

THE USE AND UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY
IN CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

by

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INTRODUCTION

The impact which John Calvin had upon the history of sixteenth century Europe, while difficult to assess accurately, was obviously of great importance. Geneva, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Scotland, England, and America were all influenced by the dynamic power of Calvin's concept of the true Christian doctrine through his own person, his pen, and his followers.¹ As Luther's successor to the role of primary spokesman for the Reformation, Calvin applied himself with great strength of will toward the goal of the reform of the Christian Church. Only death in 1564 forced him to release the reins of worldly leadership and overcame the strength of will which had made him the dominant figure of the Protestant Reformation.

His death did not, however, stay his influence upon history. His followers and fellow reformers spread his thought over much of Europe and beyond to the New World. In the words of John T. McNeill, noted twentieth century historian of Calvinism: "Although Calvinism's formative stage was passed in the sixteenth century, its subsequent history, both internal and in exterior relationships, is neither unimportant nor dull."² In France, despite the efforts of Calvin and Beza, his fellow Genevan reformer, a lengthy series of religious wars devastated the populace and the country. France remained primarily Catholic though Calvinists today wield economic

¹John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). Hereafter cited as McNeill, Calvinism.

²Ibid., p. viii.

influence much greater than their numbers might indicate.³ In the Netherlands, Calvinism exercised a powerful force in shaping that nation as it exists today. The mixture of international political forces and Calvinist evangelism brought war to the Low Countries also. In 1609, the son of William of Orange secured a truce with Spain which, in effect, assured the existence of the Dutch nation and religious toleration.⁴ Scotland embraced Calvinism for a variety of reasons. A clash of the national interests of England and France took place in Scotland and was directly concerned with religious issues. The forceful character of John Knox, constantly in contact with Calvin in Geneva, was yet another factor. Calvinism rooted itself deeply into the Scottish soil after its victory, a victory limited by the deep involvement of the church in the political affairs of Scotland.⁵ These briefly described examples clearly indicate, then, the force with which Calvinism shaped European history.

Calvin's most powerful weapon was his pen. Excluding his early writings prior to his conversion to Protestantism, all of his works were concerned with reformed doctrine and its defense.⁶ The most famous and most

³On the religious wars in France and their connection to Calvinism see Robert M. Kingdon, Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1563 (Geneva: Droz, 1956); the same author's Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564-1572 (Geneva: Droz, 1967); J. H. M. Salmon (ed.), The French Wars of Religion: How Important Were Religious Factors? (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1967); and Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder (eds.), Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy? (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1970). All contain good bibliographies for further reading not only on the religious wars of France but also on various aspects of Calvinism.

⁴McNeill, Calvinism, pp. 255-267.

⁵Ibid., pp. 290-308.

⁶Of recent English translations of Calvin's works there are several which should be mentioned here. The Institutes of the Christian Religion,

enduring of his works was The Institutes of the Christian Religion which was continually revised and expanded from its initial publication in 1536 until its final Latin and French editions in 1559 and 1560, respectively.⁷ Calvin was a prolific writer, commentaries on the Scriptures and spirited defenses of reformed theology flowed from his pen. His many letters, in themselves, form what McNeill calls "a rich treasury of the thought and opinions he shared with his friends and a record of his efforts to win influential support for the cause of reform."⁸ In a lengthy essay, Jean-Daniel Benoît has presented a good survey of these letters.⁹ Calvin's correspondents were kings and paupers, persecutors of the Reformed Church and its martyrs, enemies and friends. Letters were addressed to the Kings and Queens of France, England, Poland, and Denmark, and to the heads of great families such as the Prince of Condé, the King and Queen of Navarre,

trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX and XXI; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); Theological Treatises, trans. by J. K. S. Reid (Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXII; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954); Commentaries, trans. and ed. Joseph Haroutunian (Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXIII; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958); John Calvin: Selections from His Writings, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1971). The McNeill-Battles, Haroutunian, and Dillenberger editions all have bibliographies which will guide the reader to other English editions of Calvin's works. John T. McNeill also has written a useful bibliographical essay, "Fifty Years of Calvin Study," Williston Walker, John Calvin: The Organizer of Reformed Protestantism, 1509-1564 (New York: Schocken Books, 1969). See pp. xxvi-xxxi and pp. lxi-lxvii for Calvin's works.

⁷ Jean-Daniel Benoît, "The History and Development of the Institutio: How Calvin Worked," trans. G. E. Duffield, John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield (Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology, I; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 102.

⁸ McNeill, Calvinism, p. 203.

⁹ Jean-Daniel Benoît, "Calvin the Letter-Writer," trans. G. E. Duffield, John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield (Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology, I; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 67-101.

and Admiral Coligny.¹⁰ The reformers in Europe were all recipients of Calvin's letters. Heinrich Bullinger, Guillaume Farel, John Knox, Martin Bucer, and Theodore Beza are only a few of the reformed leaders who heard Calvin's words of encouragement and strengthened their faith from his own.¹¹

Calvin's letters are invaluable for the historian as Calvin characteristically wrote little about himself in his other works. In the letters, Calvin's strength of will and determination which overcame his sickly body and allowed him to direct his whole life toward reforming Christianity become apparent. The letters destroy the old image of an austere and stern individual who saw little pleasure in life. Instead, they paint the portrait of a man of iron will whose sensitivity was so great as to cause him much emotional distress all through his life.¹² Just as importantly, Calvin's letters re-emphasize Calvin's faith in God and in his belief that the primary reason for man's existence was not his own salvation but the glorification of God. King or peasant, the correspondent was always aware of God, the center of Calvin's life.¹³ The importance of these letters is best reflected in Benoît's words:

It is in his letters, that he gives himself freely, not only with the clarity of his mind, but also with all the warmth of his heart. . . . It is in his letters that he can be seen giving himself to his friends. There his indignation, anger, and impatience are

¹⁰Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 68-70.

¹²Ibid., pp. 76-77.

¹³Ibid., pp. 87-92.

uncovered, as also is that "tenderness of heart." His other books were written with pen and ink. . . . His letters, however, are written with his heart. . . .¹⁴

Calvin was also an expositor of the Scriptures. Although his first commentary did not appear until 1540, four years after the first edition of the Institutes was published, Calvin had been involved in biblical studies with his cousin, Olivétan, and had revised parts of the Waldensian translation for its second edition by 1535.¹⁵ In fact, there exists evidence that Calvin saw such exposition as the primary concern of his writing. In any case, Calvin devoted much time to writing on the Scriptures from 1540 until his death.¹⁶ The production of these commentaries, which required so much study and thought, was enormous. When they are combined with the rest of his writings, the volume of production from Calvin's pen is so large that it becomes almost unimaginable.¹⁷ The method which Calvin used was similar to that of his first book on Seneca's De Clementia. It had been used by the medieval theologian, Peter Lombard, in his Sentences and by humanists in their commentaries on historical works.¹⁸ The result was a constantly growing list of books that posited the reformed doctrine in the Scriptures.

Calvin also wrote many spirited defenses of the Reformed Church and

¹⁴Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁵Whether or not Calvin had much to do with the first edition other than the two prefaces which he wrote is a matter of conjecture which is discussed briefly in Parker's article. T. H. L. Parker, "Calvin the Biblical Expositor," John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield (Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology, I; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 178.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 187-188 for a chronological list of Calvin's commentaries.

¹⁷McNeill, Calvinism, p. 204.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 105.

attacks upon the Roman Church. These polemical writings are of special importance for several reasons. First, they represent an intense effort by Calvin to reach out beyond his fellow reformed theologians to the public, for Calvin wrote most of these in French.¹⁹ In them, Calvin attempted to pass on to his readers doctrinal truths which had been defined in deeper theological efforts. Second, this group of works, which was far more responsible for the spread of reformed doctrine than those written in Latin, displays Calvin's very important contribution to the development of the French language.²⁰ Calvin's polemical treatises were marked by an austerity of expression and an ability to concentrate meaning. Francis M. Higman has remarked in his book on Calvin's polemical style that the reformer's language gave the impression of "a grave and massive dignity in the prose, heavy but noble; a prose which has its roots in Cicero, but which avoids the 'Ciceronianizing' excesses of other Renaissance writers."²¹ At the same time, the violence of his polemics seemed to rule out any understanding of human weakness or sympathy for mankind. Higman also notes that in these works Calvin's style is both unified and rigid, in part because of his effort to write clearly and to the point.²² Unlike the highly intellectual and logically constructed contents of the Institutes, unlike the open and emotional character of his letters, the polemical works are harsh, both in style and content. In them, Calvin is the instrument of God

¹⁹Francis M. Higman, The Style of John Calvin in His French Polemical Treatises (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 10. In the bibliography, Higman provides a partial list of Calvin's polemical works.

²⁰Ibid., p. 1.

²¹Ibid., p. 2.

²²Ibid., pp. 155-156.

dealing with a specific situation. Some intolerance and lack of humanity are found in them. Without the addition of these traits, however, they would lack the sense of power that pervades every page.

Calvin's best known work and his most powerful legacy was the Institutes of the Christian Religion. McNeill has described it as "one of the few books that have profoundly affected the course of history."²³ The Institutes has generated, over the years, a vast number of works which have dealt with various aspects of Calvin's theology.²⁴ One aspect, although not ignored or unknown, has been little discussed by Calvin scholars. That is Calvin's view and use of history.²⁵ What was his philosophy of history? What were Calvin's historical sources and how did he use them? How did Calvin view the past, especially with respect to the age of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages? What was his understanding and use of church history? Obviously Calvin was primarily a theologian, but he remained conscious of and concerned with the discipline of history. He felt a definite calling to defend the evangelical church from the time of the Creation up to and including his own day as a continuing historical fact. Indeed, much of his writing would be identified today as "historical

²³McNeill, Calvinism, p. 119.

²⁴Some interpretative works in English of Calvin's theology include Duffield (ed.), John Calvin; Francois Wendel, Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Wilhelm Niesel, The Theology of John Calvin, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956); also consult McNeill, "Fifty Years of Calvin Study," Walker, Calvin, pp. xxxi-xl and pp. lxvii-lxxv, for a listing of recent interpretative works on Calvin's theology.

²⁵The McNeill-Battles edition of the Institutes does note Calvin's use of history but it is not developed. Some work in this area has been done by Battles and Hugo in Ford Lewis Battles and Andre Malan Hugo (eds. and trans.), Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969).

theology." All this makes the understanding of Calvin's view and use of history important to an analysis of his life or his work.

The answers to these questions concerning Calvin as an historian can best be found by closely inspecting his life, his education and his humanism in particular, and then turning to the pages of the Institutes for his understanding and use of history.

