

## CHAPTER 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Knudsen, "Calvinism as a Cultural Force," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene F. Rice Jr., "Humanist Idea of Christian Antiquity: Lefèvre d'Étaples and His Circle," in *French Humanism, 1470-1600*, ed. Werner L. Gundersheimer (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 169.

*evidentia*.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Calvin used the term shows that he followed Seneca's own method. Calvin employed the *compendium* which "gathers up the discussion and refreshes the reader's memory enabling him to discern the real substance through the details."<sup>5</sup> But at that stage Calvin did not develop the method very far. According to T. H. L. Parker, the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as Budé employed them dated back to Quintilian.

Brevity is, of course, one of the foremost aims of the Renaissance, an aim which harked back to Quintilian's definition of *methodus* 'as a brief and compendious way of speaking,' which Budé interpreted as suggesting that there could be a short way to understanding a subject or a document.<sup>6</sup>

Calvin, after his conversion, began to develop this ideal in his theological writings. In his commentaries Calvin used these principles to help his readers understand the meaning of Scripture clearly and easily.

Thirdly, another influence on the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* can be traced back to Chrysostom's method of Scriptural interpretation. Here the important question whether Chrysostom, like Calvin, in fact applied the principles of

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<sup>4</sup> "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, edited and translated by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 87. On the method of *brevitas et facilitas*, Rudolphe Peter, "Rhétorique et prédication selon Calvin," 250, states that the method of *brevitas et facilitas* dates back to the rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian.

*brevitas et facilitas* arises. Of course Chrysostom did not use exactly the very same method of *brevitas et facilitas* which Calvin employed. Chrysostom, however, intended to follow a brief and simple approach in his writings. On this issue R. Gamble argues that Calvin followed the method of Chrysostom, who did not twist the simple meaning of the words (*ac nullam sibi licentiam sumere in simplici verborum sensu contorquendo*).<sup>7</sup> J. R. Walchenbach also states that Calvin believed that Chrysostom did not twist the true meaning of Scripture.<sup>8</sup> Chrysostom rejected the allegorical interpretation of Scripture followed by the Alexandrian school, and emphasized the literal interpretation used by the Antiochene school. Chrysostom was, in Calvin's view, a good interpreter, and Calvin therefore emulated him. Calvin said:

The outstanding merit of our author, Chrysostom, is that it was his supreme delight always not to turn aside even to the slightest degree from the genuine, simple sense of Scripture and to allow himself no liberties by twisting the plain meaning of the words.<sup>9</sup>

Here we can see that Calvin was influenced by Chrysostom who, in his view, did not twist the meaning of Scripture and insisted on the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. As far as

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<sup>7</sup> R. Gamble, "*Brevitas et Facilitas*," p. 8. Cf. CO. 9.835. Alexandre Ganoczy and Stefan Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins*, p. 119, state that Calvin followed Chrysostom who did not twist the single sense of the text.

<sup>8</sup> John Robert Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator," p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> John H. McIndoe, "Preface to the Homilies of Chrysostom," *The Hartford Quarterly* 5 (1965): 23. Cf. CO 9.835.

the hermeneutical method of Chrysostom is concerned, Calvin followed the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. But this is not to say that he always agreed with the Scriptural interpretation of Chrysostom. In fact, Calvin pointed out many mistakes in Chrysostom especially with regard to the interpretation of theological doctrines,<sup>10</sup> and often disagreed with Chrysostom's view in cases where it was not supported by sufficient proof.<sup>11</sup> Calvin also pointed out that Chrysostom did not reveal the intention of the author: "I do not think that even he has hit the Apostle's meaning."<sup>12</sup>

Although Chrysostom employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* partly in that he did not force the real sense of the text of Scripture, showing the simple interpretation of Scripture, Calvin's ideal was better than Chrysostom's. The fact that Calvin did his best to reveal the intention of the author of Scripture leads us to see what the difference between Chrysostom and Calvin was.

#### B. The Sources of the Ideal of *Brevitas et Facilitas*

The method which Calvin used dated back to the classical rhetorical writings. As far as the ideal of *brevitas et*

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<sup>10</sup> In the commentary on John 3:5 "Unless a man be born of water" Calvin disagreed with Chrysostom's view that the word water referred to baptism. Cf. *Comm. on Jn. 3:5*, p. 110.

<sup>11</sup> *Comm. on Rom. 8:3*, p. 281.

<sup>12</sup> *Comm. on Tit. 2:15*, p. 323.

*facilitas* is concerned, Calvin was influenced by Cicero, Quintilian, and Chrysostom. Calvin, however, confirmed that Scripture itself presented him with this ideal.

## 1. Rhetoric

Calvin's rhetorical skill clearly appears in his Commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* and his *Institutes*.<sup>13</sup> Calvin, like Erasmus,<sup>14</sup> developed the rhetorical methods of Cicero and Quintilian into his own hermeneutical model. His application of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* to the interpretation of Scripture shows us the value of a theologian with a creative mind and a practical bent. Serene Jones describes Calvin's use of rhetoric and his influence on French literature as follows:

Calvin's use of rhetoric was much more creative; he refined and often stretched the rhetorical rules he was

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<sup>13</sup> Quirinus Breen, "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition," *Church History* 26 (1957): 3-21. He argues that the *De Clementia* has rhetorical form (p. 7), and that the *Institutes* has rhetorical logic: "There is a logic in the *Institutes*. In fact, it is full of logic. But the logic is not syllogistic. It is rhetorical logic. Syllogistic logic uses induction and the syllogism; rhetorical logic uses example and the enthymeme." (p. 13).

<sup>14</sup> He was greatly influenced by Cicero's and Quintilian's rhetoric through the tradition of Italian humanism beginning with Petrarch. Rhetoric played a significant role in Erasmus' systematizing theology and hermeneutic. Cf. Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 15-31. For the study of the relation between hermeneutics and ancient rhetoric, see K. Eden, "Hermeneutics and Ancient Rhetorical Tradition," *Rhetorica* 5 (1987): 59-86.

taught in law school. And the result is a style of presentation that is quite original. In fact, as one scholar has noted, Calvin's preference for a lucid and concise style in both Latin and French, void of unnecessary rhetorical flourishes or distracting ornamentation, constituted a certain sober literary aesthetic that differed significantly from the style adopted by his French contemporaries. As such, his style marked a new period in the evolution of the French language, one that would be recognized only later when it was taken up by such figures as Montaigne, Descartes, and Pascal.<sup>15</sup>

The term "rhetoric" has traditionally been applied to the principles of training communicators, those seeking to persuade or inform others.<sup>16</sup> John Henry Freese says:

"Rhetoric, in the general sense of the use of language in such a manner as to impress the hearers and influence them for or against a certain course of action, is as old as language itself and the beginnings of social and political life."<sup>17</sup>

Rhetoric was "practiced and highly esteemed among the Greeks from the earliest times."<sup>18</sup>

The origin of rhetoric as an art was the island of Sicily.<sup>19</sup> J. H. Freese describes the beginning of rhetoric as

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<sup>15</sup> Serene Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), pp. 25-6.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Christopher Carey, "Rhetoric Means of Persuasion," in *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*, ed. Ian Worthington (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 26-45.

<sup>17</sup> John Henry Freese, "Introduction," in *The Art of Rhetoric, The Loeb Classical Library*, by Aristotle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), p. vii.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. viii. Cf. Michael Gagarin,, "Probability and Persuasion: Plato and early Greek rhetoric," in *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*, pp. 46-68. He also thinks that

follows:

According to Cicero, Aristotle, no doubt in his lost history of the literature of the subject, gives the following account of its origin. After the expulsion of the "tyrants" (467 B.C.), a number of civil processes were instituted by citizens, who had been previously banished and then returned from exile, for the recovery of property belonging to them which had been illegally confiscated by the tyrants. This made it necessary for the claimants to obtain assistance from others and the Sicilians, "an acute people and born controversialists," supplied the want in the persons of Corax and Tisias (both of Syracuse), who drew up a system which could be imparted by instruction, and a set of rules dealing with such questions as were likely to arise. These two may therefore claim to have been the founders of technical rhetoric, although Aristotle, in an early lost work called the *Sophist*, gives the credit to the philosopher Empedocles, whose pupil Gorgias is said to have been.<sup>20</sup>

I shall now examine the rhetoric of Socrates and Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian who began to use the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

#### a. Socrates and Plato

Since the time of Plato there has been a close relationship between rhetoric and democracy. There the function of rhetoric was "to persuade the unintelligent multitude in the law courts and public assemblies in regard to justice and injustice."<sup>21</sup> Exiles returning to Syracuse, who had been deprived of their lands by the tyrants, sought their

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rhetoric "originated in Sicily with the handbooks of Corax and Tisias as a response to the large number of legal suits which arose after the overthrow of the Syracusan tyrants in 467." Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. viii-ix.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. xviii.



property. Later, in Athens, early teachers of rhetoric, known as Sophists, did not simply teach methods of argumentation; rather, they made rhetoric a central educational discipline. When Athenian democracy grew and higher systematized education advanced, they became very powerful and influential in society.

