' interpretation was that he ignored the context. "For so I understand the words, rather than in the sense given them by Erasmus, who thus renders them, 'Let no one think proudly of himself'; for this sense is somewhat remote from the words, and the other is more accordant with the context."⁴⁵ He tried not to depart from the

⁴⁴ *Comm. on Gal. 1:10*, p. 35. CO 50.175. "*Alii Deum et homines pro divinis et humanis accipiunt. Qui sensus admodum bene quadraret, nisi esset aliquanto a verbis remotior. Eum itaque sequi malui, qui minus erat coactus.*"

⁴⁵ *Comm. on Rom. 12:3*, p. 456. CO 49.236. "*Sic enim intelligere malo quam secundum quod Erasmus vertit: Ne quis superbe de se sentiat: quia et hic sensus est aliquanto a verbis remotior, et ille melius quadrat orationis contextui.*"

common rendering when he was not constrained to do so.⁴⁶ He often criticized the interpretation of Origen for departing from the relevant subject.⁴⁷ He often emphasized that an interpreter should deal in a text only with the subject at hand. He also tried not to sacrifice a particular passage to be subservient to another one. For example, in commenting the verb 'blind' in 2 Cor. 4:4, he clearly expressed that he was not departing from the present passage. He said,

With respect to the passage before us (*quod ad praesentem locum spectat*), the blinding is a work common to God and to Satan, for it is in many instances ascribed to God; but the power is not alike, nor is the manner the same. . . . Scripture, however, teaches that Satan blinds men, not merely with God's permission, but even by his command, that he may execute his vengeance.⁴⁸

He intended to interpret the present passage in its own context.

E. Simplicity

The most important element of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* is the simplicity of the interpretation of

⁴⁶ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 3:2*, p. 167. Cf. CO 50.37.

⁴⁷ *Comm. on Rom. 7:14*, p. 260. CO 49.128. "*Illa autem Origenis expositio, quae tamen ante hoc tempus multis arrisit, indigna est quae refutetur. Legem spiritualem a Paulo vocatam dicit, quia non sit literaliter intelligenda scriptura. Quid istud ad causam praesentem?*"

⁴⁸ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 4:4*, p. 195. Cf. CO 50.51. Here he showed that he handled the issue of the passage after discussing the opinion of Hilary, Chrysostom, and Augustine on Satan. *Ibid*, pp. 192-195.

Scripture. As Calvin had already suggested in the dedication of his *Commentary on Romans*, the purpose of simplicity was to let the readers easily understand the intention of the author.

The emphasis on simplicity was a reaction against ambiguity, perversion, and conjecture. Calvin showed simplicity in his commentaries. For example, on Rom. 2:24, "for the name of God", he said:

But some think that it is a proof from the less to the greater, according to this import, "Since the Prophet upbraided, not without cause, the Jews of his time, that on account of their captivity, the glory and power of God were ridiculed among the Gentiles, as though he could not have preserved the people, whom he had taken under his protection, much more are ye a disgrace and dishonour to God, whose religion, being judged of by your wicked life, is blasphemed." This view I do not reject, but I prefer a simpler one, such as the following.⁴⁹

Although he did not reject others' interpretation of this phrase, Calvin wanted a simple explanation. He thought that his intervention in others' interpretation often made his readers be confused. That increased ambiguity. He, therefore, stressed the simplicity of expression in the interpretation of a text. In the interpretation of Rom. 6:5 "for if we have been ingrafted" Calvin said,

But the words admit of a twofold explanation, - either that we are ingrafted in Christ into the likeness of his

⁴⁹ *Comm. on Rom. 2:24*, p. 107. CO 49.43. "Putant autem quidam esse argumentum a minori ad maius, in hunc sensum: Si aetatis suae Iudaeos non abs re increpuit propheta, quod propter eorum captivitatem haberetur Iudibrio inter gentes Dei gloria et potentia, ac si populum, quem in protectionem suam susceperat, non potuisset conservare: multo magis estis Dei probra et dehonesta, ex quorum pessimis moribus aestimata eius religio male audit. Quam sententiam ut non refello, ita simpliciores malo."

death, or, that we are simply ingrafted in its likeness. The first reading would require the Greek dative *homoioumati* to be understood as pointing out the manner; nor do I deny but that it has a fuller meaning, I have preferred it; though it signifies but little, as both come to the same meaning: but as the other harmonizes more with simplicity of expression, I have preferred it.⁵⁰

He argued that the plain and simple sense of the text of Scripture always agreed well with the author's intention, without perverting it.⁵¹ In the interpretation of Gal. 2:6 "Whatsoever they were" Calvin did not agree with the interpretations of Chrysostom and Jerome, but rather provided a simpler explanation.

Chrysostom and Jerome take a harsher view of the words, as an indirect threatening of the most distinguished apostles. Whatsoever they may be, if they swerve from duty, they shall not escape the judgment of God; neither the dignity of their office, nor the estimation of men, shall protect them. But another interpretation appears to me more simple, and more agreeable to Paul's design.⁵²

Calvin explained that the purpose of simplicity was for

⁵⁰ *Comm. on Rom. 6:5, p. 223. CO 49.106-7. "Caeterum bifariam exponi possunt verba, vel nos Christo insitos esse in similitudinem mortis eius: vel simpliciter insitos esse similitudini. Prior lectio posceret dativum graecum homioīmati ad modum notandum referri. Nec illam infitior habere pleniorē sensum: sed quoniam altera magis quadrat simplicitati dictionis, eam praeferre visum est."*

⁵¹ *Comm. on Isa. 44:4, p. 361. CO 37.107. "Haec quidem doctrina deduci ac fusius tractari potest: sed prius exprimenda est mens prophetae, atque simplex et genuinus sensus patefaciendus est."*

⁵² *Comm. on Gal. 2:6, p. 54. CO 50.186. "Chrysostomus et Hieronymus durius accipiunt: quasi oblique minetur etiam primis apostolis, in hunc sensum: qualescunque sint, non effugient Dei iudicium, si declinent ab officio: non liberabit eos vel officii dignitas, vel hominum existimatio. Mihi haec expositio simplicior videtur et magis consentanea menti Paulinae."*

the readers to understand the true meaning of the text easily.

For as to Ambrose's qualifying the statement in this way - You not only read, but also acknowledge, there is no one that does not perceive that it is quite foreign to the import of the words. And the meaning that I have stated is plain, and hangs together naturally, and up to this point, there is nothing to prevent readers from understanding it, were it not that they have had their eyes shut, from being misled by the different meanings of the word.⁵³

Calvin believed that the ambiguity of the words of a passage often made an interpreter misinterpret the true meaning. He maintained that only the principle of simplicity could solve this problem.⁵⁴

F. Suitability

The criterion of suitability is related to the intention of the author, the historical situation, the grammatical construction, and the context of a particular text. Calvin insisted that the interpretation of a passage should suit the mind of the author. This reference to Erasmus in his *Commentary on 2 Cor. 1:6* is a case in point. Calvin wrote, "Erasmus takes the participle *energoumenes* in an active sense,

⁵³ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 1:13*, p. 128. CO 50.18. "*Nam quod Ambrosius ita mitigat, non modo legitis, sed etiam agnoscitis: nemo est qui non videat a verbis esse omnino alienum. Sensus autem, quem afferro, planus est, ac sponte fluit: neque alia ratio hactenus impedivit lectores quominus ipsum perciperent, quam quod diversa verbi significatione decepti clausos oculos habuerunt.*"