I. CALVIN: THE MAN AND HIS LIFE

John Calvin was born in the town of Noyon in Picardy, sixty miles northeast of Paris, on July 10, 1509. From Picardy had come Peter the Hermit, Roscelin, Ramus, Lefèvre, Olivétan, and Vatable. In his biography of Calvin, Williston Walker has described the men of Picardy in a fashion which obviously includes Calvin:

Eager, controversial even to fanaticism, enthusiastic, dogmatic, and persistent, they have fought on all sides in the controversies by which France has been divided, but have never been lukewarm or indifferent. They are capable of producing men of leadership and ready to carry principles to logical consequences.²⁶

Little is known about Calvin's mother, who died early in his life, except for her reputation as a woman of great beauty and piety.²⁷ Gérard Calvin (the original family name was Cauvin), the son of a manual laborer, was Calvin's father. He, however, was skilled in law and business and by 1481 had established himself in Noyon. Soon he had become deeply involved with the cathedral chapter of that city, apparently holding several positions of trust. In 1497, Calvin's father received an appointment to Noyon's bourgeoisie and established close personal relationships with the locally powerful family of Hangest, holder of the bishop's seat at Noyon

²⁶ Walker, Calvin, p. 21. Although first published in 1906, Walker's biography of the Genevan reformer remains the best written in English. The most exhaustive study of Calvin is known to be that of Émile Doumergue, Jean Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps. Doumergue was prejudiced in favor of Calvin and it must be used with care. No truly definitive biography of Calvin has yet been published, McNeill, "Fifty Years of Calvin Study," Walker, Calvin, pp. xix-xxv and pp. lv-lxi.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 24; Wendel, Calvin, p. 17.

for several generations.²⁸

The ambition of Gérard Calvin was as much for his sons as for himself. In 1519, perhaps because of Gérard Calvin's influence with the bishop, Charles, the eldest son, was appointed to a post as chaplain at the cathedral in Noyon. John received a similar position in 1521, although he was still some two months younger than the required age of twelve. While studying at Paris, Calvin was appointed to another benefice, the curacy at Saint-Martin-de-Martheville. Two years later in 1529, he exchanged this post for a like position at Pont l'Evêque, the ancestral home of the Calvin family. Like others of his day, Calvin used the income from the appointment to finance his education and probably did not discharge the responsibilities of the positions.²⁹

Calvin followed his older brother, Charles, to the College of the Capettes in Noyon. At that time, he was also tutored at the home of the Hangest family. His fellow students there included Claude, the son of Louis de Hangest, lord of Montmor, to whom Calvin would dedicate his Seneca Commentary in 1532, and three sons of Adrien, lord of Genlis and brother of Louis.³⁰ While studying with the Hangest family, Calvin was given ample opportunity to become acquainted with the characteristics and manners of the nobility of France. Perhaps because of these contacts and others made later in Paris, Calvin was fully confident of his position when, in Geneva, he appealed to the great families of France to protect the Reformed Church. In 1523, then only fourteen, John Calvin left Noyon and journeyed to Paris

²⁸ Walker, Calvin, p. 23.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 30; Wendel, Calvin, p. 17.

³⁰ McNeill, Calvinism, p. 94.

to begin his university education. Except for brief visits, usually concerning personal matters, Calvin was never again to re-establish himself at Noyon.

Calvin pursued his education at the University of Paris with such great enthusiasm and determination that early in 1528 he was granted the degree of master of arts. Had Calvin continued his studies at Paris he might have become a cleric. Gérard Calvin changed all this when in 1528 he indicated to his son that a career at law would be better for him. The reasons for this change of direction in Calvin's education are several. The elder Calvin, skilled to a degree in law himself, may have desired for John to follow the same path on a higher level at the university.³¹ Perhaps also apparent to Calvin's father was the favor which the royal court showered upon the legal profession at the expense of the clergy.³² The change of heart manifested by Gérard Calvin may have been generated from his controversy with the canons of the cathedral chapter at Noyon. The dispute, in detail, was concerned with charges by the chapter that Gérard Calvin had mishandled the accounts of an estate left to the chapter. Calvin's father refused to give an accounting and was ultimately excommunicated. Only the pleas of the Calvin brothers made it possible for Gérard Calvin to die in the embrace of the Church in 1531.³³ In general, the dispute may have grown out of the mutual antagonism between the chapter and the newly appointed Bishop of Noyon, Jean de Hangest, whose youth and inexperience apparently touched off the quarrel. Gérard Calvin may well

³¹Ibid.; Walker, Calvin, p. 46; Wendel, Calvin, p. 21.

³²Walker, Calvin, p. 44.

³³Ibid.; McNeill, Calvinism, p. 101.

have been worried that his son would lose his benefices. In 1528, John Calvin turned from the theologically oriented University of Paris to the University of Orléans and its famous Faculty of Law.³⁴

The change had little effect upon Calvin's determination to excel. In addition to his study of law, Calvin learned the basics of Greek grammar from the German-born, Paris-trained scholar, Melchior Wolmar, and continued the study of classical antiquity which he had begun in Paris.³⁵ Meanwhile, as Calvin strengthened his intellect, he wrecked his body. The effects of the illness, perhaps dyspepsia, he contracted at Orléans were never to leave him and were, in part, responsible for his early death in 1564.³⁶ Calvin and three close friends, Nicholas Duchemin, Francois Daniel, and Francois de Canon, left their studies at Orléans under Pierre de l'Étoile and moved to the University of Bourges. There they attended the lectures of the famed Italian jurist and humanist, Andrea Alciati, who had only recently joined the Faculty of Law at Bourges.³⁷ In typical fashion, Calvin so applied himself at Bourges that he received the degree of licentié ès loix before February of 1531.³⁸

Calvin's study of the law and his studies in classical antiquity,

³⁴Walker, Calvin, p. 47; Wendel, Calvin, pp. 21-22.

³⁵Wendel, Calvin, pp. 22-23.

³⁶Ibid., p. 22; Walker, Calvin, p. 48.

³⁷Wendel, Calvin, pp. 22-23; Quirinus Breen, John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism (2nd ed.; Hamden Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), pp. 44-45.

³⁸Battles and Hugo (eds.), "Introduction," Calvin, Seneca Commentary, p. 6. Calvin may have received the degree before Christmas of 1530, but February 14, 1531 is the earliest date he is known to have the degree.

the last of which he had pursued at Paris, Orléans, and Bourges, were soon to bear fruit in the publication of his first book. Following the humanist tradition, then held in high repute in French intellectual circles, Calvin turned to the authors of classical antiquity. Seneca, the "half-canonized philosopher" of ancient Rome and his work De Clementia, became the object of Calvin's humanistic commentary.³⁹ In this effort, Calvin displayed the vast knowledge of both law and classical works he possessed and, at the same time, satisfied his own apparent desire to be a scholar of Roman Law and antiquity rather than to be a lawyer.⁴⁰ The publication of the Seneca Commentary in April of 1532 had been delayed when Gérard Calvin's death on May 26, 1531 caused Calvin to return to Noyon. The reception that the Seneca Commentary received must have amazed Calvin as well as disappointed him. His hopes to establish himself as a humanist scholar with this work were not realized. Neither praise nor criticism greeted Calvin, only silence and indifference.

The reasons for the failure of Calvin's book to strike any spark of response among the humanist scholars is a matter of speculation. Calvin's youth, he was only twenty two, and the presumptuousness of his criticism of Erasmus may have been part of the answer. Further, there was no one to sponsor the work who was of sufficient stature to be effective. Quirinus Breen also has suggested that Calvin's effort came too late. The French Renaissance had lost its vitality and was dying.⁴¹ If this was the case and the Seneca Commentary was really Calvin's effort to embrace the reform

³⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴¹ Breen, Calvin, pp. 92-93.

measures of Lefèvre while escaping the inner conflict brought on by the religious problems of his day, then he was too late.⁴² When Calvin turned to the Bible for the subject matter for his pen, indifference and silence were reactions he would never know.

The year that followed the death of his father saw Calvin not only complete the publication of his book, but also attend lectures at the newly established Royal Academy in Paris. Breen has made much of this year of study, contending that in going to the Academy, Calvin was turning from the practice of law to the study of the classics.⁴³ As has been shown, however, the Seneca Commentary was already a turning point on this matter. Breen has indicated that Calvin spent the year in Paris writing the Seneca Commentary as well as attending the lectures in Greek by Pierre Danès and Hebrew by Francois Vatable. In fact, Breen has insisted that the Seneca Commentary was written during the time at Paris and that it was indicative of Calvin's ability to handle the Greek language.⁴⁴ Recent research on the Seneca Commentary by two Calvin scholars, Ford L. Battles and André M. Hugo, has suggested another line of argument which takes issue with Breen. When Calvin went to Paris in March of 1531 and published Duchemin's defense of De l'Étoile against Alciati, he was primarily concerned with making preliminary contacts with publishers for his own partially finished manuscript. In May of that year, Calvin was attending his father in Noyon. In June, he spent some time traveling, first from Noyon to Orléans and then on

⁴² Battles and Hugo contend that Calvin was avoiding an inner conflict over religious issues of his day in writing the commentary. Battles and Hugo (eds.), "Introduction," Calvin, Seneca Commentary, p. 16.

⁴³ Breen, Calvin, p. 62.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

to Paris. It is difficult to believe that he could have attended more than a few lectures as the Academy closed in July and August for the summer and an epidemic in Paris during the fall of 1531 closed it again. Calvin apparently moved to the suburb of Chaillot until the lectures resumed just before the Christmas holidays. The vast amount of time necessary for the research for such a work was simply not available to Calvin while in Paris, however brilliant he may have been. By May of 1532, Calvin had returned to Orléans and soon received a doctorate in law.⁴⁵ Calvin's knowledge of Greek literature was basically second-hand and did not indicate a mastery of that language nor its literature as Breen has suggested. It is known, for instance, that Calvin's knowledge of certain Greek authors came from Latin translations.⁴⁶ The evidence presented favors the position of Battles and Hugo; that the Seneca Commentary was a product of Calvin's student days at Bourges, and clearly indicated the fact that the humanist in Calvin had triumphed over the lawyer much earlier than others have believed.

There exists more than sufficient evidence, although some of it is inferential in nature, that, at least from his days as a student in Paris, Calvin was very aware of the religious controversy in France. The persecution of Louis de Berquin, who finally died at the stake in 1529, began the same year that Calvin arrived in Paris. Lefèvre's reform measures were

⁴⁵ Battles and Hugo (eds.), "Introduction," Calvin, Seneca Commentary, pp. 4-9. McNeill, Calvinism, p. 104.