Socrates, on the definition of rhetoric, did not regard it as an art at all, but a mere knack of gratifying and pleasing the hearer. It was "a species of the genus flattery, like cookery (the art of making dainties), cosmetic (of adorning the person), and sophistic."<sup>22</sup>

Among the dialogues of Plato, the *Phaedrus* is famous for "the variety of its contents and style, the richness of its imaginative description, and the sportive humour of its conversation."<sup>23</sup> The main theme of the dialogue is "rhetoric, the art of speaking, a subject which formed an important part

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. xix. Cf. Rollin W. Quimby, "The Growth of Plato's Perception of Rhetoric," in *Plato: Sophistic Rhetoric*, ed. Keith V. Erickson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), p. 27, says: "Socrates does not say that rhetoric is worthy of study, nor does he excuse its faults by assigning apparent defects to substandard practitioners. As all know, Socrates defines rhetoric as a practical skill in flattery, something less than an art, an ignoble technique. Rhetoric, says Socrates, is ignoble because it is bad for society and it is not an art because 'it cannot give any account of the nature of the things it offers. . . and so cannot explain the reason why it is offered.'"

<sup>23</sup> W. R. M. Lamb, "Introduction to the *Phaedrus*," in *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 407.

of the oral and written instruction of the sophists."<sup>24</sup>

Plato agreed with the sophists that rhetoric was persuasion. Plato stressed the knowledge of the truth while the sophists thought that it was essential. The sophists insisted that "knowledge of the truth concerning the subject under discussion is not essential; all that is necessary is ability to make one's conclusions seem probable."<sup>25</sup> W. R. M. Lamb describes the relationship between the true knowledge and rhetoric as follows:

Plato shows that only the man who knows the truth can know what will seem probable; and he must also know the minds or souls to be persuaded. This he cannot do without a knowledge of the nature of the soul. Now knowledge of the truth concerning the various subjects of discourse and knowledge of all the different classes of human souls must be supplemented by knowledge of the different kind of argument and of the various niceties of speech taught by the sophists. Only he who has acquired all this knowledge is a perfect orator, so far as perfection is attainable by man; but the acquisition of this knowledge is a great task, which no one would undertake merely for the purpose of persuading his fellows; a higher purpose, the perfection of his soul and the desire to serve the gods, must animate the spirit of the student of the real art of rhetoric.<sup>26</sup>

Plato's opinion of rhetoric was to deal with the soul: "Since the function of rhetoric is to lead souls, the master of this art must first of all know the nature of this thing, the soul,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. For the study of the relationship between Plato and the sophists, see Edwin Black, "Plato's View of Rhetoric, in *Plato: True and Sophistic Rhetoric*, pp. 171-191. Cf. David Glenn Mazorol, "Plato's Rhetorical Art: An Interpretive Commentary and Critique of the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 408.

on which his art is exercised."<sup>27</sup>

When, after the speech on language, Phaedrus asked Socrates if there was anyone in Greece who could make a finer and more exhaustive speech on the same subject, he answered as follows:

What? Are you and I required to extol the speech not merely on the score of its author's lucidity and terseness of expression, and his consistently precise and well-polished vocabulary, but also for his having said what he ought? If we are, we shall have to allow it only on your account, for my feeble intelligence failed to appreciate it; I was only attending to it as a piece of rhetoric, and as such I couldn't think that even Lysias himself would deem it adequate. Perhaps you won't agree with me, Phaedrus, but really it seemed to me that he said the same things several times over. Maybe he's not very clever at expatiating at length on a single theme, or possibly he has no interest in such topics. In fact it struck me as an extravagant performance, to demonstrate his ability to say the same thing twice, in different words but with equal success.<sup>28</sup>

Socrates here already expressed the prototype of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* which Calvin later employed.

Plato mentioned the ideal of *brevitas* in his writings: "I mention these facts to make the point that, among the ancients, this Laconic brevity was the characteristic expression of philosophy."<sup>29</sup> He also said, "To prefer the

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<sup>27</sup> Glenn R. Morrow, "Plato's Conception of Persuasion," in *Plato: True and Sophistic Rhetoric*, p. 341.

<sup>28</sup> *Phaedrus*, in *the Collected Dialogues of Plato: including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 482-3.

<sup>29</sup> *Protagoras*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, p. 336.

concise, sir, is ever our Laconian way."<sup>30</sup> But he hardly used the term "*facilitas*" in his writings.<sup>31</sup>

It cannot easily be proved whether or not Calvin directly learned his method from Socrates and Plato. Concerning the issue, Calvin did not mention their writings. Before his conversion, however, Calvin could have learned the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* by studying the Classical writings of Cicero and Quintilian rather than Socrates and Plato. I will deal with this matter later.

#### b. Aristotle

Before Aristotle, the sophists understood rhetoric as only an art to persuade the hearers.<sup>32</sup> Plato, who criticized the sophists, "denied that there could be an art of rhetoric."<sup>33</sup> They did not make rhetoric systematic. Aristotle was the creator of a systematic and scientific art of rhetoric. J. H. Freese says:

The unsatisfactory character of previous productions, whose compilers had neglected the all-important subject

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<sup>30</sup> Law, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, p. 1312.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. E. Black, "Plato's View of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 44 (1958): 363-74.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. L. Cooper, "The Rhetoric of Aristotle," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 21 (1933): 10-19; L. J. Flynn, "Aristotle: Art and Faculty in Rhetoric," *Southern Speech Journal* 21 (1956): 244-54.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Margaret McCabe, "Arguments in Context: Aristotle's Defense of Rhetoric," in *Philosophical Essay: Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed, David J. Furley and Alexander Nehamas (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 129.

of "proofs" and confined themselves chiefly to appeals to the emotions and things irrelevant to the matter in hand, induced him to attack the subject from the point of view of a philosopher and psychologist, not from that of the mere rhetorician, which assuredly Aristotle was not.<sup>34</sup>

In his *Rhetoric* he defined rhetoric as a counterpart(*antistropos*) of dialectic:" rhetoric is a counterpart(*antistropos*) of dialectic; for both have to do with matters that are in manner within the cognizance of all men and not confined to any special science."<sup>35</sup> Calvin quoted this definition when he commented the interpretation of Gal. 4:25, "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."

The word, *sustoicha*, which is translated corresponding to, denotes those things which are so arranged as to have a mutual relation to each other, and a similar word, *sustoichia*, when applied to trees and other objects, conveys the idea of their following in regular order. Mount Sinai is said (*sustoichia*) to correspond to that which is now Jerusalem, in the same sense as Aristotle says that Rhetoric is (*antistropos*) the counterpart to Logic, by a metaphor borrowed from lyric compositions, which were usually arranged in two parts, so adapted as to be sung in harmony. In short, the word, *sustoikey*, corresponds, means nothing more than that it belongs to the same class."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. xviii.

<sup>35</sup> *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.1.1 p. 2. For the study of the definition of rhetoric, see Theresa M. Crem, "The Definition of Rhetoric According to Aristotle," in *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*, ed. Keith V. Erickson (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1974), pp. 52-71. For the study of the background of Aristotle's rhetoric, see William M. A. Grimaldi, *Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1972), pp. 1-17.

<sup>36</sup> *Comm. on Gal. 4:25*. p. 140.

Here we can see that Calvin was influenced by Aristotle's rhetoric.

At the beginning of his *Rhetoric* Aristotle defined rhetoric as follows: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever".<sup>37</sup> He said, "that which is true and better is naturally always easier to prove and more likely to persuade."<sup>38</sup> With the above definition and purpose of rhetoric, he presented the method of style: "Style to be good must be clear (In regard to style, one of its chief merits may be defined as perspicuity), as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do."<sup>39</sup> Here the rhetorical term "clearness" or "perspicuity" is defined as the mean between prolixity and excessive conciseness.<sup>40</sup> According to him, prolixity caused language's clearness to fail: "We thus see how the inappropriateness of such poetical language imports absurdity and tastelessness into speeches, as well as the obscurity that comes from all this verbosity-for when the sense is plain, you only obscure and spoil its clearness by

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<sup>37</sup> *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.2.1. p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.1.12. p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. III.2.1, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1984), p. 167. Cf. *The Art of Rhetoric*. III.2.1, p. 351.

<sup>40</sup> "Select Glossary," in *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. 480.

piling up words."<sup>41</sup> He used this technical term from the hermeneutical perspective, i.e. he related clearness or perspicuity with a plain meaning or a simple meaning. According to him, clearness or perspicuity is secured by using the words (nouns and verbs alike) that are current and ordinary.<sup>42</sup> He meant that a style familiar to the common hearers should be used. He also argued that a writer had to give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially. "Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary; for our hearers are prejudiced and think we have some design against them, as if we were mixing their wines for them."<sup>43</sup> The statement that "Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary" shows us one of the most important elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Aristotle argued that a style should not have antiferce. "We can now see that a good writer can produce a style that is distinguished without being obtrusive, and is at the same time clear."<sup>44</sup> Here he related clearness with antiferce (the avoidance of forced interpretation). On the matter of *facilitas* Aristotle stated that a writer should use a facile method for his readers' benefit. "It is a general rule that a written composition should be easy to read and therefore easy

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<sup>41</sup> *Rhetoric*, III.2.33, p. 172.

<sup>42</sup> *Rhetoric*, III.2.6, p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> *Rhetoric*, III.2.20, p. 167.

<sup>44</sup> *Rhetoric*, III.2.36, p. 168.

to deliver (easy to understand)."<sup>45</sup>

Like Aristotle Calvin also argued that the chief excellency of an expounder consisted in perspicuous brevity (*perspicua brevitate*). In order for his readers more easily to understand, Calvin interpreted Scripture with the familiar style of common people. His effort appeared in his commentaries and sermons. As Aristotle used the mean between prolixity and excessive conciseness, Calvin also adopted the middle way (*via media*) in the interpretation of Scripture over against Melanchthon's *loci* method<sup>46</sup> and Bucer's prolixity. Calvin pointed out that an interpreter's twisting of the true

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<sup>45</sup> *Rhetoric*, III.5.11. p. 176.