⁵⁴ Cf. *Comm. on Rom. 6:9, 7:17, 8:26, Comm. on 1 Cor. 6:16, 9:8, 10:16, 11:22, Comm. on 2 Cor. 1:20, 8:4, Comm. on Gal. 1:7, 2:19, 3:2.*

but a passive signification is more suitable, as Paul designed simply to explain in which respect everything that befell him was for their salvation."⁵⁵ The chief aim of an interpreter is to seek the intention of the author. In doing so the interpretation of a text will be appropriately executed. In the interpretation of Is. 26:21 "For, behold, Jehovah cometh out of his place." Calvin stated, "This meaning is more appropriate than if we were to interpret God's place to mean heaven, from which he 'cometh forth'; for Isaiah intended to express something more. When the prophets mention heaven, they exhibit to us the majesty and glory of God; but here he refers to our senses, that is, when we see that God, who formerly appeared to remain concealed and to be at rest, gives us assistance."⁵⁶

Calvin argued that a suitable interpretation was one that agreed with the historical method of interpretation. In the interpretation of Da. 2:1, for example, "And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, where with his spirit was troubled, and his sleep

⁵⁵ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 1:6*, p. 116. CO 50.13. "*Erasmus active accepit participium energoumenes sed melius quadrat passiva significatio: quia nihil aliud voluit hic Paulus quam explicare qualiter pro eorum salute omnia sibi eveniant.*"

⁵⁶ *Comm. on Isa. 26:21*, p. 243. CO 36.446. "*Atque hic sensus aptior est, quam si locum Dei interpretemur Coelum, ex quo egredietur: nam plus quiddam exprimere voluit Isaias. Quum enim coelos nominant prophetae maiestatem Dei et gloriam nobis proponunt: hic vero ad sensus nostros respicit, quum scilicet Deum nobis auxilium ferre percipimus, qui antea latere et quiescere videbatur.*"

brake (break) from him", Calvin used the historical approach for a suitable interpretation.

Nebuchadnezzar reigned before the death of his father, because he had already been united with him in the supreme power; then he reigned alone, and the present narrative happened in the second year of his reign. In this explanation there is nothing forced, and as history agrees with it, I adopt it as the best.⁵⁷

He stressed that to find out the most suitable sense of a text we must consider the condition of the history of the Jews.

Almost all agree in this sense; but when I weigh the Prophet's intention more accurately, I cannot subscribe to it: because God seems to me to confirm what he had said before, that he would be a just avenger of wickedness while he treats the Jews so harshly. To discover the most suitable sense, we must consider the condition of the exiles.⁵⁸

He also argued that the interpretation of the text should be suitable to the grammatical construction.⁵⁹ In the interpretation of Ps. 12:4 "Those who have said we will be strengthened by our tongues; our lips are in our own power: who is lord over us?" Calvin indicated that the reading of the text should agree with the rules of grammar.

⁵⁷ *Comm. on Da. 2:1*, p. 116. CO 40.557. "*In hoc igitur nihil est absurdum, Nebuchadnezer regnasse ante mortem patris, quia iam accitus fuerat in societatem imperii: deinde regnasse solum: et secundo anno regni eius hoc contigisse quod nunc narratur. Nihil in hac expositione est coactum: deinde historia consentit.*"

⁵⁸ *Comm. on Eze. 14:21-22*, p. 81. CO 40.325. "*Hic sensus fere omnibus placet. Ego tamen dum propius expendo consilium prophetae, non possum subscribere: quia videtur potius Deus hic confirmare quod ante dixit, se iustum esse vindicem scelerum, dum ita duriter agit contra Judaeos. Quo res magis liqueat, videndum est qualis fuerit exsulum conditio.*"

⁵⁹ *Comm. on Da. 4:27*, p. 278. CO 40.673.

Some read, we will strengthen our tongues. This reading is passable, in so far as the sense is concerned, but it scarcely agrees with the rules of grammar, because the letter *lamed*, is added. Moreover, the sense which is more suitable is this: that the wicked persons spoken of being armed with their tongues, go beyond all bounds, and think they can accomplish by this means whatever they please; just as this set of men so deform everything with their calumnies, that they would almost cover the sun himself with darkness.⁶⁰

Calvin maintained that interpretation should be suitable to the language of the particular Apostle (*cui interpretationi bene suffragatur apostoli phrasis*).⁶¹ Calvin confirmed that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* appeared in the style of writing of the authors of Scripture. In the interpretation of Is. 47:3 "I will take vengeance, and will not meet (thee) a man," Calvin argued that the interpretation of the text should be "more agreeable to the original text".⁶²

Calvin emphasized that the interpretation of the text should be suitable to the context of the passage and the author's context. In the interpretation of 1 Cor. 2:13 "spiritual things with spiritual" Calvin argued that the sense of the word of the text should be suitable to the author's context. "*Sugkrinesthai* is used here, I have no doubt, in the sense of adapt. This is sometimes the meaning of the word, (as Budaeus shows by a quotation from Aristotle), and hence *sugkrima* is used to mean what is knit together or glued

⁶⁰ *Comm. on Ps. 12:3-4*, p. 174. CO 31.127-8.

⁶¹ *Comm. on Rom. 1:4*, p. 46. CO 49.10.

⁶² *Comm. on Isa. 47:3*, p. 452. Cf. CO 37.166.

together, and certainly it suits much better with Paul's context than *compare* or *liken*, as others have rendered it."⁶³ Calvin never accepted an interpretation which was adverse to the author's context. This was one of the most valuable contributions Calvin made in the interpretation of difficult passages. Calvin regarded the contextual interpretation as the simple (*simplicius*) sense of the text.⁶⁴ Calvin interpreted a text from the perspective of the whole text (*totum contextum*) of Scripture. In the interpretation of the time of the Messiah in Jer. 30:4-5, Calvin pointed out that both Jews and Christians perverted this passage, for they applied it to the time of the Messiah. He, in turn, showed the real meaning of the Prophets: "They consider this as a prophecy referring to the time of the Messiah; but were any one wisely to view the whole context, he would readily agree with me that the Prophet includes here the sum of the doctrine which the people had previously heard from his mouth."⁶⁵ In the interpretation of Ps. 119:8 "I will observe thy statutes" Calvin also used the

⁶³ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 2:13*, p. 114. CO 49.343. "**Sugkrinesthai** hic pro aptare positum non dubito. Quum enim haec interdum sit verbi significatio, sicut Budaeus ex Aistotele citat: unde et **sugkrima**, pro conserto vel coagmentato: longe certe melius quadrat Pauli contextui quam comparare vel conferre, sicut alii reddiderunt."

⁶⁴ *Comm. on Jer. 16:16*, p. 326. Cf. CO 38.251.

⁶⁵ *Comm. on Jer. 30:4-5*. 8. CO 38.614. "Referunt omnes hoc vaticinium ad tempus Messiae: sed si quis prudenter expendat totum contextum, facile mihi subscribet, prophetam scilicet complecti summam eius doctrinae, quam pridem populus ex eius ore audierat." Cf. *Comm. on Lev. 2:20*.

contextual interpretation. "The term forsake is susceptible of two interpretations, either that God withdraws his Spirit, or that he permits his people to be brought low by adversity, as if he had forsaken them. The latter interpretation agrees best with the context, and is most in accordance with the phrase immediately subjoined, very far."⁶⁶

G. Freedom

A unique feature of Calvin's hermeneutic is freedom. This does not mean that an interpreter freely deals with the text without the influence of hermeneutical presuppositions. Rather this means that if there were many interpretations of a text, Calvin did not force his readers to accept his view only, but gave them freedom to choose the interpretation which they preferred.

