

CHAPTER 2

CALVIN AS AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE

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

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

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

A. Calvin's Training

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰ Richard Stauffer, "Calvin," p. 15.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²² Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁹ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

questions are employed. He writes as follows:

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

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

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

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

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

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

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

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

³⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁴ F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁶ *Comm. on Ps*, p. xl.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶² F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

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

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁰ F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 26.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. The Influences on Calvin's Hermeneutics

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

1. Chrysostom

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

⁷⁶ *Comm. on. Ps*, p. xlix.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But of Chrysostom's method, Calvin remarked:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁷ *Comm. on Eph. 1:3*, p. 197.

⁸⁸ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 1:2*, pp. 53-4.

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

⁸⁹ *Comm. on Jn. 6:63*, p. 273.

⁹⁰ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 6:3*, p. 201.

⁹¹ *Comm. on Gen. 1:26*, p. 94.

⁹² *Comm. on Jn. 3:5*, p. 110.

⁹³ *Comm. on 2 Th. 5:22*, p. 302.

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

2. Valla

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Budé

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁶ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 9:4*, p. 306.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹¹ *Comm. on Php.* 3:9, p. 97.

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

4. Erasmus

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

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

Erasmus freely on matters of biblical and theological interpretation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

emended the text of the New Testament.

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

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

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

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

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

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

¹²¹ Ruth Chavasse, "Erasmus," p. 198.

¹²² Ibid.

was very great. Interpretation eighteen times.

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

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

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

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

¹²⁵ *Comm. on Rom. 2:8*, p. 92.

rejected Erasmus' interpretation eighteen times.¹²⁶

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

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

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

¹²⁷ *Comm. on Tit.* 1:7, p. 293.

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

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

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

¹²⁹ *Comm. on Ac.* 3:26, p. 162.

¹³⁰ *Comm. on Rom.* 8:3, p. 279.

¹³¹ *Comm. on 1 Pe.* 4:1, p. 121.

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

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

Calvin's Accidents Fixed the rather well defined
Interpretation

In order to interpret the Bible, Calvin first
we first need to interpret the Bible. The Bible
interpretation of the Bible. The Bible
and the Jewish people.

Calvin's method of interpretation was based
of Scripture. Calvin's method of interpretation
from the perspective of the Bible. Calvin's
distinguished his method from theirs. Calvin
developed his own distinctive principles of brevitas et
facilitas. Calvin's method of interpretation
Jerome, and others. Calvin's method of interpretation
hermeneutical method. Calvin's method of interpretation
Pauline Epistles. Calvin's method of interpretation
interpretation prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church.

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