<sup>46</sup> Melanchthon's *loci* method derived from Aristotle's *topoi*. On this method, William M. D. Grimaldi, "The Aristotelian Topics," in *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*, pp. 176-193, says: "In other words, the *topoi*, which are the sources for intelligent discussion and reasoning in dialectic and rhetoric, are concerned with both the material and formal element in such discussion. As sources for the content of discussion (the ordinary meaning of *loci communes*: persons, places, things, properties, accidents, etc., the *peristaeis*, or aspects of the subject pertinent to discussion) they ultimately provide the material by means of which general or particular propositions are enunciated. As sources for the forms of discussion they are axiomatic forms, or modes of inference, in which syllogistic (or what is called 'enthymematic' in the *Rhetoric*) reasoning naturally expresses itself. Neither aspect can be neglected. For, granted that the *topoi* are concerned with propositions (a point obvious to one acquainted with the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*), it must not be forgotten that propositions consist of terms which must be clearly defined and determined before they can be used in meaningful discussion, or in intelligent, convincing, although probable, inference. There must be a precise apprehension of the subject as far as is possible, and there must be reasonable, inferential modes in which to develop the subject further. In the methodology of the topics Aristotle was apparently concerned with both ideas" (Ibid., p. 178).



meaning of the text might lose the natural sense of a passage. For him the natural meaning was the genuine sense. Calvin maintained that an exegete should not force the real meaning. He pointed out that Origen's allegorical interpretation came from forcing the passage. Aristotle and Calvin both agreed that a writer and an interpreter should allow their expression to be easily understood. Calvin made every effort for his readers to understand Scripture more easily.

It is undeniable that Calvin's method dated back to Aristotle.<sup>47</sup> We have observed several very close parallels between the insights of Aristotle and Calvin. The continuity between them shone dimly in Aristotle's indirect influence on Calvin's usage of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin as a humanist used Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*. After his conversion Calvin used a rhetorical term of Aristotle in his commentary on Acts 1:3.

Therefore, that the truth hereof might not be called in question, he saith that it was proved by many signs and token. Those which Erasmus, following an old interpreter, doth call arguments, I have translated proofs. For Aristotle doth call that *tekmérion*, in the first book of his *Rhetorics*, which is necessary in signs. This is, therefore, that which I said before, that Christ did make manifest his resurrection unto his apostles by evident tokens, which did serve instead of necessary proofs, lest they should doubt of the same.<sup>48</sup>

According to Aristotle, the proof is a necessary sign which

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<sup>47</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> *Comm. on Ac. 1:3*, p. 36.

cannot be refuted. The following statement of Aristotle shows us that Calvin employed the rhetorical method of Aristotle.

Of signs, one kind bears the same relation to the statement it supports as the particular bears to the universal, the other the same as the universal bears to the particular. The infallible kind is a 'complete proof' (*tekmérion*); the fallible kind has no specific name. By infallible signs I mean those on which syllogisms proper may be based: and this shows us why this kind of sign is called 'complete proof': when people think that what they have said cannot be refuted.<sup>49</sup>

Considering that he directly quoted the passage of Aristotle, we suppose he probably knew the concepts of Aristotle relating to the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

### c. Cicero

Marcus Tullius Cicero was born in 106 B.C. in Arpinum. Renaissance humanists regarded Cicero as "a man who was able to integrate devotion to *litterae humaniores* and public service."<sup>50</sup> His rhetorical treatises are *Rhetorica ad Herennium*<sup>51</sup>, *De Inventione*, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, *Topica*,

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<sup>49</sup> *Rhetoric*, I.2.5, p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> Harold C. Gotoff, *Cicero's Elegant Style: An Analysis of the Pro Archia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> For the first time Lorenzo Valla doubted that *Ad C. Herennium* was the writing of Cicero. In 1491 Raphael Regius positively separated that work from Cicero's name. Who was the real author? We have no evidence to answer that question. This work is traditionally attributed to Cicero. But all the recent editors disagree with this view. John Ferguson and John P. V. Dacre Balsdon include this work among Cicero's writings ("Cicero" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th.). Charlton T. Lewis and Short also categorize it in Cicero's writings, even though it's author is not clear. Cf. Lewis and Short,

*De Fato, Paradoxa Stoicorum, De Partitione Oratoria, Brutus, and Orator.*

Cicero was Calvin's chief philosophical source in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*. Calvin used all rhetorical writings including the *Ad Herennium*, accepted as Cicero's in the editions Calvin used.<sup>52</sup> Except for the *Ad Herennium*, these writings of Cicero do not offer a systematic scheme of rhetorical terminology.

In fact, of Calvin's rather few citations of Cicero's rhetorical treatises, only a fraction have to do with the technical vocabulary of rhetoric. Yet, indirectly, these works and Cicero's other works undergird Calvin's whole sense of style and his rhetorical skill.<sup>53</sup>

Cicero's influence upon Calvin's method of hermeneutics was substantial. For example, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin undertook to reflect on man's natural knowledge of God and turned to Cicero for far-reaching support.<sup>54</sup> But in selecting and recording Cicero's insights, Calvin edited them for his own specific Christian use.<sup>55</sup> Calvin used Cicero's thought, and at the same time developed

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"Abbreviations," in *A Latin Dictionary Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. viii.

<sup>52</sup> "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, edited and translated by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, P. 81.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>54</sup> Egil Grisliis, "Calvin's Use of Cicero in the *Institutes* I:1-5 - A Case Study in Theological Method," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 62 (1971): 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

his own theological models from the standpoint of Scripture.

Cicero revealed clearly the concept of *brevitas et facilitas* in his writings. He argued that the form of narrative which contained an exposition of a case in law ought to have three qualities: "it should be brief, clear, and plausible (*ut brevis, ut aperta, ut probabilis sit*)."<sup>56</sup> In the *Orator* Cicero repeated this rule - to set forth the facts briefly, clearly and plausibly (*breviter exponere et probabiliter et aperte*).<sup>57</sup> These three elements became the framework of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin also showed that his method followed Cicero's statement. Cicero's three qualities appeared clearly in Calvin's writings where Calvin interpreted the text of Scripture with the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

First, Cicero, who had influence on the philological insights of Erasmus and the Reformers, described how to employ *brevitas* as follows:

It (the form of narrative) will be brief if it begins with what needs to be said, and is not carried back to the most remote events; if it does not include details when

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<sup>56</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione* I.20.28, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 57. The author of *Ad Herennium* explained to us "A statement of facts should have three qualities: brevity, clarity, and plausibility (*ut brevis, ut dilucida, ut veri similis sit*) in *Ad C. Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 24-25. The rule is Isocratean or even older. Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* 4.2.31-2 mentioned three elements. But Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3.16, "scorned the injunction of brevity in favor of the proper mean" (*Ad Herennium*, p. 25).

<sup>57</sup> *Orator*, 35.122, p. 397.

it is sufficient to have stated the substance of the story - for often it is sufficient to say what happened, so that you do not need to tell how it happened - and if the narrative is not carried farther than is needed, and if it does not digress to another story.<sup>58</sup>

The employment of *brevitas* consists in this. His description reminds us of Calvin's method. Cicero added some important factors in connection with *brevitas*. These are technical elements. According to Cicero, *brevitas* can be gained "if the story is told in such way that at times something which has not been mentioned can be gathered from what has been said; also, if not only what is prejudicial is omitted but also what is neither prejudicial nor helpful; and if each thing is mentioned once and once only, and if it does not begin all

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<sup>58</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 20.28, pp. 57-59. "*Brevis erit, si unde necesse est inde initium sumetur et non ab ultimo repetetur, et si, cuius rei satis erit summam dixisse, eius partes non dicentur - nam saepe satis est quid factum sit dicere, ut ne narres quemadmodum sit factum, - et si non longius, quam quo opus est, in narrando procedetur, et si nullam in rem aliam transibitur.*" Cf. *Ad Herennium* clearly shows how to use *brevitas*: "We shall be able to make the statement of facts brief if we begin it at the place at which we need to begin; if we do not try to recount from the remotest beginning; if our statement of facts is summary and not detailed; if we carry it forward, not to the furthest point, but to the point to which we need to go; if we use no digressions and do not wander from the account we have undertaken to set forth; and if we present the outcome in such a way that the facts that have preceded can also be known, although we have not spoken of them. (*Rem breviter narrare poterimus si inde incipiemus narrare unde necesse erit; et si non ab ultimo initio repetere volemus; et si summam, non particulatim narrabimus; et si non ad extremum, sed usque eo quo opus erit persequemur; et si transitionibus nullis utemur, et si non deerrabimus ab eo quod coeperimus exponere; et si exitus rerum ita ponemus ut ante quoque quae facta sint sciri possint, tamentsi nos reticuerimus.*)" *Ad Herennium*, I.9.14-15. pp. 25-26.

over again at the point at which it has just stopped."<sup>59</sup> He also warned against not being deceived by a false brevity. "Many are deceived by an appearance of brevity so that they are prolix when they think they are brief."<sup>60</sup> He stated that this occurred when speakers tried to "say many things in a brief compass, rather than saying very few or not more than is necessary."<sup>61</sup> According to him, *brevitas* is "secured when no word is used unless necessary (*Brevitas est, cum nisi necessarium nullum assumitur verbum*)."<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, Cicero showed us how to obtain clarity in a narrative. Calvin applied this to the clarity of Scripture and the clarity of the interpretation of Scripture. Cicero exhibited the principle of clarity:

It will be possible to make the narrative clear if the events are presented one after another as they occurred, and the order of events in time is preserved so that the story is told as it will prove to have happened or will seem possible to have happened. On this point care must be taken not to say anything in a confused and intricate style, not to shift to another subject, not to go back to ultimate beginnings nor to go on far, and not to omit

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<sup>59</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 20.28. p. 59.

