

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The history of Christian theology is the record of the interpretation of Scripture generation after generation.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

Sound theologizing is, therefore, intimately related to a

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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 Unpublished Paper, Congress of the International Reformed Theological Institute held in Stellenbosch on June 12, 1997.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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> In fact Calvin's

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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."

<sup>5</sup> P. C. Potgieter, "Calvin as Scriptural Theologian," in *Calvinus Reformator: 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 Reformator*.

<sup>6</sup> 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",<sup>7</sup> and that the more we study his commentaries, the more astonished we become "at their scholarship, lucid profundity, and freshness of insight."<sup>8</sup> 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

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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."

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

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

genuine exegesis'.<sup>9</sup>

#### 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.<sup>10</sup> These principles, as the center of Calvin's

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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,<sup>11</sup> F. W. Gotch,<sup>12</sup> Frederic W. Farrar,<sup>13</sup> Philip Schaff,<sup>14</sup> J. Baumgartner,<sup>15</sup> Irwin Hoch De Long,<sup>16</sup> James Orr,<sup>17</sup> H. R. Mackintosh,<sup>18</sup> K. Barth,<sup>19</sup>

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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).

<sup>11</sup> 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).

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

<sup>13</sup> 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."

<sup>14</sup> 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.

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

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

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

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<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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."

<sup>19</sup> 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."

<sup>20</sup> 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.*

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

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

<sup>23</sup> 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,<sup>26</sup> T. H. L. Parker,<sup>27</sup> John H. Leith,<sup>28</sup> John Robert Walchenbach,<sup>29</sup> Richard Stauffer,<sup>30</sup> Jack B. Rogers and

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<sup>24</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> 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*."

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



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

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<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> 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."

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

<sup>34</sup> 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.

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

<sup>36</sup> 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.

<sup>37</sup> 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 Silva<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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,

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<sup>38</sup> 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."

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> 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 theology<sup>41</sup> was not simply to develop

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<sup>41</sup> 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 church<sup>42</sup> and to help his readers in the practical context of their lives.<sup>43</sup> 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

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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."

<sup>42</sup> 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."

<sup>43</sup> 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,"<sup>44</sup> In his commentaries Calvin interpreted the meaning of passages practically.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

### 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

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

<sup>45</sup> *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.

<sup>46</sup> *Inst.* 1.14.4, p. 164. Cf. *Inst.* 1.13.29, p. 159, *Inst.* 3.4.39. p. 669.

(*publicum Ecclesiae bonum induxisset*).<sup>47</sup>

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.<sup>48</sup>

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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<sup>47</sup> "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxv. Cf. *Iohannis Calvini 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.

<sup>48</sup> "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,<sup>49</sup> 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

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<sup>49</sup> 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."<sup>50</sup> Here he pointed out the problem of Melancthon's *loci* method in which he discussed such passages as particularly required observation.<sup>51</sup> 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."<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> He, therefore, determined to treat things so briefly, that without

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<sup>50</sup> "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

<sup>51</sup> 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."

<sup>52</sup> "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxvi.

<sup>53</sup> CO 10.404.



unnecessary loss of time, his readers might understand his work easily.<sup>54</sup> 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."<sup>55</sup> 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*.<sup>56</sup> 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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<sup>54</sup> CO 10.405.

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

<sup>56</sup> 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.*"<sup>57</sup> 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'.<sup>58</sup>

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'.<sup>59</sup> 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.

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<sup>57</sup> *Romanos*, ed. Parker, p. 1.

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

<sup>59</sup> *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.<sup>60</sup>

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

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<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> According to him, the method

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

<sup>62</sup> *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.

<sup>63</sup> Donald K. McKim, "Calvin's View of Scripture," p. 66.

of *facilitas* is to seek simplicity or what is easily understood.<sup>64</sup> 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*).<sup>65</sup> 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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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> *Romanos*, p. 1.

*illius officium mentem scriptoris quem explicandum sumpsit patefacere*).<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> Calvin connected *mentem scriptoris* with the intention of the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus sancti consilium*).<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> 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

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<sup>66</sup> CO 10.403.

<sup>67</sup> 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.

<sup>68</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

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."<sup>71</sup>

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

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<sup>70</sup> "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.

<sup>71</sup> "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."<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *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).

<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> "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."<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> Neither has the primary research

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<sup>74</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>75</sup> "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."

<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup>

After Wallace's survey on Calvin's hermeneutics,<sup>78</sup> Kraus made a wider and deeper study of it.<sup>79</sup> 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

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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).

<sup>77</sup> 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).

<sup>78</sup> 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.

<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> His books provide "a considerable amount of material in comprehending the ways in which and the

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<sup>80</sup> 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."<sup>81</sup> He attempts to explore Calvin's hermeneutics including the principles of *perspicua brevitatis* (*brevitatis et facilitatis*) as the means by which one finds out the genuine sense.<sup>82</sup> He maintains that Calvin applied to the interpretation of Scripture the Aristotelian concept of *perspicua brevitatis*.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

Parker's view that the principles of *brevitatis et facilitatis* 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.

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<sup>81</sup> 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.

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

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>84</sup> *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*.<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup>

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*."<sup>87</sup> 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*.<sup>88</sup> 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

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<sup>85</sup> CO 9.831-838.

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

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

Calvin's ideal.<sup>89</sup> 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*<sup>90</sup> 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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<sup>89</sup> In chapter 5 I shall deal with the difference between Chrysostom's method and Calvin's principles.

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

Calvin's exegetical methodology.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> Calvin, therefore, suggested the proper hermeneutical method. That included the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.<sup>93</sup> Gamble accepts that John Chrysostom was one of the influences on Calvin's methodology,<sup>94</sup> but rejects the view that rhetoric formed the basic element of this influence.<sup>95</sup> Rather he insists that the Scriptures themselves provide us with a model for Calvin's hermeneutics.<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> 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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<sup>91</sup> Richard C. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward An Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," 3.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-12.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-15.

<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

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

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

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>100</sup> *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.<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup>

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.<sup>103</sup> 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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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-2.

<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> 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

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

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-113.

will understand the meaning of any specific text.<sup>106</sup>

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.<sup>107</sup> The

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>107</sup> 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." F. F. Bruce, "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 proof of his commentaries." F. V. Farris, *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