⁴⁶ Ford Lewis Battles, "The Sources of Calvin's Seneca Commentary," John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield (Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology, I; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 52-53.

known to him as were the views of Melanchthon, Luther, and Zwingli.⁴⁷ Until 1533, Calvin made no decisive move to declare his religious position, unless his Seneca Commentary indicates that he agreed with the humanist sponsored reforms. Through his relationship with the sons of Guillaume Cop, he must have become familiar with the works of Erasmus and other humanists who espoused reform within the Roman Church.⁴⁸ His friendship with Nicholas Cop, one of Guillaume Cop's sons, was renewed upon Calvin's return to Paris from Bourges. By then, the young Cop had been named rector of the University of Paris. He had already positioned himself with the reform group when he defended Marguerite d'Angoulême, sister of the King and Queen of Navarre, against the Faculty of Theology, the Sorbonne, when it condemned her Mirror of a Sinful Soul.⁴⁹ In his rectorial address only a few days later, Cop struck out against the conservatives of the Sorbonne with sentiments which, while not Protestant, were like those of Lefèvre. These sentiments were shared by Calvin.⁵⁰

The Sorbonne was furious and retaliated with charges of heresy against both men. Cop fled Paris to Basel while Calvin went to the home of Louis du Tillet, a canon of the Cathedral of Angoulême at Santongue. Calvin made use of Tillet's extensive library and may also have written some sermons for several priests in the area.⁵¹ Apparently, Calvin's inner conflict over the religious questions that were perplexing all of France could no

⁴⁷Breen, Calvin, pp. 29-39.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 25-26; McNeill, Calvinism, p. 109.

⁴⁹McNeill, Calvinism, p. 110.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 111-112.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 113.

longer be pushed aside. By April of 1534, Calvin was so concerned with his own religious development that he risked a journey to Nérac where Marguerite had provided protection for the aged Lefèvre. Calvin was well aware of the fact that the Catholic reformists' party was not succeeding in France. Lefèvre and Cop were unwelcome in Paris and the forces of conservatism were apparently triumphant. Calvin may have wished advice from Lefèvre about a personal decision he had yet to make. The age of twenty-five was commonly the time when men who held benefices as Calvin did were ordained. Calvin was nearly that age and must have been aware that his religious position was not the one held by the Roman Church. We know little of the conversation between Calvin and Lefèvre, but the sight of the old reformer, living his last years in exile, could not have encouraged Calvin to stay within the Roman Church.⁵²

At this point in Calvin's life, he made the dramatic decision to leave the Roman Church and traveled to Noyon where, on May 4, 1534, he resigned his benefices. This action was the most decisive religious move Calvin had made up to this time. Yet, even then, he was not known as a Protestant. Although he was jailed in Noyon on two occasions, the arrests appear to have been connected with Charles Calvin's feud with the cathedral chapter which had flared up again when Calvin arrived. There exists no evidence to suggest that the authorities were aware of the implications of Calvin's resignation.⁵³ Calvin was allowed to leave Noyon and began a period of constant travel, avoiding arrest and preaching the doctrine to

⁵² Ibid., p. 114; Walker, Calvin, p. 112.

⁵³ Walker, Calvin, p. 57 and pp. 114-115. Charles Calvin had previous quarrels with the chapter which were personal in nature. The charge of heresy against him in 1534 is thus suspect as to its validity.

which he now fully devoted his life.⁵⁴

Calvin might well have remained merely a teacher of reformed doctrine and a commentator on the Scriptures had not two events occurred. Apparently encouraged by those who came to learn the new theology from him and deeply concerned by the increasing persecution suffered by French Protestants, Calvin intensified his efforts to complete his newest work, the Institutes of the Christian Religion.⁵⁵ The date when he actually started this work has never been ascertained, but the period between January and August of 1535 was the most productive for Calvin. Finished by August 23, 1535, the date appended to the prefatory address to Francis I, King of France, the Institutes was published in March of 1536. Before the first year was finished, the publisher was calling for a new edition.⁵⁶ The book, only six chapters long at this point, might not have altered Calvin's life had not the fortunes of war caused him to take a detour through Geneva on his way from Paris to Strasbourg.⁵⁷ There, Farel, struggling to keep Geneva in the Protestant fold against intensified efforts by the Catholic Church, prevailed upon Calvin to aid him in Geneva. In Calvin's own words, "But Wilhaim Farel forced me to stay in Geneva not so

⁵⁴For the best discussion of Calvin's evangelical conversion see McNeill, Calvinism, pp. 107-118.

⁵⁵Calvin, "Introductory Selections from Calvin," Joseph Haroutunian, ed., Commentaries, p. 52.

⁵⁶McNeill, Calvinism, p. 125; Calvin, Institutes, p. xxxii.

⁵⁷Calvin, Institutes, p. xxxiii. The title was of impressive length considering the relatively small size of the first edition of the Institutes. The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Containing almost the Whole Sum of Piety and Whatever It is Necessary to Know in the Doctrine of Salvation. A Work Very Well Worth Reading by All Persons Zealous for Piety, and Lately Published. A Preface to the Most Christian King of France, in Which this Book is Presented to Him as a Confession of Faith. Author, John Calvin of Noyon. Basel, MDXXXVI.

much by advice or urging as by command, which had the power of God's hand laid violently upon me from heaven."⁵⁸ Thus began the stormy and intense relationship between the young reformer and the city of Geneva.

To follow Calvin's life any further in detail would be of little value to the goal of this study. It is enough, perhaps, to briefly sketch the struggle Calvin fought for the freedom of the Reformed Church and indicate how the Institutes developed over those years.

Calvin and Farel both failed in their first attempt to establish the authority of the Reformed Church over the lives of the citizens of Geneva and free the church from the control of the Councils of the city. The Councils of Geneva were a product of that city's struggle to liberate itself from the domination of both the papacy and the House of Savoy.⁵⁹ The efforts were primarily politically motivated and were little concerned with religious issues. However, the city had been introduced to Luther's writings as early as 1521 or 1522 and Farel had gained some measure of influence by 1533.⁶⁰ When Calvin and Farel attempted to enforce the authority of the Reformed Church to deny communion to those deemed unworthy by the Church, the Council of Two Hundred dealt their claims a serious setback by prohibiting the Geneva Church any such freedom of action. This occurred in January of 1538, and by late in April Calvin and Farel were banished from the city.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Calvin, "Introductory Selections from Calvin," Joseph Haroutunian, ed., Commentaries, p. 53.

⁵⁹ E. William Monter, Calvin's Geneva (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), pp. 32-34.

⁶⁰ McNeill, Calvinism, pp. 133-134.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 139-143.

The city needed Calvin, however, and only a year after his banishment the Council began to approach him and suggest his return. Calvin insisted upon the Councils' adoption of his Ecclesiastical Ordinances of the Church of Geneva as payment for his return to Geneva in 1541. The Ordinances provided the right of excommunication to the elders of the church meeting as the Consistory.⁶² Ideally then, the church was free from the control of the Small Council of Geneva.⁶³ However, two factors made this freedom theory and not practice. First, the Ordinances did not forbid the Small Council from acting as a court of appeal to cases of excommunication. The Consistory had no legal powers nor were they, or anyone, explicitly given power in the Ordinances to remove excommunication.⁶⁴ Second, the elders who made up the body of the Consistory were selected from the members of the Small Council and the Council of Two Hundred while a syndic presided over its sessions.⁶⁵ Thus, in 1543, Calvin had to threaten resignation to stop the Small Council from assuming the power of excommunication once again.⁶⁶

The year 1546 marks the end of Calvin's first successful effort to purify the Reformed Church of Geneva. The eight pastors of urban Geneva

⁶²Monter, Calvin's Geneva, p. 127.

⁶³The Small Council of Geneva consisted of twenty-five men plus four syndics, the treasurer, and two secretaries. This body was the seat of real political power in Geneva, relatively safe from the sway of public opinion. The members of the Small Council were elected each year by the Council of Two Hundred. The syndics were elected by the General Council of all male citizens once a year. Ibid., pp. 145-146.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 127.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 137.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 138.

were all Calvin's appointees by 1545 and the rural parishes were similarly placed under his control by 1546. The Company of Pastors then began eight years of intense activity marked by internal and external disputes that ended for the greatest part in 1555.⁶⁷ A former monk, Jerome Bolsec, challenged Calvin's authority over the Company when he denied Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Although Bolsec was ultimately banished from Geneva and Calvin's position in the Company was strengthened, the attack was evidence enough that Calvin did not at that time control Geneva.⁶⁸

The next doctrinal quarrel after the Bolsec episode in 1551 came in 1553 from the famous Michael Servetus and his denial of the Trinity. His book, On the Errors of the Trinity, written in 1531, resulted in Servetus being regarded as a heretic by both Catholics and Protestants. In 1553 he published the Restitution of Christianity which further documented his position as an anti-Trinitarian. In 1545 Calvin and Servetus began a correspondence that saw Calvin send a copy of the Institutes to Servetus who returned it filled with critical notations. In turn, Servetus sent Calvin a part of his Restitution manuscript. When Servetus was placed on trial for heresy in Vienne, the annotated copy of the Institutes appeared in the hands of the Catholic authorities.⁶⁹ Servetus escaped from prison but was condemned and an execution took place in effigy. Then the Spaniard appeared inexplicably in Geneva where he was arrested, tried, and sent to the stake. The guilt of Servetus was apparently never doubted even by Calvin's opponents who had gained political dominance in the Small Council.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 126-127 and p. 134.

⁶⁸ Walker, Calvin, pp. 315-320.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 326-331; McNeill, Calvinism, pp. 173-174.

Ami Perrin, who headed the faction, tried, amid the tumult and confusion generated by the Servetus trial, to once again deny the Consistory the right of excommunication. The Council of Two Hundred declared that the Small Council had final authority in this matter. Calvin and his fellow pastors met this threat by refusing communion to anyone banned by the Consistory and then threatened their resignations. The issue was not really settled as the Small Council merely advised those under ban not to seek communion without giving up their positions.⁷⁰ Although Calvin gained no strength on the Small Council in the 1554 elections that followed, he did strengthen his position and that of the Company of Pastors considerably.

Within the Company of Pastors, despite Calvin's best efforts, there was also some dissension. The Bolsec affair did not end with his banishment. A pastor, Philippe de Ecclesia, lost his pulpit in 1552 despite efforts by the Small Council to have him reinstated.⁷¹ In 1558 and again in 1564 the Company found it necessary to censure pastors for supporting Bolsec's position on predestination.⁷² In all cases, Calvin prevailed and strengthened his position. Other problems came to the attention of the pastors when some of their number were censured for scandalous conduct in their private lives. By 1555, with only a few exceptions, the Company of Pastors was in harmony with Calvin's doctrines and the Reformed Church of Geneva was operating smoothly.

The Consistory, the watch dog of public and private morals, was often the cause of opposition to Calvin from outside the structure of the

⁷⁰Walker, Calvin, pp. 338-340; Monter, Calvin's Geneva, p. 84.

⁷¹Monter, Calvin's Geneva, p. 132.

⁷²Ibid., p. 133.