<sup>60</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 20.28, p. 59. He gave an example: "Many, for example, think that one is speaking briefly who speaks as follows: 'I went to his house, I called the slave. He answered. I asked for his master. He said that he was not at home.' Here, although so many things could not be said more briefly, still because it was sufficient to say, 'He said he was not at home,' it is made too long by the abundance of details. Therefore in this section of the speech too, a false brevity is to be avoided, and one must refrain no less from an excess of superfluous facts than from an excess of words."

<sup>61</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 20.28, p. 59.

<sup>62</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 22.32, p. 65.

anything pertinent to the case.<sup>63</sup>

He maintained the relation between brevity and clarity. "In general the rules about brevity are to be followed in seeking clarity also."<sup>64</sup> Because misunderstanding came from the excessive length of a narrative, he insisted that the diction should be perspicuous.<sup>65</sup> In order to be perspicuous in an argument, the form should have a partition: "In an argument a partition correctly made renders the whole speech clear and perspicuous (*Recte habita in causa partitio illustrem et perspicuam totam efficit orationem*)."<sup>66</sup>

The word *perspicuitas* used by Cicero is closely related to the terms *facilitas* and *simplicitas*. They are almost synonymous from the hermeneutical perspective. Cicero regarded the principle of *facilitas* as something easier to follow.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 20.29, p. 59. "Aperta autem narratio poterit esse, si ut quidque primum gestum erit ita primum exponetur, et rerum ac temporum ordo servabitur, ut ita narrentur ut gestae res erunt aut ut potuisse geri videbuntur. Hic erit considerandum ne quid perturbate, ne quid contorte dicatur, ne quam in aliam rem transeat, ne ab ultimo repetatur, ne ad extremum prodeatur, ne ab ultimo repetatur, ne ad extremum prodeatur, ne quid quod ad rem pertineat praetereatur." Cf. *Ad Herennium*, IV. 12.17, p. 271. "Clarity renders language plain and intelligible. It is achieved by two means, the use of current terms and of proper terms. Current terms are such as are habitually used in everyday speech. Proper terms are such as, or can be, the designations specially characteristic of the subject of our discourse".

<sup>64</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 20.29, p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 20.29, p. 61.

<sup>66</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 21.31, p. 63.

<sup>67</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 27.41, p. 81.

According to him, a speaker must use the word with simple lucidity (*plane et dilucide*).<sup>68</sup> Calvin tried to use this method in order to help his readers understand the text more easily. In contrast with Bucer's highly academic interpretation, Calvin gave a practical interpretation meant for common readers.

*Perspicuitas* contrasts with *ambiguitas*. *Perspicuitas* can be obtained words with unambiguous meanings. *Ambiguitas* occurs when what is written has two or more meanings.<sup>69</sup> According to Cicero, ambiguity causes controversy: "A controversy arises from ambiguity when there is doubt as to what the writer meant, because the written statement has two or more meanings."<sup>70</sup> Calvin, like Cicero, avoided the ambiguous interpretation which could confuse his readers' understanding of Scripture. While Calvin dealt with ambiguity from the perspective of Scriptural interpretation, Erasmus applied it to understanding the original text of Scripture.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *De Oratore*, I. 32.144, p. 101.

<sup>69</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 13.17, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> *De Inventione*, II. 34.116, p. 285.

<sup>71</sup> With his effort's to overcome the obscurity in Scripture Erasmus opened the new era of textual criticism in Scriptural interpretation. Cf. Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus*, p. 175. "Obscurities in Scripture arise, according to Erasmus, not only from the nature of its tropes but also from technical problems like incorrect translations; incorrect ideas about antiquity; mistaking the meanings of words with similar sound; confusing the things expressed by the same noun; incorrect punctuation; incorrect pronunciations; contradictions, untruths, absurdities; and difficulties of telling in whose name a



Further, Cicero insisted that the narrative should be plausible in order to persuade the audience. Calvin applied suitability or plausibility to the intention of the author of Scripture and the context of the present passage. He regarded the true meaning of a passage of Scripture as the suitable agreement with the intention of the author. Cicero explained the principle of plausibility as follows:

The narrative will be plausible if it seems to embody characteristics which are accustomed to appear in real life; if the proper qualities of the character are maintained, if reasons for their actions are plain, if there seems to have been ability to do the deed, if it can be shown that the time was opportune, the space sufficient and the place suitable for the events about to be narrated; if the story fits in with the nature of the actors in it, the habits of ordinary people and the beliefs of the audience. Verisimilitude can be secured by following these principles.<sup>72</sup>

According to Cicero, a plausible statement is "supported by the opinion of the auditor without corroborating evidence: for

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discourse proceeds."

<sup>72</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 21.29. p. 61. "*Probabilis erit narratio, si in ea videbuntur inesse ea quae solent apparere in veritate; si personarum dignitates servabuntur; si causae factorum exstabunt; si fuisse facultates faciendi videbuntur; si tempus idoneum, si spatii satis, si locus opportunus ad eandem rem qua de re narrabitur fuisse ostendetur; si res et ad eorum qui agent naturam et ad vulgi morem et ad eorum qui audient opinionem accommodabitur. Ac veri quidem similis ex his rationibus esse poterit.*" Cf. *Ad Herennium*, I. 9.16, p. 29. "Our statement of the facts will have plausibility if it answers the requirements of the usual, the expected, and the natural; if account is strictly kept of the length of time, the standing of the persons involved, the motives in the planning, and the advantages offered by the scene of action, so as to obviate the argument in refutation that the time was too short, or that there was no motive, or that the place was unsuitable, or that the persons themselves could not have acted or been treated so."

example, There is no one who does not wish his children to be safe and happy."<sup>73</sup>

#### d. Quintilian

Marcus Fabius Quintilian, the author of *Institutio Oratoria*, was born, like Seneca, about 35 A.D. at Calagurris in northern Spain (modern Calahorra). His father was a successful rhetorician in Rome so that Quintilian was sent to Rome for his education. He had good teachers like "the famous grammaticus Remmius Palaemon, and the no less distinguished rhetorician Domitius Afer."<sup>74</sup> Quintilian practiced for a time as an advocate in the law courts, and taught rhetoric, combining this with advocacy in the law courts. He followed the rhetorical theory of Cicero. "There are many references to the rhetorical theory of *On the Orator* and *The Orator* and to other works of Cicero and there are more illustrations of technique taken from Cicero's speeches than from any other source."<sup>75</sup> His purpose in the *Institutio* is as follows:

It will be his aim not only to instruct students in the science which some regard as the whole of rhetoric - he has perhaps the pedantic Pliny in mind, but probably also numerous other technical handbooks - but he will try to

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<sup>73</sup> *De Inventione*, I. 30.48, p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> "Introduction," in *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, vol.1, trans. by H. B. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. vii.

<sup>75</sup> George Kennedy, *Quintilian* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1969), p. 55.

nourish eloquence and cover the bare bones with flesh.<sup>76</sup>

In his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* the source for Calvin's rhetorical terminology was Quintilian's *Institutio*, cited by name countless times for a variety of purposes.<sup>77</sup>

According to Battles, Quintilian was perhaps second to Cicero in the formation of Calvin's sense of style and critical insight.<sup>78</sup> He goes on to describe Quintilian's influence on Calvin's rhetorical learning as follows:

Yet he provided Calvin with more than technical learning: Calvin drew moral teaching and pedagogical insights, and a great deal more, from him. In some instances, citations of Cicero have come by way of Quintilian, especially illustrations of rhetorical figures drawn from Cicero's speeches. In one place Calvin prefers Quintilian's use of a term over Cicero's.<sup>79</sup>

Following Cicero's tradition, Quintilian systematized the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the rhetorical expression of wishing, detestation, entreaty, or anxiety:

We shall also find it a useful device for wakening the attention of our audience to create the impression that we shall not keep them lying and intend to stick closely to the point. The mere fact of such attention undoubtedly makes the judge ready to receive instruction from us, but we shall contribute still more to this effect if we give a brief and lucid summary of the case (*si breviter et dilucide summam rei*) which he has to try.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> "Introduction," in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, edited and translated by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, p. 82.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 1.34, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), P. 25.

The motif of *breviter et dilucide summam* appeared in Calvin's own method of Scriptural interpretation in the preface of his *Commentary on Romans* (*praecipuam interpretis virtutem in perspicua brevitate esse positam*).<sup>81</sup> In his *Institutes* he followed the ideal of *brevitas* over against scholastic prolixity.

Quintilian recognized that statements should have the following characteristics: "Most writers, more especially those of the Isocratean school, hold that it should be lucid, brief and plausible (for it is of no importance if we substitute clear for lucid, or credible or probable for plausible)."<sup>82</sup> He used the words lucidity, simplicity, and facility more than the term brevity, while Cicero used *brevitas* several times. This shows that Quintilian emphasized the hermeneutical interest of the text and the practical perspective of the audience. Cicero focused on the orator and his style of delivery while Quintilian stressed the audience's facile understanding.

First, Quintilian described how to make the statement of facts lucid:

We shall achieve lucidity and clearness in our statement of facts, first by setting forth our story in words which are appropriate, significant and free from any taint of meanness, but not on the other hand farfetched or unusual, and secondly by giving a distinct account of

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<sup>81</sup> CO 10.402-3.

