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

Sound theologizing is, therefore, intimately related to a

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legitimate understanding of Scripture. 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.

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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, 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. 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 Reformatior: 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 Reformatior.

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 pneumaticher 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


\(^8\) Ibid.
genuine exegesis'.

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. These principles, as the center of Calvin's


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 subtility, 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, Melanchthon, and Bucer. With regard to the nature of Calvin's hermeneutics, many scholars like August F. Tholuck, F. W. Gotch, Frederic W. Farrar, Philip Schaff, J. Baumgartner, Irwin Hoch De Long, James Orr, H. R. Mackintosh, K. Barth, 


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."


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 comprehensibleness 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."

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 brevitas». Genensatz zu Butzer: «Kum hat er einen Stoff ergriffen, so strömt die unlaubliche 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."


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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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 Pittsburgh, 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."


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 brevitas. Why? Because the Scriptures are also clear and precise. For that reason our exegesis also has to be like that."


and Moisés Silva\textsuperscript{39} recognize that the hallmarks of Calvin's hermeneutical approach are the principles of \textit{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 \textit{brevitas et facilitas} as the central dimension of his hermeneutics.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{brevitas et facilitas} are rooted in the rhetorical method of Aristotle.

\textsuperscript{38} Brevard S. Childs, \textit{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 \textit{loci} method of Melanchthon and the proximity 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."


\textsuperscript{40} No substantial study has yet been published on the methodology of \textit{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 theology" was not simply to develop

"A. D. Pont, "Opening Address: The Message of the Institutes of the Christian Religion," in John Calvin’s Institutes His Opus Magnum: 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 11 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 church\(^2\) and to help his readers in the practical context of their lives.\(^3\) 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."

\(^2\) 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."

very useful for us," In his commentaries Calvin interpreted the meaning of passages practically. 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.

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 Melanchthon, 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.

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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.

(publicum Ecclesiae bonum induxisset).

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.

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.

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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 ilii 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, subleavarem eos a iudicandi molestia, quibus non satis firmum est a seipsis iudicium: praesertim quam ita omnia succincte perstringere instituerem, ut non magnam temporis iacturam facturam 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."\textsuperscript{50} Here he pointed out the problem of Melanchthon's \textit{loci} method in which he discussed such passages as particularly required observation.\textsuperscript{51} 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 \textit{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."\textsuperscript{52} Calvin argued that Bucer handled every point so extensively that it could not be read in a short time. This \textit{prolixis commentariis}, according to Calvin, was Bucer's hermeneutical method.\textsuperscript{53} He, therefore, determined to treat things so briefly, that without

\textsuperscript{50} "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

\textsuperscript{51} Gamble, \textit{"Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic,"} 4, says on Melanchthon's \textit{loci} method as follows: "Perhaps using Rudolf Agricola's analysis as his foundation, Melanchthon 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 \textit{topoi}, which was translated by Cicero as \textit{loci}. This then was the methodology which Melanchthon followed in all of his biblical commentaries."

\textsuperscript{52} "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

\textsuperscript{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 Melanthchon'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

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\(^{54}\) CO 10.405.


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 brevitas 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.

59 Ibid. p. 91.
Walchenbach gives a good definition of the method of \textit{brevitas et facilitas} from the dedicatory epistle in Calvin's \textit{Commentary on Romans}. He argues that Calvin had discussed the best method of interpreting Scripture with his scholarly friend Grynæus. He describes it as follows:

By the principle of \textit{brevitas}, Calvin wishes to avoid \textit{prolixis commentariis} which only exhaust the reader. By the principle of \textit{facilites}, Calvin wishes to avoid discussions of other commentators, and come as quickly as possible to the primary meaning of the text. \textit{Facilites} here does not mean either a "short-cut" or superficiality. It means the absence of polemic, the exclusion of protracted excursuses, the purposive omission of detailed examinations from other sources. \textit{Brevitas} and \textit{facilites} 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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

\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Melanchthon, Bullinger, and Bucer.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{63} According to him, the method

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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{63} Donald K. McKim, "Calvin's View of Scripture," p. 66.
of *facilitas* is to seek simplicity or what is easily understood. 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 brevitas*. Rather he simply described this method as the best method of interpreting Scripture (*praecipuam interpretis virtutem in perspicua brevitate esse positam*). 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

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64 Ibid.

illiis officium mentem scriptoris quem explicandum sumpsit patefacere).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{67} Calvin connected mentem scriptoris with the intention of the Holy Spirit (Spiritus sancti consilium).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{66} CO 10.403.


\textsuperscript{68} See chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{71}

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


\textsuperscript{71} "The Epistle Dedactory," in Comm. on Rom. p. xxiv. CO 10.403. "Verum quum ita ferat ea quae hominum igenis 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 fit ut neque nos, quibus magis placet brevitatis, eorum labores vel respamus 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.  

"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."  

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. Neither has the primary research

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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 habebo de dogmatibus longas disputationes instituere, et in locos communes evagari, eas compendio semper astringam."

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

After Wallace’s survey on Calvin’s hermeneutics,\textsuperscript{78} Kraus made a wider and deeper study of it.\textsuperscript{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


\textsuperscript{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).

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 and works on this subject since 1964. His books provide "a considerable amount of material in comprehending the ways in which and the

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

\begin{quote}
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.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Parker's view that the principles of \textit{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.


\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 86.

\textsuperscript{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. 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.

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." 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. 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.


87 Ibid., p. 200.

88 Ibid., pp. 167-8.
Calvin’s ideal. 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 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

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Calvin’s exegetical methodology. 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. Calvin, therefore, suggested the proper hermeneutical method. That included the principles of brevitas et facilitas. Gamble accepts that John Chrysostom was one of the influences on Calvin’s methodology, but rejects the view that rhetoric formed the basic element of this influence. Rather he insists that the Scriptures themselves provide us with a model for Calvin’s hermeneutics. 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.

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

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92 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
93 Ibid., p. 7.
94 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
95 Ibid., pp. 9-12.
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

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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

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101 Ibid., p. 157.

102 Ibid., pp. 101–2.

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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{105} He
concludes that the illumination by the Holy Spirit and
philological expertise are both needed by the interpreter of
Scripture. He states,

\begin{quote}
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
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{104} David L. Puckett, \textit{John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old

\textsuperscript{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.

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 interprets. 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 interprets. In chapter 7, I identify and describe ten component elements as the ideal of brevitas et facilitas.