Calvin frequently used the expression 'Let every person adopt his own opinion' or 'I leave the interpretation of the text to my readers' in his commentaries. This principle protected Calvin from one-sidedness in the interpretation of texts because it acknowledged his limits and lack of understanding.

Calvin knew that the ambiguity of the words and some

⁶⁶ *Comm. on Ps. 119:8*, p. 406. CO 32.217. "*Quanquam istud relinquere bifariam exponi potest: vel quum spiritum suum Deus subducit: vel quum perinde rebus adversis affligi suos patitur ac si ab illis remotus foret. Atque haec posterior expositio melius convenit, propter particulam mox additam usque valde.*"

degree of obscurity in the author's words caused many interpreters to give the readers several interpretations and caused confusion in understanding the meaning of the passage. Even in the cases Calvin suggested that his readers choose one correct interpretation, while offering a few perspectives. First, Calvin let the readers choose the unforced and suitable interpretation if there were many arguments on the interpretation of a difficult and ambiguous text. Calvin, for example, respected the freedom of the readers in the interpretation of 2 Cor. 4:6 "God who commanded light to shine out of darkness." "I see that this passage may be explained in four different ways. In the first place thus: 'God has commanded light to shine forth out of darkness: that is, by the ministry of men, who are in their own nature darkness, He has brought forward the light of His Gospel into the World.' Secondly, thus. . . . The third exposition is that of Ambrose. . . . The fourth is that of Chrysostom. . . . This transition, from light that is visible and corporeal to what is spiritual, has more of elegance, and there is nothing forced in it. The preceding one, however, is not unsuitable. Let every one follow his own judgment."⁶⁷ Here Calvin left the readers to

⁶⁷ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 4:6*, pp. 199-200. CO 50.52-3.

"Video hunc locum quadrifariam posse exponi. Primo sic: Deus iussit lucem e tenebris splendescere: id est, hominum ministerio, qui suapte natura tenebrae sunt, lucem evangelii sui mundo protulit. Secundo sic. . . . Sequitur tertia, quae est Ambrosii. . . . Quarta est Chrysostomi. . . . Haec anagoge lucis visibilis et corporeae ad spiritualem plus habet gratiae, et in ea nihil est coactum. Proxima tamen non male quadrat. Fruatur quisque suo iudicio."

select one of four interpretations, without forcing them. However he hinted that the true meaning of the passage was the most suitable and unforced one. In other words, Calvin suggested that his readers should choose the interpretation expressing the most suitable meaning. In the interpretation of 2 Cor. 4:17, he showed the same respect for the freedom of the readers;

There is some degree of obscurity in Paul's words, for as he says, with hyperbole unto hyperbole, so the Old Interpreter, and Erasmus, have thought that in both terms the magnitude of the heavenly glory, that awaits believers is extolled; or, at least, they have connected them with the verb worketh out. To this I have no objection, but as the distinction that I have made is also not unsuitable, I leave it to my readers to make their choice.⁶⁸

In the cases where many interpretations of a text were possible Calvin often considered the common rendering as a proper interpretation. He, however, did not compel the readers to take his view. In the passage "which is known and read" in 2 Cor. 3:2 Calvin said:

It might also read - "Which is known and acknowledged," owing to the ambiguity of the word *anaginōskethe*, and I do not know but that the latter might be more suitable. I was unwilling, however, to depart from the common rendering, when not constrained to do so. Only let the reader have this brought before his view, that he may consider which of the two renderings is the preferable

⁶⁸ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 4:17, p. 212-3. CO 50.59. "In Pauli verbis aliqua est obscuritas: quia enim dicit, secundum hyperbolen in hyperbolen, tam vetus interpres quam Erasmus utraque particula extolli putarunt magnitudinem coelestis gloriae, quae fideles manet: vel certe retulerunt ad verbum operatur: quod mihi non displicet: sed quia apte etiam convenit distinctio quam posui, libera sit optio lectoribus."*

one.⁶⁹

Calvin often did not accept the overstrained interpretation of other interpreters, yet neither did he force the readers to follow his opinion. With reference to Gal. 6:14 he, therefore, remarked, "Some take his meaning to be, 'If the world looks upon me as abhorred and excommunicated, I consider the world to be condemned and accursed.' This appears to me to be overstrained, but I leave my readers to judge."⁷⁰ Here we can see Calvin's humility in his Scriptural hermeneutics.

Calvin suggested that his readers ensure that the interpretation of the text should agree to the general scope of a passage. In his *Commentary on Psalm 49:19* he, therefore, said, "As either interpretation, however, agrees with the general scope of the Psalm, the reader may choose for himself."⁷¹ He also implied that his readers should select the interpretation of a text which agrees with "the scope of the

⁶⁹ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 3:2*, p. 167. CO 50.37. "Posset etiam legi, quae cognoscitur et agnoscitur, propter dubiam significationem verbi *anaginōsesthai*: et nescio annon melius conveniret. Nolui tamen discedere a recepta translatione, nisi coactus. Tantum admonitus sit lector ut consideret utrum sit melius."

⁷⁰ *Comm. on Gal. 6:14*, p. 185. CO 50.266. "Nam quod quidam exponunt: si mundus me anathema et catharma reputat, ego vicissim illum damno et exsecrationi habeo: mihi videtur esse paulo remotius a mente Pauli. Iudicium tamen erit penes lectores."

⁷¹ *Comm. on Ps. 49:19*, p. 255. CO 31.493.

passage."⁷² Scripture as simply as possible.

Calvin argued that the interpretation of a text became ambiguous because of the original text, the antiquity of the text, the wrong rendering of words,

H. Avoidance of Ambiguity

Calvin tried to avoid ambiguous interpretations because his readers required simple and clear explanations of Scripture. He believed that vague interpretations did not present the true sense of the passages of Scripture, but rather confused the readers. Thus for Calvin the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* were always employed against ambiguity. In the interpretation of Rom. 8:23, "Who have the beginnings", for example, Calvin avoided ambiguity.

Some render the word first fruits, (*primitias*) and as meaning a rare and uncommon excellency; but of this view I by no means approve. To avoid, therefore, any ambiguity, I have rendered the word beginnings, (*primordia*, the elements) for I do not apply the expression as they do, to the Apostles only, but to all the faithful who in this world are besprinkled only with a few drops by the Spirit, and indeed when they make the greatest proficiency, being endued with a considerable measure of it, they are still far off from perfection."⁷³

For him to avoid any ambiguity meant that he needed to clarify the meaning of the passage for the common readers to

⁷² *Comm. on Isa. 7:6*, p. 234. CO 36.148. "*Etsi autem illam interpretationem non refello, hanc tamen sequi malo, quia contextui melius quadrat.*"

⁷³ *Comm. on Rom. 8:23*, p. 308. CO 49.154. "*Quod alii primitias interpretantur raram et eximiam praestantiam, mihi nullo modo placet: ideoque ad vitandam ambiguitatem vertere liceret primordia. Non enim de solis apostolis, quemadmodum illi, dictum accipio: sed de universis fidelibus, qui in hoc mundo guttulis duntaxat spiritus aspersi, vel certe, quum optime profecerunt, certa eius mensura praediti, a complemento adhuc non parum absunt.*"

understand Scripture as simply as possible.