<sup>82</sup> *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.31, pp. 66-7. Cf. "*Eam plerique scriptores, maxime qui sunt ab Isocrate, volunt esse lucidam, brevem, verisimilem.*"

facts, persons, times, places and causes, while our delivery must be adapted to our matter, so that the judge will take in what we say with the utmost readiness.<sup>83</sup>

While Cicero began to present the order of events in order to make the narrative clear, Quintilian emphasized the exposition of a story with the appropriate and significant words, referring to the historical accounts of facts, persons, times, places and causes. Quintilian's perspectives made his method historical and hermeneutical. Calvin applied clarity or perspicuity to the principle of *facilitas*, seeking simplicity or the easy understanding of the text. Against the allegorical interpretation of Origen and its ambiguity, he insisted on a clear interpretation as Scripture is clear.

Secondly, Quintilian explained how the statement of facts could be brief:

The statement of facts will be brief, if in the first place we start at that point of the case at which it begins to concern the judge, secondly avoid irrelevance, and finally cut out everything the removal of which neither hampers the activities of the judge nor harms our own case. For frequently conciseness of detail is not inconsistent with length in the whole.<sup>84</sup>

His view on brevity is similar to that given in Calvin's

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<sup>83</sup> *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.36. pp. 69-71. "Erit autem narratio aperta atque dilucida, si fuerit primum exposita verbis propriis et significantibus et non sordidis quidem, non tamen exquisitis et ab usu remotis, tum distincta rebus, personis, temporibus, locis, causis, ipsa etiam pronuntiatione in hoc accommodata, ut iudex quae dicentur quam facillime accipiat."

<sup>84</sup> *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.43, pp. 72-3. "Brevis erit narratio ante omnia, si inde coeperimus rem exponere, unde ad iudicem pertinet; deinde, si nihil extra causam dixerimus; tum etiam, si reciderimus omnia, quibus sublatis neque cognitioni quidquam neque utilitati detrahatur."

definition. Calvin, following him, applied these elements to his ideal of *brevitas*, revealing the intention of the author, concerning him with the nature of the text, and reducing long explanations. On the use of brevity, Quintilian expressed as follows:

Personally, when I use the word brevity, I mean not saying less, but not saying more than occasion demands. As for repetitions and tautologies and diffuseness, which some writers of textbooks tell us we must avoid, I pass them by; they are faults which we should shun for other reasons beside our desire for brevity. But we must be equally on our guard against the obscurity which results from excessive abridgment, and it is better to say a little more than is necessary than a little less. For though a diffuse irrelevance is tedious, the omission of what is necessary is positively dangerous.<sup>85</sup>

His description of brevity is indicative of the relationship between the rule of rhetoric in general and the procedure that Calvin usually suggested to his readers in order to understand a passage. Using Quintilian's method, Calvin made his interpretation easy and simple, not boring his readers.

Thirdly, Quintilian argued that a statement of fact should be credible or plausible (*credibilis* or *verisimilem*).

The statement of fact will be credible, if in the first place we take care to say nothing contrary to nature, secondly if we assign reasons and motives for the facts on which the inquiry turns (it is unnecessary to do so with the subsidiary facts as well), and if we make the characters of the actors in keeping with the facts we desire to be believed.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.43-44, pp. 73-75.

<sup>86</sup> *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.52. pp. 78-9. "*Credibilis autem erit narratio ante omnia, si prius consuluerimus nostrum animum, ne quid naturae dicamus adversum, deinde si causas ac rationes factis praeposuerimus, non omnibus sed de quibus quaeritur, si personas convenientes iis, quae facta*

In the explanation of plausibility Quintilian did not touch on the life of ordinary people, which Cicero detailed. He, however, maintained that in order for the narrative with argument to be credible, it should be short and simple (*simplici et brevi*).<sup>87</sup>

## 2. Scripture

For Calvin Scripture was not complicated, but simple. Scripture was simply the eloquent speech of the Holy Spirit for his simple people.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, to vitiate the simplicity of Scripture was to destroy the whole of Scripture. Calvin criticized Origen for his torturing Scripture allegorically. Origen vitiated the simplicity of Scripture.<sup>89</sup> For Calvin the simplicity of Scripture was immediately connected with his hermeneutical method. This supplied Calvin with the foundation for the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as his hermeneutical ideal.

Recently Battles and Gamble suggest that Calvin exhibited Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. According to Battles, Calvin commended "the Biblical writers in general for their clarity, simplicity, and brevity,

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*credivolemus.*"

<sup>87</sup> *Institutio Oratoria*, IV. 2.54. p. 79.

<sup>88</sup> Richard C. Gamble, "*Brevitas et Facilitas*," p. 14.

<sup>89</sup> *Comm. on Gen.* 21:12, p. 545.

qualities that he especially prized and sought to attain".<sup>90</sup> Calvin tried to "write in such a way as to communicate his whole thought clearly and with no waste of words."<sup>91</sup> According to Gamble, Calvin, rejecting frivolous rhetoric (the rhetoric of the world), had high regard for the simplicity of Scripture and attempted to imitate that style as his own.<sup>92</sup> This simplicity (or *facilitas*) was "particularly noticeable in his commentaries and even more markedly so in his sermons".<sup>93</sup> I agree with Gamble's statement: "The ultimate presupposition of this hermeneutic is the clear brevity of the Scriptures".<sup>94</sup>

Calvin regarded Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* in the *Institutes*, and his commentaries. Calvin pointed out that even Christ used a simple interpretation: "I think that the written law, as well as the exposition of it, will come to an end; but, as I am of opinion that Christ spoke more simply, I do not choose to feed the ears of readers with such amusements."<sup>95</sup> Calvin, therefore, saw that Scripture contained the simple words of Christ.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ford Lewis Battles, "Introduction," in *Inst.*, pp. lxix-lxx.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. lxx.

<sup>92</sup> Richard C. Gamble, "*Brevitas et Facilitas*," p. 15.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

<sup>95</sup> *Comm. on Mt.* 5:18, p. 278.

<sup>96</sup> *Comm. on Mk.* 14:24, p. 215.



In his *Institutes* Calvin argued that the simplicity (or *facilitas*) of Scripture, even though it was largely in mean and lowly words, could inspire in us greater reverence than any eloquence of rhetoricians: "Now since such uncultivated and almost rude simplicity (*simplicitas*) inspires greater reverence for itself than any eloquence, what ought one to conclude except that the force of the truth of Sacred Scripture is manifestly too powerful to need the art of words?"<sup>97</sup>

Calvin recognized that the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero could allure, delight, and enrapture us in wonderful measure. For him, however, the power of the biblical rhetoric peculiar to Scripture was "clear from the fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably."<sup>98</sup> On the difference between 'the writings of the world' and Scripture Calvin explained as follows:

Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle, and others of the tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them to this sacred reading. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your very marrow, that, compared with its deep impression, such vigor as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. Consequently, it is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Inst.* 1.8.1, p. 82.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

In his *Commentary on Genesis* Calvin showed that Moses adhered to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* for the benefit of his people. According to Calvin, Moses taught his people simply.

We have elsewhere said, that Moses, by a homely and uncultivated style, accommodates what he delivers to the capacity of the people; and for the best reason; for not only had he to instruct an untaught race of men, but the existing age of the Church was so puerile, that it was unable to receive any higher instruction.<sup>100</sup>

Calvin pointed out that Moses declared God's Word in a homely style.<sup>101</sup> For Calvin the style of Moses was not ornamented and academic, but simple and ordinary. According to Calvin, Moses accommodated his terms to his untaught common people. "For he knew whom he was appointed to instruct, and therefore he always accommodated his words to the rude capacity of the people; and this is his common custom in reference to the names of places, as I have previously intimated."<sup>102</sup> Calvin insisted that Moses did not speak scientifically, but in a popular style.<sup>103</sup> According to Woudstra, Calvin's sensitivity to Moses' simple style led him to make a material point of exegesis from which admonitions can be drawn for contemporary

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<sup>100</sup> *Comm. on Gen. 3:1*, p. 141.

<sup>101</sup> *Comm. on Gen. 3:21*, p. 181.

<sup>102</sup> *Comm. on Gen. 14:1*, pp. 381-2.

<sup>103</sup> *Comm. on Gen. 24:4*, p. 15.

readers.<sup>104</sup>

For Calvin, the prophet Isaiah also strived for accommodation to the common people: "This mode of expression, therefore, Isaiah accommodated to the capacity of the people, that they might know that the covenant into which God entered with the fathers was firm, sure, and eternal, and not changeable or temporary."<sup>105</sup> Calvin observed Jeremiah, who had his own habitual mode of speaking.

There is therefore no wonder that he often uses expressions to which he had been accustomed; for education in a great measure forms the language of men. Though then the Prophet speaks according to the usual phraseology of Scripture, there is yet no doubt but that he retained, as it has been said elsewhere, his own habitual mode of speaking.<sup>106</sup>

Calvin often remarked that prophets like Jeremiah, rejecting the elevated style of 'world rhetoricians', used their own ordinary style for the profit of God's people.

But we must ever bear in mind what we have often stated, that the prophets, when they thus speak in astonishment, do not adopt an elevated style as rhetoricians do, to shew their eloquence, but have always a regard to what is profitable.<sup>107</sup>

Calvin saw the language style of Ezekiel as accommodating itself to the exiles. He agreed with Ezekiel's own adoption of a homely style.

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<sup>104</sup> Marten H. Woudstra, "Calvin Interprets what 'Moses Reports': Observations on Calvin's Commentary on Exodus 1-19," *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Comm. on Isa*, 55:3, p. 161.

<sup>106</sup> *Comm. on Jer*. 50:19, p. 153.