Geneva Church. After 1546, this group of church elders began increasingly to call citizens before them to answer charges of private immorality. Some of the cases heard by the Consistory were frivolous and petty.⁷³ These proceedings may well have exasperated some Genevans, but when the respected families of Favre and Perrin became objects of censure, organized opposition within the Small Council began in earnest. Thus, two families who had strongly supported Calvin's return to Geneva in 1541 had become directly opposed to him by 1547.⁷⁴ The political struggles which followed until Calvin's victory in 1555 did not create a fully polarized situation in Geneva, but, in general, the Perrins and Favres were supported by the older Genevan's while the religious refugees of France and Italy supported Calvin. After 1548, the libertines, as the Calvinists called the Perrin party, held a majority in the Small Council, from which position they attempted over the years to regain the supremacy of the Council which they felt had been lost when the Ordinances had been adopted.⁷⁵ The proponents of Calvin, in firm control of the parishes, attacked their opponent from the pulpits, a move which was in turn banned by the Council.⁷⁶ In 1553, after Perrin's partisans had won decisively in the elections, the pastors were excluded from the General Assembly and refugees found it increasingly difficult to become citizens of Geneva.⁷⁷ The political battle thus generated continued

⁷³Wendel, Calvin, p. 84.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 88-89. Elsewhere, Wendel notes the ambiguity of the Ordinances which allowed various interpretations concerning the relative location of final authority. Ibid., p. 74.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 93-94.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 93; Monter, Calvin's Geneva, p. 82.

off and on until 1555.

Calvin's position in this struggle remained quite clear from the beginning. He intended to free the Reformed Church of Geneva from any political control in its sphere of spiritual authority. To Calvin, the key issue was the right of the church to excommunicate those who were undeserving without appeal to any secular agency. Therefore Calvin interpreted the Ordinances to the benefit of the Geneva Church. Calvin was not attempting to establish the dominance of the church over the state. The spheres of authority for each were well defined, in theory.⁷⁸ In practice, the distinctions became blurred with various interpretations and the conflict between Calvin and Perrin was one result.

The Perrinists were not as well organized in their opposition as was Calvin nor were they so consistent in their stand. The hostile Council supported Calvin against Bolsec and Servetus and often made civil punishments for ecclesiastic failings rather severe, thus aiding the work of the pastors.⁷⁹ The attempts by the Small Council to regain their control over the church were based upon what it took to be threats to its privileges. Thus the Consistory, which was exercising the right to excommunicate on the basis of moral laxness, was thought to be infringing upon the government's already close regulation of public morality.⁸⁰

In November of 1553, Calvin and the Consistory were once again embroiled in the excommunication debate with the Council. While awaiting an appeal to the Protestant canons, Calvin's supporters gained two decisive

⁷⁸Wendel, Calvin, p. 79.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 89.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 74.

election victories when, in 1554, they elected three syndics and, in 1555, when they obtained a majority in the Small Council and the Council of Two Hundred. A riot in May of 1555 resulted in the complete rout of Calvin's opponents. The Calvinists then solidified their position by admitting many refugees to citizenship, thereby increasing the electorate to their benefit.⁸¹

From 1555 until Calvin's death in 1564, the city of Geneva belonged to him. During those years no other person of his stature or eloquence appeared to challenge his authority. From the pulpits of Geneva and the Reformed Church in France, Calvin's doctrines were articulated by pastors who, for the most part, displayed intelligence and courage.⁸² The Sunday schools Calvin had established in the 1540's and 1550's produced a generation well-schooled in the reformed catechism and increasingly ready to bow to the ecclesiastical discipline demanded by Calvin.⁸³ Yet Calvin was not a dictator, he was a moral force to whom all listened with deep respect. Neither was the church Calvin had built dominant over the state. Instead, the Consistory, the Small Council, and the Council of Two Hundred became increasingly interlocked in both membership and goals.⁸⁴ Together, under God's rule and Calvin's ever persistent guidance, they began the evangelization of Europe.⁸⁵

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 99-100.

⁸²Monter, Calvin's Geneva, pp. 99-100.

⁸³Ibid., p. 108.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 139.

⁸⁵Wendel, Calvin, pp. 106-107.

The establishment of the Reformed Church in Geneva required no little amount of energy from Calvin. Yet, despite his bad health and the long hours of work spent on the day-to-day problems of the church, Calvin devoted an immoderate amount of time and energy to the revision and expansion of the Institutes of the Christian Religion. Here Calvin formulated his doctrines, presenting them formally in great detail and with precision. Although he wrote many other works during his lifetime, Calvin's greatest legacy was the Institutes.

The first edition of the Institutes was printed in Basel by Thomas Platter and Balthasar Lasius in 1536. Including the prefatory address, the six chapters into which the text was divided, and a short index, the book was relatively small for a theological catechism. In his work, Calvin provided the needed doctrinal force for the continued reformation of the church. So popular and well-received was the Institutes that only a year later the editor called for a new publication as his supply of books was exhausted.⁸⁶ This popularity is particularly significant as it was written in Latin, thus narrowing the number of readers greatly.⁸⁷ The first four chapters were devoted respectively to the Law, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Thus far the Institutes followed the form of catechism, which was one purpose for which Calvin intended the work.⁸⁸ Although the publishers asked for a second printing in 1537, Calvin was unable to revise the book and have it

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 113; Battles and McNeill, "Introduction," Calvin, Institutes, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁸⁷Wendel, Calvin, p. 113.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 112; Benoît, "The History and Development of the Institutio: How Calvin Worked," John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield, p. 103.

ready for the press until 1539 because of his activities in Geneva which resulted in his banishment from that city. There exists evidence that a French translation of the 1536 Institutes may have reached manuscript form, but there are no indications that such a book was ever published.⁸⁹

The Latin edition of 1539 represented an enlargement of both physical size and subject matter. Scriptural citations were increased as were references to Augustine, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, and some contemporary scholarship. The seventeen chapters included material developed in his controversies over the Trinity, as well as discussions on the knowledge of God, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and predestination.⁹⁰ This revision was translated into French by Calvin and published in 1541. Printed in Geneva by Jean Girard, the book was intended not for theologians, as the Latin editions had been, but for the laymen who had no knowledge of Latin. The importance of this translation should not be overlooked. For the first time, the French language was used to express a serious work. The style, personal and elegant, was the forerunner to those of Pascal and Bousset. Intended originally for the French speaking Swiss

⁸⁹Wendel, Calvin, p. 113; Benoît, "The History and Development of the Institutio: How Calvin Worked," John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield, pp. 106-107; Battles and McNeill, "Introduction," Calvin, Institutes, p. xxxv. The evidence consists in part, of certain passages of the 1541 French edition which are translated from the 1536 Latin Institutes and not the 1539 Latin edition. Battles and McNeill argue that Calvin's activities in Geneva in the autumn of 1536 would have allowed him little time for such work.

⁹⁰Benoît, "The History and Development of the Institutio: How Calvin Worked," John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield, p. 103; Battles and McNeill, "Introduction," Calvin, Institutes, pp. xxxiv-xxxv; McNeill, Calvinism, pp. 125-126.

people, it soon became the standard doctrinal guide for the French Reformed Church.⁹¹

A new Latin edition was printed in 1543, but it was not changed appreciably from its predecessor. The number of chapters was increased to twenty-one, two of the chapters taking up the subjects of human traditions and vows. The four chapters which now dealt with the Creed were to serve as the basic plan for the entire 1559 revision.⁹² This edition was republished, apparently without change in 1545 and a French translation also appeared in that year. Then came a pause of five years until in 1550 a revised Institutes appeared in Latin followed in 1551 by a translation into French. Additions included new material on scriptural authority, on saints and images, and on the human conscience. Calvin also introduced numbering of the paragraphs in these editions, greatly simplifying its use by the reader.⁹³ The Institutes of 1553 and 1554 showed no basic change in content over the previous edition and were both translated into the French language. In 1557, the French publication revealed few revisions.⁹⁴

In 1559, Calvin finally completed his constant attempt to define his theology in the Institutes. The plan was radically different from previous printings. The form which served as the framework was the

⁹¹Battles and McNeill, "Introduction," Calvin, Institutes, p. xxxvi; Benoît, "The History and Development of the Institutio; How Calvin Worked," John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield, pp. 104-106 in which Benoît notes that Calvin's translation involved adding descriptive adjectives to terms and names that would have been unnecessary for the learned readers of Latin.

⁹²Wendel, Calvin, p. 117.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Battles and McNeill, "Introduction," Calvin, Institutes, p. xxxvii; Benoît, "The History and Development of the Institutio: How Calvin Worked," John Calvin, ed. G. E. Duffield, pp. 107-108.

Aspostle's Creed, although he varied this somewhat and never allowed the form to detract the reader from the content.⁹⁵ The Institutes was divided into four books containing eighty chapters and the size of it was increased greatly over the last impressions.⁹⁶ This final edition by Calvin also marked another change in format. The Institutes of previous years had been structured as catechisms. The 1559 edition was now an exposition. Calvin first turned to the knowledge of God, scriptural revelation, and man, exclusive of his need for salvation and apart from sin. In the second main division, which is spread over the last three books of the Institutes, he concerned himself with historic revelation and God's plan of salvation for man. The result was that Calvin finally achieved a masterful organization of his theology.⁹⁷

Calvin was deeply concerned that his last attempt to define his theology be completed. Ill and bed-ridden, Calvin called upon his brother, Antoine, and other close associates to help him complete the work necessary before he died.⁹⁸ When the Institutes was finished, Calvin said of it in his preface to the reader: "Although I did not regret the labor spent, I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth."⁹⁹ The agreement of Calvin's followers with his own assessment of the 1559 edition is reflected in the fact that, until 1863, it was the only

⁹⁵Wendel, Calvin, p. 121.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 119.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 121.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 118; Calvin, Institutes, p. 3.

⁹⁹Calvin, Institutes, p. 3.

version reprinted or abridged.¹⁰⁰

The Institutes can be regarded as the chief accomplishment of Calvin's life. The church he built in Geneva and the evangelizing of Europe might never have occurred without the respect and authority this theological work gave to the person of Calvin. The logic of his arguments and the power of his polemics were important parts of the appeal of the Institutes. The elegant Latin style which graced the pages of the Institutes, the immense knowledge of the author which was so evident throughout the work, the rhetorical methods which held the reader to Calvin's view were all a result of an education which came from the Renaissance and supported and aided the reformation of Christianity. Such an important part of Calvin's life which so influenced the most conspicuous triumph of his career, the Institutes, must be studied in some detail.

¹⁰⁰Battles and McNeill, "Introduction," Calvin, Institutes, p. xxxvii.