Calvin argued that the interpretation of a text became ambiguous because of the very brief expression of the original text, the ambiguity of the text, the wrong rendering of words, and departure from the author's meaning.

Although Calvin liked brevity of interpretation, he did not maintain entirely that brevity only could be the best interpretation of a text. He thought that a very short expression without enough explanation made the true meaning of God's infinite truth difficult for finite men to comprehend. He stated that brevity of expression in the original text could cause the interpretation of the passage to be ambiguous. "Brevity of expression renders this sentence obscure or ambiguous (*Brevitas verborum facit, ut obscura vel ambigua sit sententia*)."⁷⁴ Of course Calvin's description does not mean that he rejected the clarity of Scripture. In the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 3:2 "All have not faith." Calvin argued that the mode of expression was the cause of the ambiguity. "This might be explained to mean, 'Faith is not in all.' This expression is, however, ambiguous and more obscure (*Posset ita resolvi: non in omnibus est fides. Verum haec loquutio et ambigua et magis obscura foret*)."⁷⁵ Calvin, however, rejected it if an interpreter made a mistake to offer an ambiguous interpretation. Calvin, for example, criticized

⁷⁴ *Comm. on Jer.* 46:16, p. 589. CO 39.294.

⁷⁵ *Comm. on 2 Th.* 3:2, p. 348. CO 52.209.

Erasmus for obscuring Paul's meaning rather than clarifying it. In the passage "Now these things were type to us" in Cor. 10:6 he stated, "Of the term *type* I shall speak presently. Only for the present I should wish my readers to know, that it is not without consideration that I have given a different rendering from that of the old translation (the Vulgate), and of Erasmus. For they obscure Paul's meaning, or at least they do not bring out with sufficient clearness this idea - that God has in that people presented a picture for our instruction."⁷⁶ He also attacked Erasmus, for obscuring Paul's doctrine (*doctrinam Pauli obscurat*),⁷⁷ and not avoiding ambiguity.⁷⁸ Calvin sometimes rejected Erasmus' rendering because it provided an ambiguous interpretation. With reference to the passage "wisdom will perish from the wise" in 1 Cor. 1:19, he pointed out the incorrect rendering of the word: "As to the second term *athetein*, (which Erasmus renders 'reject') as it is ambiguous, and is sometimes taken to mean efface, or expunge, or obliterate, I prefer to understand it in this sense here, so as to correspond with the Prophet's

⁷⁶ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 10:6*, p. 322-3. CO 49.456-7. "De vocabulo *typi* mox dicemus: nisi quod in praesentia monitos velim lectores, non temere me tam ab antiqui interpretis quam ab Erasmi versione discessisse. Obscurant enim Pauli mentem, vel saltem non clare exprimunt, Deum in illo populo delineasse quod nos erudiat."

⁷⁷ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 7:31*, p. 258. CO 49.421.

⁷⁸ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 11:25*, p. 382. CO 49.489. "Nolui autem cum Erasmo vertere coena peracta: quia in re tanti ponderis vitanda fuit ambiguitas."

word vanish or be hid."⁷⁹

Calvin tried to avoid ambiguity by following certain rules. He used the grammatical approach in order to remove ambiguity.⁸⁰ By understanding a proposition clearly, he avoided obscurity. His *Commentary on Jer. 2:2* is a case in point:

Some render the words, "I remember the piety or kindness of thy youth;" and *lak* may be thus taken, as it is in other places. Others omit this word; while others consider a copulative to be understood, I remember thee, and the kindness of thy youth." But none, as I think, have attained to the meaning of the Prophet: there is yet no obscurity in the words, if a preposition be considered as being understood, so as to read thus, - that God remembered his people for the kindness which he had shewn to them, and for the love which he had manifested towards them from the beginning.⁸¹

He showed that ambiguity could be removed by taking into account the immediate context of a passage. "But the Prophet removes all ambiguity by the words which immediately follow in the second clause (*Sed videtur etiam tolli omnis ambiguitas*

⁷⁹ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 1:19*, p. 79. CO 49.323. "*Secundum verbum athetein, quod Erasmus vertit reicere, quum ambiguum habeat significationem et aliquando sumatur pro delere, vel expungere, aut obliterare: in hoc sensu accipere hic malo, ut respondeat verbo prophetae, evanescere aut abscondi.*" Cf. *Comm. on Mal. 2:13*, p. 550.

⁸⁰ *Comm. on Jer. 2:21*, p. 112. CO 37.521.

⁸¹ *Comm. on Jer. 2:2*, p. 69. CO 37.496. "*Vertunt quidam, Recordatus sum pietatis, vel misericordiae adolescentiae tuae, et Lak ita posset resolvi, sicuti quibusdam aliis locis. Alii autem omittunt particulam Lak: alii vero subaudiunt copulam, Recordatus sum tui et misericordiae. Nullus autem, meo iudicio, assequutus est prophetae mentem, quum tamen nulla sit obscuritas in verbis, si subaudiatur particula, quod scilicet Deus recordetur populi sui, propter misericordiam qua ipsum complexus est, propter misericordiam qua ipsum complexus est propter amorem quo prosequutus est eum ab initio.*"

prophetae verbis: paulo post in secundo membro addit)."⁸²

Calvin's strategy for removing ambiguity was to consider the main subject of a passage. Calvin thought that digression from the central subject led the readers away from the text. "Let us now see what the Prophet means. With regard to the passage, as I have said, there is not ambiguity, provided we bear in mind the main subject (*Iam videndum est quid velit propheta: quod ad verba spectat, nulla est, ut dixi, ambiguitas, modo teneamus summam rei*)."⁸³ Calvin maintained that avoiding argument could remove ambiguity. "Let contention be avoided, and there will be nothing of obscurity (*Facessant contentiones, et nihil erit obscuri*)."⁸⁴ In order to avoid ambiguity, Calvin suggested that the interpretation of a passage should correspond with the author's word.⁸⁵

I. Avoidance of Forced Interpretation

Calvin avoided forcing or twisting a text, but tried to seek out the true meaning of a passage. Calvin identified a number of causes for forced interpretation. The first was the harsh attacks which the Church Fathers launched against early church heresies. Calvin clearly explained that the incorrect

⁸² *Comm. on Jer.* 13:16, p. 178. CO 38.164.

⁸³ *Comm. on Mic.* 7:11-2, p. 385. CO 43.420.

⁸⁴ *Comm. on 1 Cor.* 10:16, p. 335. CO 49.464.