<sup>107</sup> *Comm. on Jer*. 49:25, p. 100.

This is a repetition of the same doctrine; for we said that our prophet is more verbose than Isaiah, and even than Jeremiah, because he had accustomed himself to the form of speech which was then customary among the exiles. He is not, therefore, either so restricted or so polished; but we must understand that he accommodated his language to learners, because he had to do with a people not only rude and dull, but also obstinate. And then they had degenerated as much from the purity of their language as from that of their faith; hence the prophet purposely bends aside from elegance of language. Whatever repetition he might use with men so dull and slothful, it was not superfluous.<sup>108</sup>

Calvin pointed out that Ezekiel, who was accustomed to homely language, did not use an elegant and polished style, since those who were in exile naturally contracted many faults of language.<sup>109</sup>

Calvin believed that Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel employed a simple and easy style in order for ordinary people to understand God's Word more easily. This made him believe that the style of Scripture had its orientation in *brevitas et facilitas*.

Consequently Calvin, influenced by rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian in his ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, confirmed that the authors of Scripture demonstrated this ideal. Calvin made this ideal a part of his own hermeneutical method.

<sup>108</sup> *Comm. on Eze. 3:10-11*, p. 139.

<sup>109</sup> *Comm. on Eze. 2:3*, p. 110.

## C. The Employment of *Brevitas et Facilitas* in Calvin's Writings

Calvin presented the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as a hermeneutical key to Scriptural exegesis in his various writings.

### 1. Calvin's *Institutes*

First, Calvin continued to employ this method from the first Latin edition of the 1536 *Institutes* to the final Latin edition in 1559. For example, in the *Institutes* of 1536 he used it criticizing the Scholastic doctrine of penance:

Now I come to discuss what the Scholastic Sophists have taught concerning repentance. This I will run through in as few words as possible because it is not my intention to pursue everything, lest this little book of mine which I mean to keep to the brevity of a handbook (*enchiridii brevitatem exegere volo*), burst all bounds. They have involved this matter, otherwise not very complicated, in so many volumes that there would be no easy way out if you were to immerse yourself even slightly in their slime.<sup>110</sup>

As opposed to the verbosity of the Scholastic Sophists, he emphasized the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. In the 1559 *Institutes* Calvin replaced *brevitatem* with *compendium*. T.

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<sup>110</sup> *Inst.* (1536) 133. Cf. OS 1.173. For the 1559 version, see *Inst.* 3.4.1. Cf. CO 2.455-456. "Nunc venio ad excutienda ea quae de poenitentia scholastici sophisticac tradiderunt, quae quam paucissimis fieri poterit percurram, quia omnia persecui animus non est, ne hic liber, quem ad docendi compendium aptare studeo, in immensum extrahatur. Et illi rem alioqui non valde implicitam tot voluminibus involverunt, ut non futurus sit facilis exitus, si te paulum in eorum faeces immerseris."

H. L. Parker also identifies *brevitas* with *compendium*, and says that both words "concern the subsequent teaching and not the preliminary understanding."<sup>111</sup> In the following statement his thinking on this principle emerges clearly:

Now, in setting forth how the life of a Christian man is to be ordered, I am not unaware that I am entering into a varied and diverse subject, which in magnitude would occupy a large volume (*et quod magnitudine sua longum volumen explere possit*), were I to try to treat it in full detail. In composing exhortation on but a single virtue, the ancient doctors, as we see, became very prolix (*prolixitatem*). . . . But I do not intend to develop, here, the instruction in living that I am not about to offer to the point of describing individual virtues at length, and of digressing into exhortations (*et in exhortationes exspatietur*). Such may be sought from others's writings, especially from the homilies of the fathers. . . . By nature I love brevity (*Amo natura brevitatem*); and perhaps if I wished to speak more amply (*si copiosius loqui vellem*) it would not be successful. But though a more extended form of teaching (*prolixior docendi ratio*) were highly acceptable, I would nevertheless scarcely care to undertake it. Moreover, the plan of the present work demands that we give a simple outline of doctrine (*simplicem doctrinam*) as briefly (*brevitate*) as possible.<sup>112</sup>

Calvin understood the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* as

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<sup>111</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, p. 87.

<sup>112</sup> *Inst.* 3.6.1. Cf. CO 2.502. "*Porro dum vitam christiani hominis formandam suscipio, argumentum me ingredi non ignoro varium et copiosum, et quod magnitudine sua longum volumen explere possit, si numeris suis omnibus ipsum absolvere libeat. Videmus enim in quantam prolixitatem diffundantur veterum pareneses de singulis tantum virtutibus compositae. . . . Mihi vero animus non est, quam me traditurum nunc profiteor vitae institutionem eo usque extendere, ut et peculiariter singulas prosequatur virtutes, et in exhortationes exspatietur. . . . Amo natura brevitatem; et forte si copiosius loqui vellem, non succederet. Quod si maxime plausibilis esset prolixior docendi ratio, experiri tamen vix liberet. Praesentis autem operis ratio postulat ut simplicem doctrinam quanta licebit brevitatem perstringamus.*"

an escape from prolixity. These elements are closely connected with his idea that readers should be able to understand Scripture easily. Using phrases such as *amo brevitatem*, *amore compendii*, *compendium studeo*, and *brevitati studeo*, Calvin indicated that this method was an important feature of his approach. Calvin often criticized the prolixity of the exegesis of the ancient doctors and insisted on the necessity of his method.

The ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* in the *Institutes* includes several elements. First, Calvin mentioned the principle of brevity. In mentioning man's corruption in Romans 3, Calvin tried to explain the meaning as briefly as possible: "That condemnation of the heart when it is called 'deceitful and corrupt above all else' (Jer. 17:9) is no less severe, But because I am striving for brevity (*Sed quia brevitati studeo*), I shall be content with but one passage."<sup>113</sup> Calvin also said that Scripture imputed to God all that was for our benefit: "Well, then since we are now at the principal point, let us undertake to summarize the matter for our readers by but a few, and very clear, testimonies of Scripture."<sup>114</sup> Calvin did not waste much time explaining others' views and directly

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<sup>113</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.2. Cf. CO 2.210. "*Nihilo levior est cordis condemnatio, quum faradulemtum dicitur (Ier. 17, 9) prae omni re et perversum. Sed quia brevitati studeo, contentus ero uno tantum loco.*"

<sup>114</sup> *Inst.* 2.3.8. CO 2.217. "*Et quoniam in praceipuo cardine iam versamur, agedum summam rei paucis ac apertissimis tantum scripturae testimoniis probatam tradamus lectoribus.*"

expressed his own opinion:

We have said that observance of the law is impossible. Since this is commonly looked upon as a very absurd opinion- Jerome does not hesitate to anathematize it - we ought at once to explain and confirm it in a few words. I do not tarry over what Jerome thinks; let us rather inquire what is true. Here I shall not weave long circumlocutions of various kinds of possibilities.<sup>115</sup>

Another example: In explaining the different meanings of the word "faith" in Scripture, Calvin strove after brevity: "But now we ask, of what sort is that faith which distinguishes the children of God from the unbelievers, by which we call upon God as Father, by which we cross over from death into life, and by which Christ, eternal salvation and life, dwells in us? I believe that I have briefly and clearly (*breviter et dilucide*) explained the force and nature of faith."<sup>116</sup>

With great brevity Calvin also interpreted the body of Christ in heaven related with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper: "But because nothing will be more effective to strengthen the faith of the pious than to have learned that the doctrine which we have put forward has been drawn from the pure Word of God, and rests upon its authority - I shall also

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<sup>115</sup> *Inst.* 2.7.5. Cf. CO 2.256. "*Quod autem impossibilem legis observationem diximus, id est paucis verbis explicandum simul et confirmandum. Solet enim vulgo absurdissima sententia videri, ut Hieronymus non dubitarit anathema illi denuntiare. Quid visum sit Hieronymo, nihil moror; nos quid verum sit inquiramus. Non texam, hic longas ambages de variis possibilitatis generibus.*"

<sup>116</sup> *Inst.* 3.2.13. Cf. CO 2.409. "*Sed nunc quaerimus quid sit fides quae filios Dei ab incredulis distinguit, qua Deum invocamus patrem, qua transimus a morte in vitam, et qua Christus, aeterna salus et vita, in nobis habitat. Eius autem vim et naturam breviter et dilucide explicuisse videor.*"



make this plain with as much brevity (*brevitate*) as I can."<sup>117</sup> Calvin did not want his interpretation to depart from the present subject of the text. Instead, he sought to concentrate on the present matter only.

That gentleman had conceived something bordering on Manichaeism, in his desire to transfuse the essence of God into men. From this arises another fiction of his, that Adam was formed to the image of God because Christ had already been destined as the prototype of human nature before the Fall. But because I am striving for brevity, I must concentrate on the present matter (*Sed quia brevitati studeo, in praesenti causa insistam*).<sup>118</sup>

As Calvin said in the dedicatory preface in the *Commentary on Romans*, he insisted on an exegete's revealing the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*), and warned an interpreter not to lead the readers away from it and wander out of bounds ("*Et sane quum hoc sit prope unicum illius officium, mentem scriptoris, quem explicandum sumpsit, patefacere: quantum ab ea lectores abducit, tantundem a scopo suo aberrat, vel certe a suis finibus quodammodo evagatur*").<sup>119</sup>

Secondly, Calvin mentioned antiprolivity as one of the elements of *brevitas et facilitas*. One of the reasons why Calvin rejected the interpretations of the Fathers was their

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<sup>117</sup> *Inst.* 4. 17.26. Cf. CO 2.1025. "*Sed quia nihil ad confirmandam piorum fidem magis valebit, quam ubi didicerint, quam posuimus doctrinam ex puro Dei verbo sumptam esse, eiusque autoritati inniti, hoc quoque qua potero brevitate planum faciam.*"

<sup>118</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.5. Cf. CO 2.536.