II. CALVIN'S EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

The education of John Calvin in Paris, Orléans, Bourges, and the Royal Academy is important to any analysis of his life and work. Only fourteen years of age when he first attended the University of Paris, Calvin, like all such young men, must have been deeply impressed by the intellectual activity which he saw there. Calvin's subsequent intellectual brilliance made obvious his desire at an early age to enter into the study of ideas and men. Any university often teaches students as much outside the lecture hall as inside since it is the focal point around which scholars congregate. Calvin received an essentially medieval education within the university, especially at Paris and Orléans, but was deeply influenced by the humanists through his associations other than those of the classroom. Humanists, Catholic reformers, Protestants, and the religious controversies which swirled about them all forced Calvin to take note of a changing world. Calvin's definitive educational experience began at Paris, the center of France.

By 1523, the University of Paris long since had lost the position of leadership in learning which Thomas Aquinas, William of Occam, and Duns Scotus had provided in years past. The rising tide of humanism was challenging the out-dated methods of teaching and the stagnant theology of Medieval Scholasticism.¹⁰¹ The Sorbonne, first established in 1257, prided itself upon its strict orthodoxy, readily apparent in its strong,

¹⁰¹Breen, Calvin, p. 10.

and unbending opposition to Luther.¹⁰² The Faculty of Theology was not only opposed to doctrinal changes, it was opposed to the New Learning of humanism. This opposition came, in part, from the general stagnation previously mentioned, and, in part, from the very real danger that the New Learning presented to the medieval orthodoxy which the Sorbonne championed.¹⁰³ The search for manuscripts of antiquity had led the humanists to new sources and to re-evaluate long unread works of Christian theology as well as those pagan writings which the Renaissance humanists had re-discovered. Such intellectual activity was viewed, and rightly so, as a real challenge to the decaying medieval church, already under attack from Luther.¹⁰⁴

In 1533, the same year that Calvin arrived in Paris, Louis de Berquin began his battle with the Sorbonne. In that year he narrowly escaped execution for translating some of Luther's work into French. Only the intervention of the King, at the request of his sister Marguerite d'Angoulême, saved him.¹⁰⁵ The students at the university celebrated his release, indicating their opposition to the official faculty position. In 1526, the same man was found to possess what Breen called probably "the most representative Luther library in France no doubt."¹⁰⁶ Other books found and condemned by the Sorbonne, along with Luther's works, included

¹⁰² Walker, Calvin, p. 6.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ In the following description of the de Berquin affair I follow closely Breen, Calvin, pp. 26-36; McNeill, Calvinism, p. 97.

¹⁰⁶ Breen, Calvin, p. 34.

works of Erasmus, Melanchthon, several orthodox Catholic books in which de Berquin had included marginal comments, and a copy of Marsilius of Padua's Defender of the Peace.¹⁰⁷ Once again the King intervened to free de Berquin.

The condemnation of the books of Erasmus was, as Breen has noted, not without significance. Only the year before, Erasmus had broken openly with Luther. The Christian humanist of Rotterdam, however much he desired reform, was unwilling to cause a split in the Roman Church. Despite his loyalty to the church, if not to the papacy, the Sorbonne, acting out its opposition to humanism, had struck out against Erasmus. The entire circle of humanists in France, of which Calvin was now a member, was thus attacked more directly than ever before.¹⁰⁸

By 1529, the opposition of the Sorbonne had gained enough force that de Berquin was once again arrested and condemned. Then, before the King could act, de Berquin was burned at the stake. Such events would have been closely followed by Calvin and his fellow students, despite Calvin's evident rejection of the Protestant revolt against the church.¹⁰⁹ Such, then, was one major event among others against which Calvin's sojourn at the University of Paris should be set. The persecution of Lefèvre, Roussel, and Bricconnet occurred during this same period and also must have been noted by Calvin.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 27; Walker, Calvin, pp. 13-14.

Calvin first attended the Collège de la Marche at Paris and, though he spent only a few months there, he was fortunate enough to study under the brilliant Latinist, Mathurin Cordier, who later would die in Geneva in the same year as his former pupil.¹¹¹ From Cordier came Calvin's introduction to Latin in a pure and elegant form. Objecting to the notoriously bad Latin of the university students, Cordier taught his students to separate the French and Latin languages and to use each to its fullest extent. In addition to his desire to purify Latin, Cordier was also an advocate of other reforms in teaching methods which were in keeping with his own character of Christian love and concern.¹¹²

For reasons of which his biographers are uncertain, but which may have been connected either to his father's desires or to those of the Noyon cathedral, Calvin transferred to the Collège de Montaigu, a stricter and more ecclesiastically oriented institution. The methods used at that college to instruct students were shaped by John Standock who was intimately connected with the school from 1483 until his death in 1504. Looking back to his experience at Gouda with the Brethren of the Common Life, Standock had instituted harsh corporeal punishment and strict discipline at Montaigu. His successor, Noel Béda, continued Standock's methods, which by Calvin's day had degenerated to the point of becoming more important than the intellectual enrichment of its students. By the time Calvin transferred there, Pierre Tempête had become principal, leaving Béda free to press his attack on the humanists and the Protestants. Such was the content and the

¹¹¹Walker, Calvin, p. 35.

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 34-35; Breen, Calvin, pp. 15-17.

direction of the studies pursued by Calvin that it is apparent that his own enthusiasm for classical learning could not have come from Montaigu.¹¹³

Despite the obvious defects of Montaigu, Calvin, working hard under conditions that were cruel enough to receive the scorn and ridicule of Erasmus and Francois Rabelais, quickly established his tremendous capacity for learning.¹¹⁴ His skill in grammar was readily apparent and, over the years in Paris, he became an especially effective debater. Early in 1528, Calvin concluded his first period of education in Paris.¹¹⁵

Calvin's education in Paris came as much from fellow students and humanist scholars as his teachers. Both Walker and Breen have indicated how far-ranging this may have been.¹¹⁶ Although Calvin's acquaintances with some of the scholars mentioned in the studies of Walker and Breen are shown only indirectly, the fact remains that Calvin was in contact with a large number of humanists, Catholic reformers, and Protestants. Calvin's cousin, Pierre Robert dit Olivétan, translated the Scriptures into French, completing the work of Lefèvre. Olivétan had read and included in his own library the works of Rabelais, Homer, Hesoid, and John Chrysostom.¹¹⁷ It seems certain that Calvin had access to this treasure house of literature. Through the Hangests, Calvin was introduced into the home of Guillaume Cop, professor of medicine at Paris and physician to the King of France. Through Cop, Calvin must have learned about much of the work of Erasmus and John

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 18-22; Walker, Calvin, pp. 37-38.

¹¹⁵ Walker, Calvin, p. 38.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 39-43; Breen, Calvin, pp. 23-26.

¹¹⁷ Breen, Calvin, p. 23.

Reuchlin, who were friends of the elder Cop. Calvin may also have met the great French humanist, Guillaume Budé, who was also a friend of Cop and frequented his home.¹¹⁸ The above would appear sufficient to indicate that despite the essentially medieval education that Calvin received at Montaigu, he was influenced strongly by the New Learning and its most illustrious proponents.

In 1528, after pursuing the theologically oriented education of Paris, Calvin left for Orléans. There he entered into the study of law with the same amount of determination and self-discipline that marked his previous scholarship. Despite the more relaxed atmosphere of Orléans, Calvin proved to be as harsh a master of himself as Montaigu.¹¹⁹ Combined with his own keen desire to learn was the capable instruction Calvin received from two men in particular at Orléans. The first was Melchoir Wolmar, a German scholar who had studied at Bern, Freiburg and Paris. Paris, his last residence before Orléans, proved to be less than congenial to his Lutheran leanings. A student of Greek under Glareus and Nicholas Beroaldus at Paris, Wolmar introduced Calvin to Greek. Except for a very brief time of study later in Paris with Danès at the Royal Academy, this was the only instruction in Greek that Calvin apparently received until after his conversion.¹²⁰ In 1529, at the invitation of Marguerite of Navarre, Wolmar moved to Bourges where Calvin would continue to study under him. The second influential teacher was the highly esteemed Pierre Taisan de

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 18-32; Walker, Calvin, pp. 37-38.

¹¹⁹ Walker, Calvin, p. 48.

¹²⁰ Battles and Hugo (eds.), "Introduction," Calvin, Seneca Commentary, pp. 4-5.

l'Étoile. From him, Calvin acquired a basic medieval view of the past, especially in regard to the law. Even though conservative in his teaching methods as well as his religion, de l'Étoile so retained the admiration of his students that, when attacked in the Apologia by the famed humanist, Andrea Alciati, then at Bourges, one of them, Nicholas Duchemin, wrote the Antapologia, a defense of Orléans' most respected jurist. To this work, Calvin added a preface.

Calvin was so successful in applying himself to the study of law that he often gave lectures for his instructors when they were unable to meet with their classes.¹²¹ However, the change from Paris to Orléans and the turn from theology to law did not deter Calvin from his desire to increase his knowledge of ancient literature. The influence of Wolmar was instrumental in introducing Calvin to the Greek classics as he studied Greek grammar.¹²² Calvin may also have received some guidance from de l'Étoile, who, despite his preference for medieval teaching methods and his orthodoxy, appears to have been at least influenced by the biblical humanists if he was not one himself. Francois Daniel lived with his family in Orléans and, through him, Calvin may have been introduced to Francois Rabelais, who was a sympathetic supporter of Lefèvre's religious reforms.¹²³ Once again, as in Paris, Calvin had supplemented his formal education with a continuing study of the classics and contacts with the humanists of France.

¹²¹ Walker, Calvin, p. 48.

¹²² Ibid., p. 49; Breen, Calvin, pp. 42-43.

¹²³ McNeill, Calvinism, p. 102; Breen, Calvin, p. 45, n. 14.

When Calvin left Orléans for Bourges, he found his classroom environment altered considerably. The University of Bourges had been founded in 1463 by Louis XI when he acquiesced to the wishes of his brother, Charles, to establish a school in Bourges. Despite the opposition of Paris and Orléans, the school prospered for a time and then began to decline, apparently for lack of financial support.¹²⁴ Shortly before Calvin arrived, Marguerite, duchess of Berry, in whose duchy the school was established, began to invite celebrated scholars and humanists to join the faculty of Bourges. This effort to recall the lost reputation of years past was largely successful. Andrea Alciati of Milan agreed to occupy the chair in Roman law in 1529 and Wolmar arrived there late in the next year. The atmosphere of Bourges allowed a considerable amount of religious freedom which may have been most attractive to Wolmar. For Calvin, the key figure at the university was not Wolmar, but Alciati, who united law and classics thus lending the law a brilliance never seen at Orléans.¹²⁵

This Italian expositor of Roman law had received an education in the Renaissance tradition. He studied Greek at Milan with Janus Parrhasius and law under Jason Mainus at Pavia. His studies of law at Bologna were guided by Carlo Ricini. By the age of fifteen he had composed a book on civil law and in 1513 he received the doctorate in law while only twenty-one. Prior to coming to Bourges, he wrote his Emblems on law and taught at Avignon. His appearance at the University of Bourges induced many students, among them Calvin, to travel there and attend his lectures. Despite Calvin's apparent distaste for the attacks Alciati had made against

¹²⁴Breen, Calvin, pp. 44-45.