⁸⁵ *Comm. on 1 Cor.* 1:19, p. 79. CO 49.323.

interpretations of the Fathers often resulted from their resistance to the doctrines of heresy. In the passage "whose minds the god of this world" in 2 Cor. 4:4, Calvin pointed out that the Fathers had twisted the text:

He (Paul) intimates, that no account should be made of their perverse obstinacy. "They do not see," says he, "the sun at mid-day, because the devil has blinded their understandings." No one that judges rightly can have any doubt, that it is of Satan that the Apostle speaks. Hilary, as he had to do with Arians, who abused this passage, so as to make it a pretext for denying Christ's true divinity, while they at the same time confessed him to be God, twists the text in this way - "God hath blinded the understandings of this world." In this he was afterwards followed by Chrysostom, with the view of not conceding to the Manicheans their two first principles. What influenced Ambrose does not appear. Augustine had the same reasons as Chrysostom, having to contend with the Manicheans.⁸⁶

Calvin indicated that they had interpreted the texts from the perspective of the doctrines of their time. Another cause for forced interpretation was the attempt by the Roman Catholics to establish their doctrines. In the interpretation of the passage "But faith, which worketh by love" in Gal. 5:6, Calvin criticized them: "There would be no difficulty in this passage, were it not for the dishonest manner in which it has

⁸⁶ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 4:4, pp. 192-3. CO 50.50. "Significat quam nihili fieri debeat perversa illorum obstinatio. Non vident, inquit, solem in meridie, quia diabolus eorum sensus excaecavit. Quin de Satana loquatur apostolus, nemini recte iudicanti dubium esse potest. Hilarius, quia negotium habebat cum Arianis, qui hoc praetextu abutebantur, ut Christum confitendo Deum veram eius divinitatem negarent, sic contextum torquet: Deus excaecavit huius saeculi sensus. Id postea sequutus est Chrysostomus, ne Manichaeis duo principia concederet. Quid Ambrosium impulerit, non apparet. Augustino eadem ratio fuit, quae Chrysostomo: quia cum Manichaeis erat illi certamen."*

been tortured by the Papists to uphold the righteousness of works."⁸⁷ In the interpretation of Gal. 5:14, Calvin said:

The love which men naturally cherish toward themselves ought to regulate our love of our neighbour. All the doctors of the Sorbonne are in the habit of arguing that, as the rule is superior to what it directs, the love of ourselves must always hold the first rank. This is not to interpret, but to subvert our Lord's words.⁸⁸

A third cause for a forced interpretation of the Bible was the mistaken theological views of a text. In his *Institutes* Calvin refuted the Scholastic theologians who, in his view, twisted the meaning of the text for their purpose: "Now in that quarrel the marked shamelessness of the theologians is evident, who corrupted and forcibly twisted all the passages of Scripture they cited for their purpose."⁸⁹

Calvin often criticized Erasmus for perverting the true sense of a passage. Erasmus sometimes interpreted the text by rendering words differently, and changing the original text, rather than adhering to the words of Scripture themselves. As a result of that, he became one of the interpreters of

⁸⁷ *Comm. on Gal. 5:6*, p. 152. CO 50.246. "*Locus hic nihil habet difficultatis: nisi eum calumniose torquerent papistae ad iustitiam operum adstruendam.*"

⁸⁸ *Comm. on Gal. 5:14*, pp. 160-1. CO 50.251. "*quemadmodum quisque affectu carnis propensus est ad se amandum, ita nobis commendari a Deo amorem erga proximos. Evertunt enim, non interpretantur verba Domini, qui inde colligunt (ut faciunt omnes Sorbonici) amorem nostri semper ordine priorem esse: quia regulatum inferius sit sua regula.*"

⁸⁹ *Inst. 3.4.4*, p. 627. CO 2.458-9. "*In eo vero certamine insignis theologorum impudentia apparuit, qui tot locos scripturae depravarunt et vi detorserunt, quot in rem suam citabant.*"

Scripture whom Calvin often criticized. On Erasmus' insertion of the words into the text, in the passage "Neither let us tempt Christ: in 1 Cor. 10:9 Calvin remarked: "This is a remarkable passage in proof of the eternity of Christ; for the cavil of Erasmus has no force - "Let us not tempt Christ, as some of them tempted God;" for to supply the word God is extremely forced."⁹⁰ Against Erasmus' inserting a preposition into a passage, Calvin displayed the simplicity of his interpretation without forcing the meaning of the words. In the passage "the cup of blessing" in 1 Cor. 10:16, Calvin accused Erasmus of forcing the text: "I acknowledge, indeed, that it is sometimes employed in this sense, but never in the construction that Paul has here made use of, for the idea of Erasmus, as to supplying a preposition, is exceedingly forced. On the other hand, the meaning that I adopt is easy, and has nothing of intricacy."⁹¹ Calvin always thought that the principle of retention protected an interpreter from perverting the true meaning of the words. In the passage "I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians" in Rom. 1:14, Calvin said, "Those whom he means by the Greeks and

⁹⁰ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 10:9*, pp. 325-6. CO 49.459. "*Locus hic insignis est de aeternitate Christi: neque enim valet Erasmi cavillum, ne Christum tentemus, sicut quidam eorum tentaverunt Deum.*"

⁹¹ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 10:16*, p. 334. CO 49.464. "*Fateor quidem interdum hoc sensu poni: sed nunquam in ea constructione qua hic usus est Paulus. Nam quod Erasmus praepositionem subaudit, nimis est coactum. Sensus autem, quem sequor, facilis est, nec quidquam habet implicitum.*"

barbarians, he afterwards explains by adding, both to the wise and to the foolish; which words Erasmus has not rendered amiss by "learned and unlearned," (*eruditos et rudes*) but I prefer to retain the very words of Paul."⁹²

Calvin argued that the exposition of a text would be too strained if the context was not be considered.⁹³ In the interpretation of Ps. 94:15 "But judgment will return unto righteousness", Calvin emphasized the context of the passage. "The form of expression used by the Psalmist is a little obscure, and this has led some to read the first part of the verse, as if it contained two distinct clauses - justice will return at the end, and then, judgment would be fitted or conformed to justice."⁹⁴ Calvin stated that an interpreter could not interpret the text correctly if he perverted the meaning of the author: "though interpreters have tried to bring light, yet the effect has been to pervert the real meaning of the Prophet."⁹⁵ Calvin maintained that an

⁹² *Comm. on Rom. 1:14*, p. 60. CO 49.18. "*Quos per Graecos et Barbaros intelligat, ostendit exegesi: ubi nominat eosdem aliis epithetis sapientes et stultos: pro quibus non male vertit Erasmus, eruditos et rudes: sed ego ipsa Pauli verba retinere malui.*"

⁹³ *Comm. on Mic. 4:6*, p. 274. CO 43.353. "*Sed illa expositio nimis coacta est. Videmus etiam contextum repugnare. . .*"

⁹⁴ *Comm. on Ps. 94:15*, p. 24. CO 32.25. "*Quia phrasis prophetae nonnihil obscura est: disiunctim quidam haec duo legunt, Iustitia ad finem revertetur: postea, iudicium revertetur.*"

⁹⁵ *Comm. on Mal. 2:10*. pp. 541-2. CO 44.445. "*quum vellent interpretes lucem afferre, nihil aliud quam corrupta fuit genuina mens prophetae.*"

interpreter forced the text when he did not confine himself to a particular passage.⁹⁶ He himself, however, always tried to explain the relevant matter dealt with in such a passage.⁹⁷

Calvin recognized that an interpreter should use the grammatical method in order not to twist the text.⁹⁸ Although he was influenced by Chrysostom in his hermeneutics, Calvin did not approve of Chrysostom's twisting the text because of his disregard of the grammatical method. Calvin made this point in his *Commentary on 1 Cor. 12:28*: "As the Apostle is here enumerating offices, I do not approve of what Chrysostom says, that *antilepeis*, that is, *helps or aids*, consist in supporting the weak."⁹⁹

Calvin pointed out that the heretics, e.g. the Arians and Servetus had tortured the text in order to prove their doctrines. In the interpretation of Jn. 10:36 "Do you say that I blaspheme?" Calvin pointed out this problem: "The Arians anciently tortured this passage to prove that Christ is not God by nature, but that he possesses a kind of borrowed Divinity. But this error is easily refuted, for Christ does not now argue what he is in himself, but what we ought to

⁹⁶ *Comm. on Jer. 46:19*, pp. 592-3. CO 39.297. Cf. *Comm. on Ps. 8:1*, p. 93. CO 36.166.