<sup>119</sup> *Romanos*, p. 1.

prolixity in the exegesis of Scripture.<sup>120</sup> The prolixity is the result of repeating the same thing: "I shall not weary my readers with repeating the same thing."<sup>121</sup> Since Calvin believed prolix exegesis wearied his readers, he avoided prolixity to understand the meaning easily and briefly. "Let my readers pardon me if I do not expressly examine the Schoolmen's follies, for I would lighten their burden. It would surely not be very difficult for me, and a praiseworthy thing, to expose to ridicule, to their great shame, what they have heretofore boasted of as mysteries; but because my purpose is to teach profitably, I pass them over."<sup>122</sup> In order for his readers not to be burdened, Calvin said: "If I wanted to weave a whole volume from Augustine, I could readily show my readers that I need no other language than his. But I do not want to burden them with wordiness (*prolixitate*)."<sup>123</sup> For the benefit of his readers Calvin was careful in bringing forth an explanation of the doctrine, and stated: "Not to

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<sup>120</sup> *Inst.* 3.4.1.

<sup>121</sup> *Inst.* 3.2.35.

<sup>122</sup> *Inst.* 3.4.39. Cf. CO 2.490. "*Quod autem in eorum ineptias non tam argute exquiro, ignoscant lectores, quos volo molestia levare. Mihi certe nec valde laboriosum, et tamen plausibile esset traducere cum maximo probro quae antehac pro mysteriis iactarunt; sed quia fructuose docere propositum est, supersedeo.*"

<sup>123</sup> *Inst.* 3.22.8. CO 2.694. "*Si ex Augustino integrum volumen contexere libeat, lectoribus ostendere promptum esset, mihi non nisi eius verbis opus esse; sed eos prolixitate onerare nolo.*"

weary you, I shall bring forth only one example."<sup>124</sup>

Thirdly, Calvin viewed the principle of simplicity as one of the elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin believed the simplest of all interpretations could agree with the truth of Scripture. For example, in the explanation of repentance as the prior condition of forgiveness Calvin stated: "Truly, they who are held by a real loathing of sin cannot do otherwise. For no one ever hates sin unless he has previously been seized with a love of righteousness. This thought, as it was the simplest (*simplicissima*) of all, so has it seemed to me to agree with the truth of Scripture (*ita mihi cum scripturae veritate optime consentire visa est*)."<sup>125</sup>

Calvin viewed the simple meaning as the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*). He insisted that the view of the author of Scripture was simple: "Let us take the apostle's view, which is simple and open (*Facessant igitur hoc genus nugamenta, et ipsam apostoli mentem accipiamus, quae simplex est et aperta*)"<sup>126</sup> Calvin described the plain meaning as that which could be easily understood. This is the principle of *facilitas*. In the explanation of the phrase "Scriptural confession before God" Calvin strove for *facilitas*: "But, to

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<sup>124</sup> *Inst.* 3.10.20. Cf. *Inst.* 3.3.29, 3.4.39.

<sup>125</sup> *Inst.* 3.3.20. Cf. CO 2.451. "*Nemo enim peccatum unquam odit nisi prius iustitiae amore captus. Haece sententia, ut erat simplicissima omnium, ita mihi cum scripturae veritate optime consentire visa est.*"

<sup>126</sup> *Inst.* 3.4.6. Cf. CO 2:461.

make the whole matter plainer and easier, we will first faithfully relate what kind of confession we are taught in the Word of God (*Verum, ut res tota planior et expeditior fiat, primum bona fide referemus quod genus confessionis verbo Dei nobis traditum sit*)."<sup>127</sup> In the interpretation of Christ's promise of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter, Calvin rejected the forced interpretation of Scripture, and viewed the natural meaning as the plain meaning: "I shall bring to this an interpretation not subtle, not forced, not distorted; but natural, fluent, and plain. (*Adferam interpretationem non argutam, non coactam, non detortam, sed germanam, fluentem, obviam*)."<sup>128</sup> In the commentary on Acts 19:2-7 Calvin denied that Paul had rebaptized those who had once been baptized with John's baptism, and at the same time insisted on what he thought to be the simple interpretation of the text: "What, then, do the words, 'They were baptized in the name of Jesus,' mean? Some interpret it to mean that they were only instructed with genuine doctrine by Paul; but I prefer to understand it more simply (*Sed simplicius intelligere*), that it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that is, the visible graces of the Spirit given through the laying on of hands."<sup>129</sup>

Fourthly, one of the aspects of the ideal of *brevitas et*

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<sup>127</sup> *Inst.* 3.4.9. Cf. CO 2.463.

<sup>128</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.1. Cf. CO 2.892.

<sup>129</sup> *Inst.* 4.15.18. Cf. CO 2.972, *Inst.* 4.16.25: "I therefore simply understand. . ."

*facilitas* was a dislike of forced interpretation, which Calvin strongly criticized, as it appeared in the interpretation of Osiander, and the Roman Catholic church. Calvin insisted that to force the meaning of Scripture was detrimental to the Christian community.

In refuting Osiander's doctrine of essential righteousness, Calvin maintained that Osiander twisted the text of Rom. 5:19 so as to suggest that Jesus Christ is our righteousness solely by his divine nature, through which he imparts to us essential righteousness. This could be regarded as invalidating the Reformation doctrine of Christ's sacrifice and the agony of the cross.<sup>130</sup> Calvin continued to criticize Osiander:

When it comes to Scripture, Osiander completely corrupts every passage he cites. In Paul's statement that "faith is reckoned as righteousness" not for the "one who works" but for the "one who believes in him who justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:4-5 p.), Osiander explains "justify" as "to make righteous." With the same rashness he corrupts that whole fourth chapter of Romans. And he does not hesitate to tinge with the same deceit a passage that we have recently cited: "Who will accuse God's elect? It is God who justifies" [Rom. 8: 33]. There it is plain that the question is simply one of guilt and acquittal, and the meaning of the apostle depends on this antithesis. Therefore, both in that reason and in citing Scriptural evidence, Osiander proves himself an incompetent interpreter.<sup>131</sup>

Calvin thought that the Roman Catholic church twisted texts in order to establish its own doctrine. Whenever Calvin attacked the doctrines of the Roman church, he first pointed

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<sup>130</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.5. From the footnote, p. 729.

<sup>131</sup> *Inst.* 3.11.6. Cf. CO 2.537-8.

to a mistaken interpretation, thereby holding to Scripture as the final authority in doctrinal matters. On the doctrine of transubstantiation he followed the principle of antiforce:

And (as one error arises from another) a passage of Jeremiah is so absurdly twisted to prove transubstantiation that I dislike to mention it. The prophet complains that wood is put into his bread [Jer. 11:19, Vg.], signifying that by the enemies' cruelty his bread was infected with bitterness. So David by a similar figure of speech deploras that his bread was corrupted by gall and his drink with vinegar [Ps. 69:21]. These adversaries of ours would hold that Christ's body was allegorically affixed to the wood of the cross. Indeed, they say, some of the ancient writers thought so. As if we ought not rather to pardon their ignorance and bury their disgrace than to add the shamelessness of compelling them still to fight as enemies against the prophet's true meaning.<sup>132</sup>

On the doctrine of transubstantiation Calvin criticized the method of interpretation used by the Roman church: "Other, in interpreting the particule *est* as meaning 'to be transubstantiated', take refuge in a more forced and violently distorted gloss. There is therefore no reason why they should pretend to be moved by reverence for words. For it is something unheard of in all nations and languages that the word *est* should be taken to mean 'to be converted into something else.'<sup>133</sup> In conclusion he insisted on the impossibility of the purely literal interpretation of the

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<sup>132</sup> *Inst.* 4.17.15. Cf. CO 2.1015.

<sup>133</sup> *Inst.* 4.17.20. Cf. CO 2.1018. "*Alii, dum particulam EST pro transsubstantiari positam interpretantur, ad glossam suffugiunt magis coactam et violentur detortam. Ideoque non est cur se verborum reverentia moveri obtendant. Est enim hoc gentibus ac linguis omnibus inauditum, ut verbum EST in hunc sensum usurpetur, nempe pro converti in aliud.*"

Lord's body, and let his readers judge "what an unjust wrong these syllable-snatchers do us by imbuing the simple-minded with the notion that we discredit Christ's words, when we have actually proved that they madly pervert and confound them but that we faithfully and rightly expound them."<sup>134</sup>

Fifthly, one of the aspects of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* (in the *Institutes*) was antidisputation. This principle means that Calvin avoided disputation with others and unnecessary controversy as much as possible, and if possible, did not spend much time to refute the views of others. Attacking the Roman Catholic church's notion of implicit faith, Calvin said: "But let us not tarry longer over refuting them; we merely admonish the reader to compare these doctrines with ours. The very clarity of truth itself will of itself provide a sufficiently ready refutation."<sup>135</sup>

Calvin adopted a positive attitude in order to overcome a controversy. He tried to solve a debate by expounding the correct definition: "Now, for my part, when there is a dispute concerning anything, I am stupid enough to refer everything back to the definition itself, which is the hinge and

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<sup>134</sup> *Inst.* 4.17.23. Cf. CO 2.1022. "*Iam lectoribus iudicare promptum erit, quam iniustam nobis iniuriam faciant isti syllabarum aucupes, dum simplices imbuunt hac opinione, fidem nos detrahere Chrii verbis, quae furiose ab illis perverti ac confundi, a nobis autem fideliter ac dextre explicari demonstravimus.*"

<sup>135</sup> *Inst.* 3.2.3. Cf. CO 2.399. "*Quibus refutandis ne longius immoremur, tantum admonemus lectorem ut ipsa cum nostris conferat: ipsa enim veritatis perspicuitas satis expeditam per se refutationem suggeret.*"

foundation of the whole debate."<sup>136</sup> Calvin disliked spending unnecessary time in unnecessary debates.<sup>137</sup> Calvin said:

We do not even tarry over the subtlety of Thomas, that foreknowledge of merits is not the cause of the predestination on the side of the predestinator's act but that on our side it may in a way be so called: namely, according to the particular estimate of predestination, as when God is said to predestine glory for man on account of merits, because he has decreed to bestow upon him grace by which to merit glory.<sup>138</sup>

In the *Institutes* Calvin employed the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* having a few elements such as brevity, and simplicity. He, however, was opposed to forced interpretations, prolixity, and unnecessary argumentation.