¹²⁵Walker, Calvin, p. 51.

de l'Étoile, the reputation of this jurist and humanist was such that Calvin set aside his prejudices and studied under him.¹²⁶

Calvin apparently never lost his personal aversion to Alciati, but was deeply influenced by the methods of teaching and the elegant Latin used by him.¹²⁷ The young Frenchman was introduced in detail to Valla, Perotti, Politan, and other examples of Italian humanism. The classical civilizations were revealed to Calvin as the possessors of ethical values better than those of his own day.¹²⁸ At Bourges, Calvin did not need to look beyond his lectures to continue his humanist education, for he had left the schools of medieval scholasticism behind.

When Calvin finished his studies at Bourges in 1531, he was already deeply involved in the composition of the Seneca Commentary. The vast amount of reading necessary to research his work could only have increased the pace of his education. The short time he spent at the Royal Academy in Paris is also not without some significance for Calvin's education. Calvin initiated his study of Hebrew under Vatable at this time, although he did not view Hebrew as important as Greek.¹²⁹ As he applied himself to his studies and to the final work of the Seneca Commentary, Calvin also renewed his contacts with the humanistic scholars in Paris, although, with his heavy work schedule, these contacts must have been limited.¹³⁰ Calvin soon

¹²⁶Breen, Calvin, p. 47; McNeill, Calvinism, p. 103.

¹²⁷Breen, Calvin, p. 48.

¹²⁸Ibid., pp. 46-47.

¹²⁹Ibid., pp. 64-65.

¹³⁰Walker, Calvin, p. 55.

left Paris for Orléans where he completed his formal education by attaining the doctorate in law.

Calvin's education by 1533 was composed of a blend of medieval scholasticism and the humanist studies of the French Renaissance. At Montaigu, John Mair, the Occamist had introduced Calvin to Lombard's Sentences with his typical Nominalist interpretation.¹³¹ The law had been presented in the best tradition of the Middle Ages at Orléans by de l'Étoile. But Paris was the center of France and the Catholic reformers with their appeals for changes in the Roman Church were there at Court. The writings of Erasmus, Budé, Lefèvre, de Berquin, and others were freely discussed, thus Calvin was not unaware of them. John Mair published a commentary on the Gospels in 1529 in which he refuted the ideas of Hus, Wycliffe, and Luther. Surely the Mair lectures that Calvin attended were filled with these same attacks, thereby introducing Calvin to the thought of the Reformation.¹³² Calvin may also have become aware, while in Paris, of the works of Melanchthon and Zwingli.¹³³ Wolmar, in his teaching, had opened up the area of Greek classical literature to Calvin. Finally, at Bourges, Roman law and classicism were combined in the classroom and, at the Royal Academy, Calvin attended a school that was founded in the spirit of French humanism. Thus the education of the young man from Noyon came from two competing systems of thought which were linked together in Calvin, thus forming a connecting span between the Renaissance and the Reformation.

¹³¹Wendel, Calvin, p. 19; McNeill, Calvinism, p. 100.

¹³²Breen, Calvin, p. 30; Wendel, Calvin, p. 19.

¹³³Breen, Calvin, p. 32 and p. 36.

When Calvin turned from humanism to evangelical reform, he took with him much of what he had previously learned.

Throughout Calvin's entire life he was a student. The classics, people, theological treatises, the church fathers, and humanist writers were some subjects of his keen and grasping mind. The Scripture became not only the ultimate object of Calvin's study, but also the only source in which he felt the true Christian doctrine could be found.¹³⁴ The result of this life long search for God was then published by Calvin in an effort to present the uncorrupted word of God to all men. What Calvin wrote was more than an exposition of reformed doctrine, it was also an elucidation of his education. An education that began in the tradition of medieval scholasticism was, by 1533, an education influenced so greatly by the humanist movement of the Renaissance that Calvin would never lose the basics of humanism from either his method or his intellectual view of all he saw.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Calvin scholars such as Wendel point out that Calvin's search in the Bible for Christian doctrine can also be described as an attempt to find support in the Bible for already conceived doctrines. Wendel, Calvin, pp. 327-328 and p. 359.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 44; Breen has an interesting discussion of Calvin's humanism regarding the "mental set" and methods. Breen, Calvin, pp. 146-158.

III. HUMANISM AND CALVIN

The one aspect of the French Renaissance which is of primary importance to the life and work of John Calvin is humanism. The New Learning, which the Sorbonne opposed so fiercely, shaped his education profoundly, and through his schooling and the structuring of his education, also produced attitudes which were expressed in his evangelical writing. The style of his Institutes as well as the Seneca Commentary reflected the basic humanistic world view which he had developed before his conversion. His prejudices for the age of classical antiquity and against medieval thought were not a result of his scriptural analysis but were caused by the "mental set" he brought with him to Geneva. More importantly, Calvin's humanism is a significant bridge between the French Renaissance, of which he was an active participant, and the Protestant Reformation, to which he was the key guiding force for second generation reformers and their successors.¹³⁶

The humanistic movement of the Renaissance was not a particular school of thought devoted to a common philosophy. Perhaps the only points of agreement among humanists were the study of the humanities, the revival of ancient learning, and an anthropocentrism that was a change of emphasis and not a complete rejection of universals.¹³⁷ Any definition of humanism

¹³⁶ Breen, Calvin. Much of this has been demonstrated in Breen's pioneer work, with which I am in agreement, for the most part.

¹³⁷ Paul O. Kristeller, Renaissance Thought; the Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains (Rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 22;

thus rests, at best, on shaky ground. Paul O. Kristeller, a leading authority on Italian Renaissance intellectual history, has defined it in this manner: "By humanism we mean merely the general tendency of the age to attach the greatest importance to classical studies, and to consider classical antiquity as the common standard by which to guide all cultural activities."¹³⁸ This implied attitude of humanist scholars toward the golden age of antiquity differed somewhat from that of other eras. These academicians did not always concern themselves with combining the secular knowledge they were pursuing with theology. The humanists studied the Latin and Greek writers for the sake of their contribution to human understanding, a mark of their anthropocentrism, and not necessarily for the benefit of Christian doctrine.¹³⁹ These scholars were primarily more involved in understanding the hopes and fears, successes and failures of man than their scholastic predecessors.¹⁴⁰

The system of study held in high regard by Renaissance humanists not only indicated their opposition to medieval scholasticism, but also gave rise to the term humanism. The study of the humanities, the studia humanitatis, included the subjects of grammar, history, poetry, rhetoric and moral philosophy. The area of scholarly endeavor was then limited and excluded the disciplines of logic, natural philosophy, metaphysics,

Nancy S. Struever, The Language of History in the Renaissance (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 11-12.

¹³⁸Kristeller, Renaissance Thought, p. 95.

¹³⁹Ibid., pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁰Henry O. Taylor, Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century (2nd ed. rev.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), I, 5.

mathematics, astronomy, medicine, law, and theology.¹⁴¹ The most important feature of Renaissance humanism was the overriding interest of the humanists in high standards of rhetorical skill.¹⁴² This passion for the theory and use of language was expressed in the concern for good latinity, in the advent of textual criticism, and in producing a particularly sensitive characterization of history.¹⁴³ Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus, Guillaume Budé and so many other advocates of the New Learning made appeals for the purification of the Roman language.¹⁴⁴ Comparison of ancient works by humanists grew out of this concern for good Latin when the manuscripts of classical works were found to contain errors and barbarous language. Such criticism and comparison became the mark of the successful humanist. In France, none was to deserve his reputation for balance and thorough scholarship in classical antiquity and techniques of textual comparison as much as Guillaume Budé.¹⁴⁵ This man became the premier humanist of France, both in his literary production and in his influence over others.

The humanism which came to France from Italy, Germany, and Flanders late in the fifteenth century was interpreted somewhat differently by French scholars. Despite the decline of French letters which preceded the humanist movement, France's tradition of medieval scholarship in theology

¹⁴¹Kristeller, Renaissance Thought, p. 10.

¹⁴²Ibid., pp. 98-99.

¹⁴³Struever, The Language of History, p. 64; Breen, Calvin, p. 125.

¹⁴⁴Breen, Calvin, p. 103 and p. 117; Taylor, Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century, pp. 48-50, pp. 163-164, and pp. 299-300; Struever, The Language of History, p. 69.

¹⁴⁵Breen, Calvin, p. 113.

and philosophy deterred much of the imitative tendencies that may have existed. The twelfth century in France had been marked by classical studies which were exported to Italy and, when fused with Italian traditions of rhetoric, originated the Italian humanistic movement.¹⁴⁶ The scholasticism of the thirteenth and fourteenth century still lingered on in the universities of France, but interested students of Latin and Greek looked beyond academic orthodoxy to the innovative methods of humanist scholarship being used beyond the Alps.

The long-lived Lefèvre first stirred the revival of classical literature in France, but was also deeply concerned with religious issues. Thus, in Lefèvre, humanism was linked with Christian reform.¹⁴⁷ Like Erasmus, his hopes to use classical scholarship to aid in church reform without creating a split in the Roman Church was doomed to failure.¹⁴⁸ Erasmus of Rotterdam was the most famous living humanist in Europe, although partisan Frenchmen often preferred their own brilliant scholar, Budé. Even so, Erasmus's influence was such that his call for a purer Latin and the establishment of reliable texts was heeded even in France.¹⁴⁹

Lorenzo Valla's De linguae latinae elegantia was used as a text in France up through the years of Calvin's education. The self-appointed heir to the Roman past felt that the Latin tongue provided a unity to the

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 295; Kristeller, Renaissance Thought, p. 108; Charles Homer Hoskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927).

¹⁴⁷Taylor, Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century, p. 53.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁴⁹Breen, Calvin, p. 92.

Christian world that forces of arms could not destroy.¹⁵⁰ His attempt to purify the Latin language proved to be too narrow and strict, not allowing Latin to expand to cover new ideas or views. The classical language was too static for the needs of Renaissance society.¹⁵¹ Beyond this influence on humanist France, Valla's De falsa credita et ementita Donatione Constantini Declamatio was an outstanding example of textual criticism. This attack, leveled against the papacy, was one of the most convincing to come from the era preceding the Reformation. In other works, he employed textual comparison and philological methods to expose errors in the Vulgate.¹⁵² Valla also used scriptural defenses for his Epicurean view of life, one that Calvin later rejected as inadequate in favor of the Stoic.¹⁵³

Erasmus and Budé were both appreciative of Valla's worth; the former by publishing the Italian's Annotations on the New Testament despite its controversial nature and the latter by delving into Roman law after hearing Valla's praise for the Latin of the Justinian Digest or Pandects.¹⁵⁴ Budé was the giant of French humanism. His popularity rested upon his scholarship and the patriotism of Frenchmen who preferred him to the Dutchman, Erasmus, or any Italian. Budé taught himself Greek and then translated a tract of Plutarch in 1503. His triumph as both a philologist and juristic commentator was his Annotationes in quattuor et viginti Pandectarum libros (1508), in which he used his vast knowledge of classical literature to

¹⁵⁰Giuseppe Toffanin, History of Humanism, trans. Elio Gianturco (New York: Las Americas Publishing Co., 1954), p. 159.

