UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

SUMMARY

BREVITAS ET FACILITAS

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

BY

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

many scholars recognize that the hallmarks of Calvin's hermeneutical approach are the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. They, however, have not revealed how Calvin handled the text of Scripture with these principles. They have not adequately demonstrated how Calvin's principles of *brevitas et facilitas* are rooted in the rhetorical method of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, and also not that these hermeneutical principles are embedded in the basic motives of his theology. After having analysed Calvin's writings, I discovered ten component elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

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

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

The purpose of chapter 2 is to study the background of Calvin's hermeneutics. It includes how Calvin prepared himself to be a faithful interpreter of Scripture. I deal with what factors had influence on Calvin's hermeneutics. In chapters 3

and 4, I survey the history of hermeneutics from Calvin's own perspective. My emphasis is on Calvin's attitude toward other interpreters. In chapter 5, I examine the development, the source, and the employment of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. In order to ascertain the origin of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*, I compare this method with the rhetorical skill described with the same term. I argue that Calvin regarded the nature of Scripture as the source of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. Chapter 6 examines two theological presuppositions in Calvin's hermeneutics: firstly the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture, and secondly the principle *sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. As far as the Reformers' doctrine of Scripture is concerned, I deal with the fact that the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* is closely related to the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture which offered the Reformers the principle *Scrptura sui ipsius interpres*. In chapter 7, I identify and describe ten component elements as the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

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OPSOMMING

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deur

Myung Jun Ahn

Promotor: **Prof. Dr. CJ Wethmar**
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Die hermeneutiese metode waarvan Calvyn gebruik gemaak het om die juiste betekenis van 'n teks te bepaal, het selfs in die huidige tyd tot indringende diskussies aanleiding gegee. Soos die ander Reformatore het ook Calvyn in sy Skrifinterpretasie van die histories-grammatiese metode gebruik gemaak. Al het hy hierdie metode in die algemeen met die ander Reformatore gemeenskaplik gehad, het hy dit tog op 'n eiesoortige wyse aangewend. Die eiesoortigheid van sy benadering het daarin bestaan dat hy die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* tot sentrale dimensie van sy hermeneutiek gemaak het en dat hy dit sy hele loopbaan lank konsekwent in sy eksegetiese geskrite toegepas het.

Al was die vermelde beginsels deur baie geleerdes beskou as die onderskeidende kenmerk van Calvyn se hermeneutiek was die inhoud en toepassing daarvan tot dusver nog nie grondig ondersoek nie. In hierdie dissertasie word

die hipotese gestel en uiteindelik bevestig dat die aanwesigheid en funksionering van die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* in die werk van Calvyn medbepaal is deur die retoriese metodiek van Aristoteles, Cicero en Quintilianus en uiteindelik ten diepste bepaal word deur Calvyn se oortuiginge in verband met die Heilige Skrif en met name sy opvatting aangaande die *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. Hierdie beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* word eksplisiet in die inleiding tot sy kommentaar op die Romeinebrief voorgestel as die hermeneutiese uitganspunt van sy Skrifinterpretasie.

In 'n poging om tot 'n goeie begrip vir hierdie hermeneutiese uitgangspunt van Calvyn te kom, is die historiese, retoriese, en teologiese dimensies daarvan in hierdie proefskrif bestudeer. In hierdie proses is aandag geskenk aan sy briewe, preke, kommentare, traktate en sy Institusie.

Na die inleidende opmerkinge wat in hoofstuk een gebied is, is die agtergrond van Calvyn se hermeneutiek in hoofstuk twee aan die orde gestel. Dit sluit onder andere in 'n beskrywing van hoe Calvyn homself voorberei het om 'n betroudbare uitlegger van die Heilige Skrif te word asook 'n uiteensetting van die invloede wat op die hermeneutiek van Calvyn ingewerk het. In hoofstukke drie en vier is kortliks die geskiedenis van die hermeneutiek vanuit die perspektief van Calvyn nagegaan. Nadruk word gelê op sy houding teenoor

ander vroegkerklike en Reformatoriese uitleggers. Hoofstuk vyf beskryf die ontwikkeling, bronne en implementering van die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas*. Hierdie kenmerkende metodiek van Calvyn word vergelyk met die retoriese vaardigheid wat met dieselfde terme beskryf word. Die standpunt word beklemtoon dat die ideale van *brevitas et facilitas* by Calvyn ten eerste sy oorsprong het in sy opvattinge aangaande die aard van die Heilige Skrif. Hierdie gesigspunt word in hoofstuk 6 verder uitgewerk met 'n bestudering van twee voorveronderstellings van Calvyn se hermeneutiek tewete die rol van die Heilige Gees in die uitleg van die Heilige Skrif en die beginsel van *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. Daar word beklemtoon dat die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* ten nouste in verband staan met die leer oor die duidelikheid van die Heilige Skrif.

In hoofstuk sewe word ten slotte die samestellende elemente in die beginsels van *brevitas et facilitas* uitvoerig beskryf.