## 2. Calvin's Treatises

Calvin adhered to the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his treatises. In 1545 Calvin edited the *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* as a brief summary of religion (*Nam quum ante annos septem edita a me esset brevis religionis summa sub*

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<sup>136</sup> *Inst.* 3.4.1. Cf. CO 2.457. "Ego certe pro mea crassitie, quum de re aliqua disputatur, ad ipsam definitionem omnia refero, quae est totius disputationis cardo ac fundamentum." For an examination on the method of Calvin's solution on a debate, see *Inst.* 3.19.3. "But for the discussion of this question, the higher topics upon which the whole controversy rested had to be considered."

<sup>137</sup> *Inst.* 3.5.8. Cf. CO 2.497.

<sup>138</sup> *Inst.* 3.22.9. Cf. CO 2.695. For the study of Aquinas on God's foreknowledge of man's merits, see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* I. Xli. 1, art. 3; *Summa Theol.* I. xxiii. 5; sec. 3, quoted in the footnote, *Inst*, p. 943.



*catechismi nimine*).<sup>139</sup> Calvin hinted that he would use the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in his *Catechism*. In fact Calvin used expressions like "Explain this more clearly (*Expone hoc clarius*),"<sup>140</sup> "This needs a rather clearer explanation (*Hoc clariori etiamnum expositione indiget*),"<sup>141</sup> and "This is put here to express more clearly. . . (*Ad exprimendam clarius*)".<sup>142</sup> Calvin recommended this method in his criticisms of the Council of Trent.

Let Archpresbyters also, Curates, Parsons parochial, or otherwise holding a cure of souls, by whatever tenure they hold their churches, personally, or if under lawful impediment, by fit persons, at least on the Lord's day, and on solemn feast days, feed the people committed to them, according to their ability, with saving words, by teaching them those things which all must know in order to salvation, and announcing to them with brevity and plainness of speech the vices to be shunned and the virtues to be followed, in order to escape eternal punishment and gain celestial glory.<sup>143</sup>

### 3. Calvin's Sermons

Calvin also applied the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* to his sermons. His preaching method was always to communicate the Word of God with simplicity and brevity. His

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<sup>139</sup> CO 6.7-8.

<sup>140</sup> *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, p. 98. Cf. CO 6.28.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102. Cf. CO 6.38.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103. Cf. CO 6.38.

<sup>143</sup> "Canon and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 3. p, 83.

method of preaching was influenced by rhetoricians like Quintilian and Cicero. But like other Reformers such as Melancthon, Bucer, and Bullinger, Calvin employed the rhetorical method "rather as a tool in the interpretation of documents than for a conscious directive in his own writing."<sup>144</sup> Calvin preached about eight times every two weeks in Geneva.<sup>145</sup> He seemed to follow the approach of Augustine and John Chrysostom. Calvin would "speak clearly to the common people by following the form of the revealed text and avoiding the temptation of excessive rhetoric."<sup>146</sup> According to Parker, Calvin regarded the familiar style as the most suitable.<sup>147</sup> In order for his common congregation not to be confused by similarity of sound, he even wanted to preach with a simple word for a quite different word.<sup>148</sup> In order for them to understand his preaching easily, Calvin used the simple word and the simple sentence in accordance with the principle of

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<sup>144</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1992), p. 131.

<sup>145</sup> W. Robert Godfrey, "John Calvin, the Preacher," in *Sermons on Galatians* by Calvin (Audubon: Old Paths Publications, 1995), p. ix.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, p. 139.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 141. Cf. D. M. Miles, "Calvin's New Testament Sermons: A Homiletical Survey" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1975), p. 82, quoted in T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, p. 141.

simplicity.<sup>149</sup> Harold Dekker says: "The outstanding quality of Calvin's style is its clarity and simplicity, together with its directness and earnestness. This quality is especially notable when compared with the fashion of his day."<sup>150</sup>

Calvin's style of preaching was "never merely ornamental or colloquial, but was devised for nothing more nor less than to communicate the Word of God."<sup>151</sup> Calvin used simplicity, clarity and forcefulness for this exacting purpose.<sup>152</sup>

For example, in the *Sermons from Job*, after commenting on the long explanation of other exegetes, Calvin stated:

Concerning the following saying: "I will wait until the day of my changing may come." Some expounded it that if

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., pp. 141-149. Calvin's sermons are "not mealy mouthed commonplaces or sermons which he had up his sleeve to make them serve all passages of the Scripture, like a shoe for all feet, but expositions, true, pure, plain, and proper for the text which he had to explain." (*Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. xiv) For the study of Calvin's preaching, see V. E. d'Assonville, "Calvyn as prediker," in *Die Kerblad* 66 (1963), 3-4; H. D. A. Du Toit, "Calvyn en die prediking," in *Nederduitse Gereformeerde teologiese tydskrif* 5 (1964): 142-149; A. M. Hunter, Calvin as a Preacher, in *Expository Times* 30 (1918-19): 562-564; Erwin Mülhaupt, *Die Predigt Calvins, ihre Geschichte, ihre Form und ihre religiösen Grundgedanken* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931); Leory Nixon, *John Calvin. Expository Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950); T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947); R. Stauffer, *L'homiletique de Calvin* (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1953), and "Les Sermons Inédits de Calvin sur le Livre de la Genèse," in *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 98 (1965): 26-36.

<sup>150</sup> Harold Dekker, "Introduction," in *Sermons from Job*, ed. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. xxiv.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. xxvii.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

Job thought that God would raise the dead, and that there was some hope of the resurrection and renewal, he would wait with for that day. But it must be taken more simply; namely, "Lord, comfort me; for I am now confounded, I see Thou usest nothing but force, I see Thou executest nothing but violence against me; and so must I still fight and strain myself, and I have no other comfort except to wait for the day of my change."<sup>153</sup>

Using the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin made his preaching practical.<sup>154</sup>

Recently Farley noticed the principle of naturalness in Calvin's sermons on the Ten Commandments. This principle of naturalness used by rhetoricians means that an exegete interpreted the text naturally, not forcedly or ambiguously.

For Calvin the true meaning was the natural one:

Among Calvin's preferred principles of interpretation is his quest for a text's "true and natural sense." We meet the phrase "*le vrey sens . . . et naturel du passage*" (CO 26:310), or similar forms of it, throughout the Sermons on the Ten Commandments. For example: "*Voila le vrey sens et naturel de Moyse*: (CO 26:244); or again, "*Tant y a que c'est le vray sens, et naturel du passage*" (CO 26:310); and still again, "*si nous voulons avoir le sens naturel de ce passage*" (CO 26:335), and finally: "*Or donc maintenant nous avons le vray sens naturel du passage*" (CO 26:376). Obviously, these passage have to be

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<sup>153</sup> *Sermons from Job*, p. 83.

<sup>154</sup> *Sermons from Job*, p. 163. For the study of Calvin's sermons on Job, see Susan E. Schreiner, "Through a Mirror Dimly: Calvin's Sermons on Job," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 175-169. She argues that Calvin shared more concerns with the Thomistic line of interpretation than with the Gregorian because Gregory emphasized the moral and allegorical senses, while Thomas undertook a literal exposition of the text. (pp. 176-177) She goes on to say: "But Calvin rejected allegory. Anxious to 'bridle' the mind, he strove after the 'plain' or 'simple' sense of the text. (CO 33:272, 443, 448, 700, 757; 34:51, 68, 82, 261, 346, 366, 416, 575; 35:246, 259, 261, 464, 477)" Cf. John I. McIndoe, "John Calvin, Preface to the Homilies of Chrysostom," in *Hartford Quarterly Review* 5 (1965): 19-26.

explored within their context to grasp the principle's true forcefulness, but it is one of Calvin's oft-repeated explanations as to why he is required to infer the message he draws.<sup>155</sup>

#### 4. Calvin's Commentaries

Calvin's commentaries revealed his position on this method. He stated his love of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* in the dedicatory preface to the *Commentary on Romans* in 1539 and he again praised this method in the preface to the *Commentary on Psalms* in 1557. We must recognize that this ideal, as the central principle of Calvin's hermeneutics, becomes very clear from a comparison of Calvin's commentaries with Luther's commentary on Genesis and Bucer's commentary on Romans. I shall examine this ideal in Calvin's commentaries later.

<sup>155</sup> B. W. Farley, "Recurring Hermeneutical Principles in Calvin's Sermons, Polemical Treatises and Correspondence," in *Calvin as Exegete*, ed. Peter De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1995), p. 70.