¹⁵¹Taylor, Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century, p. 53.

¹⁵²Breen, Calvin, pp. 106-107.

¹⁵³Ibid., pp. 110-113.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 104-107.

analyze the language of the Justinian Digest. Budé was not content with simply a philological study, but also provided connections between juridicial terms and their Roman institutions. The French humanists, exemplified by Budé, displayed a less intense preference for Latin over the volgare as in the Annotations, in which Budé often gave the French equivalents of Roman legal terms and related institutions.¹⁵⁵ There appears to exist an underlying historical outlook in the Annotations.

As has been previously suggested, patriotism was one theme displayed by the French Renaissance. For example, John Calvin displayed a marked preference for de l'Étoile over Alciati, even though the latter was much more the humanist than the French jurist. Erasmus was more cosmopolitan in his outlook than Budé and his fame and influence spread over much of northern Europe.¹⁵⁶ Guillaume Budé displayed more nationalist consciousness than Erasmus, taking time in the Annotations to criticize the pro-Italianism of the French court. His French admirers pointed to his careful scholarship and his vast erudition at the expense of the Italians and Erasmus. But the French Renaissance stood on the shoulders of Italian achievement in the arts. Less concerned with beauty, the French produced translations and philological works which gained much from the Italian treatises of years past.¹⁵⁷

John Calvin was, in many ways, a product of the French Renaissance. His education came when Budé and Erasmus were at the height of their influence, when French humanists were in high favor at the court, and on

¹⁵⁵Breen, Calvin, p. 117.

¹⁵⁶Taylor, Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century, p. 155.

¹⁵⁷Breen, Calvin, p. 114.

the eve of the decay of the over-ripe fruit of the Renaissance which gave seed to the Reformation. Like many French humanists, Calvin received a mixed education which included medieval logic, philosophy, and law plus the humanist study of classical literature. Calvin was as much exposed to medieval precepts as he was to humanistic ones. If Calvin retained the humanist influences, his post-conversion writings, in particular the Institutes, would be of great importance in any attempt to confirm this.

The Institutes, although a systematic exposition of Calvinist theology, was nonetheless indicative of the reformer's humanist background. Calvin attempted to follow the Ciceronian reform that called for a marriage between rhetoric and philosophy or theology.¹⁵⁸ Investigations of the rhetorical content of the Institutes indicate that three types of discourse were used: epideictic, deliberative and forensic.¹⁵⁹ Calvin's discourse was one which drew the reader to Calvin, demanding that the reader make his own judgment of the subject-matter, much in the manner of the rhetor-historians of Italy.¹⁶⁰ Like rhetors, Calvin was content to use that subject matter of theology that was useful to his end--persuasion of the reader to believe in Calvin's view of Christianity.¹⁶¹ Calvin also used ethical, pathetic, and logical proofs, all to the benefit of the Institutes. The logic used in such a proof was rhetorical logic.¹⁶² Calvin's style has

¹⁵⁸Quirinus Breen, "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition," Breen, Christianity and Humanism (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 113.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 120-122.

one feature which identifies itself easily as rhetoric. Calvin was trying to move his audience to action, and action in the phenomenal world is the arena in which rhetoric is best-suited.¹⁶³ Other examples can be found in the Institutes, but these few are sufficient to indicate the rhetorical nature of Calvin's writing, therefore establishing another link between Renaissance humanism and the Reformation.

Calvin developed a defense of humanism based upon his doctrine of common grace. This defense may have grown out of his love for the classics or his realization that much truth was contained in the pages of some pagan texts.¹⁶⁴ Calvin believed that when man fell, he was stripped of the power to save himself. Qualities including charity and love of God were gone as was "soundness of mind and uprightness of heart. . . ."¹⁶⁵ This loss of natural gifts was not total, as a modicum of understanding and judgment remained, but these and the depraved will have been turned into darkness. Reason, a natural gift like understanding and judgment, was not completely eliminated, allowing man to differentiate between good and evil. All these too few partial remainders of natural gifts were clothed in ignorance. But man had seemingly always desired to find the truth and, despite the crippled quality of his perceptive powers, reached out again and again beyond

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 125; Struever, The Language of History, p. 37 and p. 88. Struever notes that rhetoric provides a new point of view vis a vis the phenomenal world, i.e. the reality of created experience. Rhetoric deals with the truth of events, not the truth beyond events as do philosophy and theology.

¹⁶⁴In the following analysis of Calvin's defense of the pagans, I am guided by Breen's argument on the subject. Breen, Calvin, pp. 159-179.

¹⁶⁵Calvin, Institutes, II, ii, 12. All references to the main body of the Institutes will be by book, chapter, and paragraph to expedite the use of other editions of Calvin's final revision of his epic work.

himself. However, man could not hold course, veering away from his goal because his abilities are too frail.

There existed earthly goals to which man could apply himself and attain something of worth. Because God had granted certain gifts, terrestrial ones, that were good even if the recipients were not, man could seek truth to a degree. An example of these God-given insights was the agreement among men on the necessity for political order. Thus man wanted to stabilize his relations with others through law. Even then, man fought against his tendencies for justice. In Calvin's words:

What they approve of in their understanding they hate on account of their lust. Quarrels . . . do not nullify the original conception of equity. For, while men dispute among themselves about individual sections of the law they agree on the general conception of equity. In this respect the frailty of the human mind is surely proved; even when it seems to follow the way, it limps and staggers.¹⁶⁶

The propensity of man to move away from God was ever present, even when God had provided some light for his darkness.

Often the light shed by God had been through the students of the arts and sciences, regardless of their stature as Christians. Calvin recognized this when he wrote:

Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nonetheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God.¹⁶⁷

Here, Calvin clearly said that the truth could appear in secular writings and to reject this truth would be to reject a gift from God. He then asked

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., II, ii, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., II, ii, 15.

if the work of classical jurists, philosophers, mathematicians, doctors, and those who invented the art of debate and caused man to speak well, could be safely ignored. They could not be ignored; these ancient writers were often deserving of admiration. But Calvin added this admonishment:

But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time it comes from God? Let us be ashamed of such ingratitude, into which not even the pagan poets fell, for they confessed that the gods had invented philosophy, law, and all useful arts. These men whom Scripture calls "natural men" were, indeed, sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things. Let us accordingly learn by their example how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good.¹⁶⁸

It is clear in the Institutes that Calvin saw the common grace that God had bestowed upon all men in political and economic order, manual arts, and liberal arts. These gifts from God came to man often through pagans. To refuse to recognize the good in these works would be to scorn the Holy Spirit. God had also marked certain men with virtues which man had praised and shown respect. But the virtues given were not enough before God in that all men were blemished by corruption. Calvin pointed out that ". . . anything in profane men that appears praiseworthy must be considered worthless."¹⁶⁹ When the need to glorify God was absent from man, his uprightness was absent. Thus the gifts of God to man and virtues in men were not sufficient to save, but were part of God's work on earth among men.

Calvin's own education in law and the liberal arts convinced him of their utility to man on earth. The study of the pagan classics could be instructive and worthwhile even to those who had received God's special and

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., II, iii, 4.

saving grace.¹⁷⁰ The humanism of Calvin was apparent here in another aspect of the Institutes: Calvin's defense of the liberal arts, secular writers, and the classics. Unlike his stylistic features which infer only a preference for rhetorical methods, such a defense was a clear statement of approval for the studia humanitatis of humanistic education.

One of the bonds that ties the Renaissance to the Reformation appears to be the willingness of reformers like Calvin to embrace certain qualities of humanism. Calvin's preference for rhetoric, the primary concern of humanists, his love for the classical literature of Greece and Rome, combined with the deep respect he had for a broad-based education, constitute some of the humanistic characteristics that provide one thread of historical continuity from the Renaissance to the Reformation. Calvin rejected the anthropocentrism for his life was God-centered, but rejection of one or even many concepts of as broadly a based world view as humanism does not deny the influence of even these rejected aspects nor the validity of viewing those retained characteristics as links to the past. There are other connections between the humanists and reformers, of these, one of the most useful is biblical exegesis. The reformers were not the first to study the Bible critically. Instead, it was the humanists who began the textual criticism which allowed each man to use his own judgment and not that of tradition relative to the Scriptures.¹⁷¹ It is evident then that Calvin can be described as a transitional figure between the two ages in so far as he retained certain characteristics of Renaissance humanism after his conversion.

¹⁷⁰ Breen, Calvin, p. 178.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 107-108.

The humanistic concern for both rhetorical and the classical past has implications, already suggested, that are directly connected with historical consciousness. Did Calvin carry this historical consciousness with him to Geneva? The questions concerning Calvin's view and understanding of history are closely related to such an awareness of history. The problem remains to find Calvin's sense of history within the Institutes and find the answer to whether the view was humanistic or not.

IV. RENAISSANCE RHETORIC AND CALVIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Although John Calvin was not a historian but a theologian, his awareness of history, that is, his historical consciousness, cannot be ignored. When the reformers challenged the authority of the Roman Church and the papacy they also questioned the historical tradition which formed part of the sustentive arguments for these institutions. As they extracted new meaning from re-reading the Bible, so did they re-interpret the history and traditions of the church. Calvin appears to have been well aware of the fact that Christianity was deeply rooted into the historical past of man.¹⁷² The point of view which Calvin took in relation to the past was dominated in many ways by his theology. However, the influence of humanism, especially the rhetorical emphasis of the Renaissance, upon his analysis of man's past cannot be ignored. The Italian rhetor-historian and his concern for human events did not, of course, dominate Calvin's historical position, but there remains in the Institutes a very real interest in the work of God among men and the creations of men, particularly the church.