⁹⁷ CO 10.403.

⁹⁸ *Comm. on Gen. 41:40*, p. 329. CO 23.525.

⁹⁹ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 12:28*, p. 416. CO 49.507. "*Quoniam hic officia recenset apostolus, non recipio quod ait Chrysostomus, antilepeis, hoc est, subsidia vel opitulationes, consistere in sustinendis infirmis.*"

acknowledge him to be, from his miracles in human flesh."¹⁰⁰

The reason why Calvin was not fond of perverting and wresting the words of a passage was that he wanted the readers to understand the true meaning of Scripture easily and simply. He did not willingly adopt interpretations which twisted the words. Rather he presented the readers with his interpretation, without forcing and perverting the passage of Scripture.¹⁰¹

J. Avoidance of Conjecture

Calvin avoided conjecture in the interpretation of a passage because it was not based on solid and sound argument,¹⁰² but rather started from incorrect thinking. Calvin demanded interpreters to remove speculations and adhere

¹⁰⁰ *Comm. on Jn. 10:36. p. 420. CO 47.253. "Torquebant hunc locum olim Ariani, ut Christum probarent non natura Deum esse, sed quasi precariam habere divinitatem. Sed facilis est huius erroris refutatio, quia non disputat hic Christus quis in se sit, sed qualis ex miraculis in carne humana agosci debeat."*

¹⁰¹ There are many places in which Calvin expressed opposition to forcing and twisting the true meaning of the text. See *Comm. on Rom. 3:4, 28, 9:17, 11:1, 33, 12:16, 18, 13:11, 14:22, Comm. on 1 Cor. 5:5, 7:33, 8:13, 15:10, 29, 10:10, 36, 11:10, 12:4, Comm. on 2 Cor. 1:10, 6:13, Comm. on Gal. 3:16, 6:13. Comm. on Gen. 4:7, 9:6, Comm. on Ex. 1:21, Comm. on Lev. 4:22, Comm. on Nu. 11:16. Comm. on Jos. 24:25, Comm. on Da. 7:13, Comm. on Hos. 1:2, Comm. on Am. 2:13, 6:4, Comm. on Na. 1:9, Comm. on Zec. 14:20, Comm. on Mal. 3:8, 16. In his *Commentary on Ps.* Calvin avoided forced interpretations approximately 80 times.*

¹⁰² *Comm. on Eze. 1:4, p. 63. CO 49.30.*

to simple doctrine (*hac ergo simplici doctrina contenti-
simus*).¹⁰³ He criticized Erasmus for frivolous conjectures.
For example, in the interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:32, Calvin
said, "Now by those that fought with beasts, are meant, not
those that were thrown to wild beasts, as Erasmus mistakingly
imagined, but those that were condemned to be set to fight
with wild beasts - to furnish an amusement to the people."¹⁰⁴
Calvin felt that Erasmus sometimes did not interpret the text
correctly because of frivolous conjectures. A further example
in this regard refers to Erasmus' view on Pentecost. "Erasmus
had preferred to render it - until the fiftieth day,
influenced by frivolous conjectures rather than by any solid
argument."¹⁰⁵ Calvin showed, in one case, that inserting the
principal verb into the original text caused Erasmus to
conjecture the true meaning of the passage.¹⁰⁶ While Erasmus
emphasized textual criticism more than the authority of the
original text of Scripture, Calvin stressed the original words
of the biblical text. Consequently, in Calvin's view, Erasmus'
interpretations smacked of subjectivity. Calvin aimed at

¹⁰³ *Comm on Rom. 8:21*, p. 305. CO 49.153.

¹⁰⁴ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 15:32*, p. 40. CO 49.553. "*Pugnabant autem ad bestias, non qui feris obiiciebantur, sicuti Erasmus falso existimavit: sed qui damnati erant, ut commissi in certamen cum bestiis populo spectaculum exhiberent.*"

¹⁰⁵ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 16:8*, p. 72. CO 49.568. "*Erasmus maluit usque ad diem quinquagesimum, frivolis coniecturis motus, magis quam ullo firmo argumento.*"

¹⁰⁶ *Comm. on Rom. 8:3*, p. 279. CO 49.138.

objectivity. The fact that Calvin regarded objectivity in the interpretation of Scripture as important should be highly praised.

Calvin pointed out that misguided conjectures often resulted from allegorical interpretation, and might be refuted by the author's words, and that an interpreter should try to seek out the genuine meaning of a text. A case in point can be found in his *Commentary on Eze. 16:10-13*.

Here the Prophet, in a metaphor, relates other benefits of God by which he liberally adorned his people; for we know that nothing has been omitted in God's pouring forth the riches of his goodness on the people. And as to the explanations which some give of these female ornaments allegorically, I do not approve of it, as they fruitlessly conjecture many trifles which are at variance with each other. First of all, their conjectures may be refuted by the Prophet's words: then, if we suffer the Prophet's words to be turned and twisted, what these allegorical interpretations chatter with each other is entirely contrary in their meaning. Let us, therefore, be content with the genuine sense.¹⁰⁷

Calvin pointed out the mistakes of many Rabbis, leaning on conjecture because they did not interpret the text simply. In the interpretation of Da. 5:8 "Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king the interpretation thereof", Calvin said: "Because

¹⁰⁷ *Comm. on Eze. 16:10-13*, p. 106. CO 40.343. "Hic propheta metaphorice commenorat alia Dei beneficia, quibus populum suum liberaliter ornavit. Scimus enim nihil prorsus fuisse omissum, quin Deus divitias suae bonitatis erga populum illum profunderet. Quod allegorice quidam ludunt in ornatu isto mulliebri, mihi non probatur: et futiliter etiam excogitant multas naenias, quae inter se confligunt. Primum argutiae facile possunt refelli ex prophetae verbis: deinde etiam si patiamur inflecti aut torqueri prophetae verba, tamen quod garriunt illi allegorici interpretes inter se, multis modis contrarium est. Contenti ergo simus genuino sensu."

this seems absurd, many Rabbis have hazarded various conjectures. . . . We do not require their guesses. . . . There is no necessity to conjecture any transposition of letters, or any inversion of their order, or any change of one into another."¹⁰⁸ The reason why Calvin was against conjecture was that conjectural interpretation had no sufficient foundation (*Quaquam illa coniectura forte non satis firma esset*).¹⁰⁹ In the interpretation of the four words, *mene, mene, tekem, upharsin* in Da. 5:25-28 he also rejected conjecture: "He repeats the word *mene* twice. Some conjecture this to apply to the numbering of the years of the king's life, and also to the time of his reign; but the guess seems to be without any foundation. I think the word is used twice for the sake of confirmation. . . ."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Comm. on Da. 5:8, p. 322. CO 40.704. "Quia videtur hoc esse absurdum, Rabbini hic multum laborant. . . . Nos autem non opus habemus illis coniecturis. . . . Ergo quid opus est nunc divinare fuisse literas transpositas, vel fuisse alio ordine scriptas, vel subiectas alias aliis. . . ."*

¹⁰⁹ *Comm. on Da. 5:10-11, p. 324. CO 40.706.*

¹¹⁰ *Comm. on Da. 5:25-8, p. 342. CO 40.718. "Bis verbum unum repetitur, Mene. Quidam sic distinguunt, quod numerati fuerint anni vitae regis, deinde numeratum fuerit tempus regni: sed illa argutia non videtur mihi firma esse. Ego igitur puto confirmationis causa bis fuisse positum hoc verbum. . . ."*

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to explore the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the theological hermeneutics of John Calvin. In his exegetical writings, Calvin pointed out that many interpreters before him had not expounded the genuine meaning of the author of Scripture correctly, clearly, briefly, and simply. According to my investigation, Calvin faithfully adhered to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* - from his first *Institutes* (1536) to his last commentary. Calvin's hermeneutical products abundantly proved him to use these principles as a theological hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

Calvin was not born a great interpreter, but his humanistic training made him not only the great theologian of the Reformation, but also made him one of the great interpreters in the history of Christianity. His humanistic training helped him develop his biblical interpretation. Calvin was influenced by Chrysostom who had already interpreted the plain, literal meaning of the text straightforwardly. Although he did not entirely agree with Chrysostom's interpretation because of his theological and grammatical mistakes, Calvin recognized him as a pioneer of

the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. The fact that Calvin never rejected Budé's views and interpretations proved that Budé had strongly influenced Calvin.

Calvin pointed out the fundamental problem with Origen's allegorical interpretation of Scripture: It forced the meaning of the text. Calvin argued that Origen's allegorical method had started from the wrong presupposition of hermeneutics - a mistaken wrong hermeneutic based upon the terms letter and spirit. Calvin argued that the interpretation of Ambrose had been more ingenious than solid. Calvin sometimes agreed with him when his interpretation was suitable. But he stated that Ambrose's interpretation had generally focused on the doctrinal issues related to the passage. Calvin pointed out that Jerome had not revealed the intention of the author simply, and had forced the meaning of the text. Although Augustine had a great influence on Calvin's theology, Calvin did not follow Augustine's biblical interpretation from the perspective of the grammatical-historical approach and the intention of the author. He pointed out that Augustine had often understood the text as a doctrine which was not related to the relevant passage. Nevertheless, Calvin normally agreed with the doctrine of Augustine.

Calvin maintained that, in order to establish and to justify the doctrine and the tradition of the Roman Catholic church, the 'Papists' interpreted the text with their own unacceptable methods. Calvin maintained that the basic problem

of the Roman Catholic church was that they forced the text to support their own theological positions such as the system of indulgences, the rewards of works, the mass, and Purgatory. Calvin argued that the Jewish interpreters failed to interpret the text of the Old Testament correctly because they did not accept Jesus as the Christ and the Messiah. For them the christological interpretation of the text of the Psalms was impossible.

Erasmus, breaking with the Middle Ages' interpretation, introduced the grammatical-historical method. Although Erasmus had a great influence upon the Reformers, Calvin often rejected the interpretation of Erasmus, because by inserting words, verbs, etc., into the original text, he did not get to the true meaning of the text, and did not reveal the intention of the author.

M. Luther decisively rejected the Roman Catholic church as the only authority for interpreting Scripture, and proclaimed that Scripture was its own interpreter, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. Luther's hermeneutical principle of Scripture was christological because he always regarded Christ as the center of Scripture and the goal of the interpretation of the text. Calvin did not follow Luther's interpretation when Luther's view was frivolous and not solid.

Like Erasmus, Zwingli emphasized the moral aspect of Scripture. Showing a preference for Origen's allegorical method of interpretation, Zwingli extensively used the

distinction between the natural and non-literal senses of Scripture. As the result of that, his method of Old Testament interpretation was allegorical.

Calvin noted that Melanchthon only touched on major points when interpreting texts. But according to Calvin, Melanchthon did not sufficiently explain the meaning of important passages because he used the method of *loci*. Although in the interpretation of the text, Bucer did not use the *loci* method of the Aristotelians, Calvin did not follow him entirely because his interpretation was too prolix and academic.

Calvin maintained that the Anabaptists denied the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. That was their basic hermeneutical weakness. He pointed out that the Anabaptists emphasized the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the extreme. Calvin also said that the Libertines used allegorical interpretation, and forced the simple meaning of Scripture.

Although Calvin was influenced by rhetoricians like Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian and Chrysostom, he confirmed that Scripture itself demonstrated the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as its own hermeneutical mode. Calvin faithfully followed this approach in his *Institutes*, treatises, sermons, and commentaries.

Calvin held his own theological presuppositions for the interpretation of Scripture. Calvin believed that the true interpreter of Scripture was the Holy Spirit who inspired the

authors to write it. Thus Calvin thought that in order to interpret the text correctly, an interpreter needs the help of the Holy Spirit. However he warned Sadoleto and the Anabaptists not to separate the Holy Spirit from the Word of God. Calvin showed that the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* was closely related to the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin's views on the clarity of Scripture formed the basis for his consistent application of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his works.

My investigation delineated several elements in the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* Calvin employed in his writings. Brevity meant to interpret the passage concisely. In order to make the interpretation of the text brief, Calvin avoided any disputation, argument, or controversy. He also avoided the repetition of the same interpretation of various passages, and often suggested that the readers consult his other commentaries and the *Institutes* as well as other interpreters' writings.

Calvin, if possible, did not change the original text, but rather tried to retain it. Since he felt that inserting things into the original text was not natural and simple, Calvin dared to reject Erasmus' insertion of words, prepositions, etc. Calvin had reasons for preferring retention to insertion. First, he thought that inserting something into the original text for purposes of interpretation forced the meaning of the text. Calvin always

disliked the ambiguity caused by inserting words. The result of insertion was that the readers became confused and inept at understanding the genuine meaning of a passage.

Calvin limited the scope of his interpretation to the issues related to a particular passage of Scripture. He tried not to depart from the center of the text, nor to wander outside the key subject of the text. Whenever he felt that he handled an issue not directly related to the text, Calvin tried to return to the relevant text. This showed that he attempted not to interpret Scripture in a subjective fashion.

Calvin thought that the true meaning of the text was the suitable, obvious, and simple one rather than the twisted or ambiguous one. Over against 'torturing' Scripture, Calvin stressed that the true interpretation should be obvious and natural, not allegorical.

He refuted the use of conjecture in the interpretation of the text because it was not based on solid and sound argument, but rather started from imagination. On this point Calvin often criticized Erasmus for frivolous conjecture. Calvin thought that the purpose of simplicity was to let the readers easily understand the mind of the author.

The principle of simplicity was a reaction against ambiguity, perversion, and conjecture. He thought that the plain and simple sense of the words of Scripture agreed well with the author's mind. For him to remove ambiguity meant to seek the natural and suitable meaning of the text. According

to Calvin, the criterion of suitability was related to the intention of the author and the context of the present text.

One of the distinctive features of Calvin's hermeneutics was that he did not force the readers to accept his view but gave them freedom to choose the interpretation which they preferred. This shows that he recognized the imperfection of his own interpretation, and that, as an interpreter, he was humble.

In the light of this study, we can declare Calvin's ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, to be the central principle of his theological hermeneutics.

Calvin criticized Christian interpreters for twisting the meaning of the text away from its simple sense. Calvin tried not to twist the meaning of the text, but rather with these principles to interpret it literally, simply, and clearly. Thus employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, he broke with the allegorical and scholastic interpretation of preceding centuries. He warned that an interpreter should not pervert the words of Scripture by means of his own opinions and his own doctrines and experiences. Calvin emphasized the necessary objectivity in Scriptural interpretation, against subjective methods of interpretation.

Although Calvin used the theological interpretation of the text, unlike the Fathers, he was not dominated by doctrinal interpretations. Calvin recognized significant doctrines in the text, and sometimes explained subjects

relating to doctrine. He, however, passed over the interpretation of doctrines which was not directly related to the passage. As the result of that, he did not get involved in meaningless arguments with other interpreters. He only attempted to interpret the true meaning of the text without exhausting his readers.

The fact that Calvin interpreted the text by means of the intention of the author of Scripture makes us recognize him as one of the great interpreters in the history of Protestant interpretation. One of the purposes of his hermeneutics was to help the readers understand the mind of the author of Scripture easily and briefly. In order to accomplish this goal, Calvin employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. For Calvin to interpret the true meaning of the text was to understand the words of the author or the intention of the author. Calvin identified the genuine meaning of the text with the intention of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin's practical purpose with the interpretation of texts was to edify the people of God. Calvin challenged an interpreter to consider the Christian life and the church's edification, without falling into theoretical argument. He always interpreted the meaning of the passage practically for the readers to understand easily and briefly. Especially the interpretation used in Calvin's *Sermons on Job* proved the practical application to the Christian life.

SUMMARY

BREVITAS ET FACILITAS

**A STUDY OF A VITAL ASPECT IN THE THEOLOGICAL
HERMENEUTICS OF JOHN CALVIN**

BY

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The hermeneutical methodology employed by Calvin in gleaning the true meaning of a text has given rise to considerable contemporary debate. Calvin, like other Reformers, used the so-called historical-grammatical method in the interpretation of Scripture. Although Calvin showed similarity with the other Reformers' hermeneutics in following this approach, he had a distinctive approach to Scriptural interpretation which other Reformers did not follow in all details. It included the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as the central dimension of his hermeneutics, principles Calvin employed in his exegetical writings throughout his whole life. Calvin clearly suggested the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as a basic dimension of his theological hermeneutics in the dedicatory preface in his *Commentary on Romans*. With regard to the nature of Calvin's hermeneutics,

many scholars recognize that the hallmarks of Calvin's hermeneutical approach are the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. They, however, have not revealed how Calvin handled the text of Scripture with these principles. They have not adequately demonstrated how Calvin's principles of *brevitas et facilitas* are rooted in the rhetorical method of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, and also not that these hermeneutical principles are embedded in the basic motives of his theology. After having analysed Calvin's writings, I discovered ten component elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

The purpose of my dissertation is not to explore all the principles Calvin used in his writings, but to establish the fact that the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* as the hallmark of Calvin's theological hermeneutics originated in his views on Holy Scripture, especially the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

In order to obtain a clear understanding of Calvin's hermeneutics, I studied the historical, theological, rhetorical, and hermeneutical dimensions of the issues at stake. In investigating the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, I utilized Calvin's commentaries, his sermons and his letters, his theological treatises, and his *Institutes*.

The purpose of chapter 2 is to study the background of Calvin's hermeneutics. It includes how Calvin prepared himself to be a faithful interpreter of Scripture. I deal with what factors had influence on Calvin's hermeneutics. In chapters 3

and 4, I survey the history of hermeneutics from Calvin's own perspective. My emphasis is on Calvin's attitude toward other interpreters. In chapter 5, I examine the development, the source, and the employment of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. In order to ascertain the origin of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, I compare this method with the rhetorical skill described with the same term. I argue that Calvin regarded the nature of Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Chapter 6 examines two theological presuppositions in Calvin's hermeneutics: firstly the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture, and secondly the principle *sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. As far as the Reformers' doctrine of Scripture is concerned, I deal with the fact that the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* is closely related to the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture which offered the Reformers the principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. In chapter 7, I identify and describe ten component elements as the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

OPSOMMING

BREVITAS ET FACILITAS

A STUDY OF A VITAL ASPECT IN THE THEOLOGICAL
HERMENEUTICS OF JOHN CALVIN

deur

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Graad: Philosophiae Doctor

Die hermeneutiese metode waarvan Calvyn gebruik gemaak het om die juiste betekenis van 'n teks te bepaal, het selfs in die huidige tyd tot indringende diskussies aanleiding gegee. Soos die ander Reformatore het ook Calvyn in sy Skrifinterpretasie van die histories-grammatiese metode gebruik gemaak. Al het hy hierdie metode in die algemeen met die ander Reformatore gemeenskaplik gehad, het hy dit tog op 'n eiesoortige wyse aangewend. Die eiesoortigheid van sy benadering het daarin bestaan dat hy die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* tot sentrale dimensie van sy hermeneutiek gemaak het en dat hy dit sy hele loopbaan lank konsekwent in sy eksegetiese geskrite toegepas het.

Al was die vermelde beginsels deur baie geleerdes beskou as die onderskeidende kenmerk van Calvyn se hermeneutiek was die inhoud en toepassing daarvan tot dusver nog nie grondig ondersoek nie. In hierdie dissertasie word

die hipotese gestel en uiteindelik bevestig dat die aanwesigheid en funksionering van die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* in die werk van Calvyn medbepaal is deur die retoriese metodiek van Aristoteles, Cicero en Quintilianus en uiteindelik ten diepste bepaal word deur Calvyn se oortuiginge in verband met die Heilige Skrif en met name sy opvatting aangaande die *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. Hierdie beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* word eksplisiet in die inleiding tot sy kommentaar op die Romeinebrief voorgestel as die hermeneutiese uitgangspunt van sy Skrifinterpretasie.

In 'n poging om tot 'n goeie begrip vir hierdie hermeneutiese uitgangspunt van Calvyn te kom, is die historiese, retoriese, en teologiese dimensies daarvan in hierdie proefskrif bestudeer. In hierdie proses is aandag geskenk aan sy briewe, preke, kommentare, traktate en sy Institusie.

Na die inleidende opmerkinge wat in hoofstuk een gebied is, is die agtergrond van Calvyn se hermeneutiek in hoofstuk twee aan die orde gestel. Dit sluit onder andere in 'n beskrywing van hoe Calvyn homself voorberei het om 'n betroudbare uitlegger van die Heilige Skrif te word asook 'n uiteensetting van die invloede wat op die hermeneutiek van Calvyn ingewerk het. In hoofstukke drie en vier is kortliks die geskiedenis van die hermeneutiek vanuit die perspektief van Calvyn nagegaan. Nadruk word gelê op sy houding teenoor

ander vroegkerklike en Reformatoriese uitleggers. Hoofstuk vyf beskryf die ontwikkeling, bronne en implementering van die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas*. Hierdie kenmerkende metodiek van Calvyn word vergelyk met die retoriese vaardigheid wat met dieselfde terme beskryf word. Die standpunt word beklemtoon dat die ideale van *brevitas et facilitas* by Calvyn ten eerste sy oorsprong het in sy opvattinge aangaande die aard van die Heilige Skrif. Hierdie gesigspunt word in hoofstuk 6 verder uitgewerk met 'n bestudering van twee voorveronderstellings van Calvyn se hermeneutiek teweete die rol van die Heilige Gees in die uitleg van die Heilige Skrif en die beginsel van *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. Daar word beklemtoon dat die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* ten nouste in verband staan met die leer oor die duidelikheid van die Heilige Skrif.

In hoofstuk sewe word ten slotte die samestellende elemente in die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* uitvoerig beskryf.

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