Any philosophy of history provides a structure which can give meaning and form to the flow of events which constitute the materials of history. The historian's view of the past thus depends largely upon his interpretation of not only how facts fit together into a chain of

¹⁷²For discussions of the connection between history and Christianity see Herbert Butterfield, Christianity and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950); Breen, "The Church as Mother of Learning," Breen, Christianity and Humanism, pp. 245-248.

intelligible scheme, but also upon his sense of causal relationships which may or may not extend beyond the essence of the phenomenal.¹⁷³ The age of the Renaissance produced several theories which purported to furnish patterns of understanding to history.¹⁷⁴ These theories of history were, as opposed to medieval ecclesiastical precepts, mostly concerned with secular cause and effect relationships. The "secularization" of history was as much because of the influence of humanist rhetoric as from a rejection of Christian theological influences.¹⁷⁵ Rhetoric provided a form for the ordering of phenomenon which related the meaning of experience directly to the event, not to an unseen or unknowable cause.¹⁷⁶

The humanists found in the tenets of rhetoric, a new basis for analyzing the past. Basically, the rhetors denied the ability of the mind to operate free of the phenomenal world. Operations of "pure reason" were not a possibility for man.¹⁷⁷ In such a case, then, the phenomenal world must be accepted on its own terms; humans must impose a sense of order and structure upon events that they might be understood.¹⁷⁸ Language

¹⁷³ Herbert Weisinger, "Ideas of History During the Renaissance," Journal of the History of Ideas, VI (October, 1945), p. 415.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 416. Weisinger deals with six of these theories including the idea of progress, the plenitude of nature, the climate theory, the cyclical theory, uniformitarianism, and decline.

¹⁷⁵ Harry E. Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (2nd ed. rev.; New York: Dover Publications, 1963), pp. 99-100; Struever, The Language of History, *passim*.

¹⁷⁶ Struever, The Language of History, p. 37. This recent work on the relationship of history and rhetoric in Italian humanism has been extremely useful in regard to the use of language as a structural feature of historical narrative which ties history to rhetoric.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

represented the only method which could communicate reality and then, only by relating the symbolic nature of words to the events. This problematic cast of language rendered unusable, for the humanist historian, absolutes or universals, which could not be adequately described and were, therefore, unknowable.¹⁷⁹

If the humanist historian rejected the absolutes proposed by philosophy and theology, there remained the problem of structuring the experiences of the senses into a meaningful form. Because he believed that the pure idea cannot act without expression, the rhetor-historian was concerned with the "phenomenal reality" of the idea. The subject matter of history became then not the outward behavior perceived by the senses, but the unseen operations of the mind which were expressed by the action.¹⁸⁰ The humanists became more involved with the intent which caused an author to write than in the words themselves. It was in this manner that the Renaissance historian transcended, to the degree possible, the experience and extracted meaning. The only access to the purely intellectual for the rhetor was through emphasizing the phenomena of experience.¹⁸¹

The use of the principles of rhetoric does not imply the choice of any one theory of history. However, it limits the selection to those which can be described as anthropocentric because the use of philosophical or theological absolutes or universals as a basis for historical analysis cannot be accepted. Truth is filtered through experience to man and, as such,

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 88.

is detected as a pattern within the flux of events of history.¹⁸² The choice of rhetoric implies one important feature of Renaissance historiography. Since language is used to give form to events, then the historian, in giving a pattern of intent, was creative.¹⁸³ The fame or notoriety of figures and occurrences of the past does not arise from events, but from the creative abilities of the historian.¹⁸⁴ Here lies man's similitude of God; he is no mere recorder of the past, but is highly creative.

The rhetorical method of historical study was an important step toward the Reformation as the concept of tradition as authority was rejected in favor of direct assessments of the past.¹⁸⁵ Tradition in the Roman church stemmed from the fact that the life of Christ and the Scriptures constituted a divine message from antiquity which was unchanging with respect to time. Tradition was used to justify the authority of the church by calling attention to the timelessness of it. Such views are contrary to historical consciousness in that there exists no necessity for critical review of an unchanging message and time has no concept within the system. Thus, anything connected to the traditional beliefs gains the authority of the original postulates even if they were added only recently. When the reformers defied tradition and turned to a direct confrontation with the past of the church, they found the alleged "unchangeable truth" of their divine message had been corrupted and altered.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁸³Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 51.

The perversions of God's Word (as the reformers saw the changes) came from the tenet that no innovations were allowed by tradition; existing practices were given the cloak of authority by each generation.¹⁸⁶ Thus the Renaissance historian's examinations of classical texts and the classical past led to textual criticism of the Bible and a new look at the early church.

The philosophy which guided Calvin's view of history in the Institutes is not readily apparent, especially if a relatively close approximation to the rhetorical approach is sought. This is as it should be, however, because Calvin was a reformer and theologian, who was influenced by humanistic precepts, not ruled by them. The first obvious point at which Calvin stood opposed to the rhetor-historian was on the concept of universals. Unlike the humanists, Calvin believed there was available to man an a priori knowledge of God which existed independently of the flux of phenomenal experience. Nowhere was this so well voiced as in his discussion of the knowledge of God. Calvin stated:

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. . . . Yet there is . . . no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God.¹⁸⁷

This, of course, does not mean that the humanists did not believe in the existence of God, but that most of them did not hold to an a priori knowledge of him. God was the prime cause of both Creation and existence for

¹⁸⁶ John M. Headley, Luther's View of Church History (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 56-59.

¹⁸⁷ Calvin, Institutes, I, iii, 1.

Calvin.¹⁸⁸ Calvin thus recognized in God not only a prime cause, but also a sometimes hidden, sometimes revealed meaning to the history of man. All things were, for Calvin, ordained in heaven. In contrast to the rhetor-historian, who used the subtleties of the theory of language to structure the sometimes chaotic appearance of events, Calvin relied upon the providence of God, whose will may be hidden from us.¹⁸⁹

But Calvin did not deny the rhetor's contention that the transcendent might be known through the phenomena of experiences. The order of the universe gave to man sufficient evidence of God's existence. Although God's essence was unknowable, all men can learn to know him. Calvin wrote:

Indeed, his essence is incomprehensible; hence his divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance. . . . Yet, in the first place, wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory.¹⁹⁰

However, Calvin saw that even with the magnificence of God's works, men fell into error and failed to recognize him. To know God, and so, know the meaning of life and history, the Scriptures were given to man as a guide to the truth beyond the physical existence on earth.¹⁹¹ Here, the divine intervened in the phenomenal world, a belief which was antithetical to humanist rhetoric where the influence of either divine will or pure reason are minimized.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., I, xvi, 3; I, xvi, 4.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., I, xvii, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., I, v, 1.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., I, vi, 1.

¹⁹² Struever, The Language of History, p. 38.

As has been previously discussed, the historians of the Renaissance were concerned essentially with the actions and intents of men. Calvin was concerned with the history of man, but to a different purpose. He saw history not as the record of man's achievements and failures, but an account of God's work on earth. God chose men, ". . . some serve as his ambassadors in the world, to be interpreters of his secret will, and, in short, to represent his person."¹⁹³ Calvin did not provide political or economic answers to questions of causal relationships. These were insufficient as they did not transcend the commonplace.

Although Calvin's point of view relative to the history of man was outside the flux of temporal existence, he, nonetheless, did not ignore the historical procession of mankind.¹⁹⁴ This philosophy of history can easily be mistaken for one of decay or deterioration.¹⁹⁵ In reality, it is the Renaissance cyclical theory, with sufficient qualifications to allow Calvin's theology to dominate. This modified cyclical view of history stems from both biblical history, as Calvin read it, and from Calvin's basic belief in the ability of Christ's visible church to renew itself. Calvin altered the progressive aspect of the Renaissance cyclical theory when he substituted a basically Augustinian eschatological linear direction for the unending upward spiral of cycles denoting an increase in man's physical and

¹⁹³ Calvin, Institutes, IV, iii, 1; IV, i, 5.

¹⁹⁴ One method used by Renaissance historians was to view the past in order to identify with the age in question, i.e. to judge and structure the flow of events by the relation to their own time. This view still places the historian within the stream of history, but gives his judgments a feeling of temporal distance from the present. William von Leyden, "Antiquity and Authority: A Paradox in the Renaissance Theory of History," Journal of the History of Ideas, XIX (October, 1958), p. 491.

¹⁹⁵ Weisinger, "Ideas of History During the Renaissance," Journal of the History of Ideas, VI (October, 1945), pp. 431-435.

spiritual being. In doing so, Calvin pictured a chain of cycles extending linearly from creation to the end of time. The other change in this theory authored by Calvin was his insistence in positing historical judgment outside the pathway of history and in believing in the past truth and future possibility of divine intervention in the arena of history.¹⁹⁶ God had sent Christ to mediate man's salvation in ancient days; who could deny his capability to do so again. Thus changed, the cyclical theory best demonstrates Calvin's view of history. It is all too easy, however, to turn Calvin's doctrine of the total depravity of man into an argument which is based upon the progressive linear decay of the world.

The cyclical theory of history saw the sweep of history repeating itself again and again, particularly with regard to the growth and decay of great civilizations. The rhetor-historian often saw "the movement of culture no longer as the progress from pre-existent system to un-lived doctrine, but as recurrence of types of ethical problems and behavior."¹⁹⁷ Calvin also sensed that recurrence, but in relations of man and God rather than in ethical questions. For example, he contrasted the corruption of the Roman Church to holy tradition resulting in this comparison:

The Romanists, therefore, today make no other pretension than what the Jews once apparently claimed when they were reproved for blindness, ungodliness, and idolatry by the Lord's prophets. For like

¹⁹⁶ Calvin, Institutes, III, xx, 42. Calvin apparently believed there to be the possibility of the creation of God's Kingdom on the earth before the day of judgment. He stated:

But we should not take it ill that the outward man is in decay, provided the inner man is renewed! For this is the condition of God's Kingdom: that while we submit to his righteousness, he makes us sharers in his glory. This comes to pass when, with ever-increasing splendor, he displays his light and truth, by which darkness and falsehoods of Satan's kingdom vanish, are extinguished, and pass away.

¹⁹⁷ Struever, The Language of History, p. 78.

the Romanists, they boasted gloriously of Temple, ceremony, and priestly functions, and measured the church very convincingly, as it seemed to them, by these. . . . Accordingly, we refute them by the very argument with which Jeremiah combatted the stupid confidence of the Jews.¹⁹⁸

In another analogy of the fallen Jewish church with the Roman Church of his own day, Calvin paralleled the conditions of the two after both had been contaminated by idolatry and false doctrine. Both had periods of great corruption during which men of staunch faith had to refuse participation in the rites. The papists were even worse than the Jews in that the Roman Church was, in Calvin's view, practicing idolatry and committing sacrilege.¹⁹⁹

Calvin followed his parallel of the corruption of the Jewish and Roman churches to a logical conclusion. As the prophets separated from the erring Jewish assemblies, so Christians who see the Roman Church "contaminated with idolatry, superstition, and ungodly doctrine," must turn away from the false church.²⁰⁰ Just as the Jewish assemblies had to renew themselves by breaking with the established order, so Calvin saw the only way open for temporal renewal of the Christian Church was a break in unity.

The early Christian Church was, for Calvin, the golden age of antiquity, which provided a model for the reborn church. In Chapter IV of Book IV, Calvin devoted much detail to the government of the ancient church. The duties, privileges, and methods of election for each office in the early Christian community is shown and compared (in Book IV, Chapter V) with the corruptions perpetrated by the papacy. Calvin saw the pure

¹⁹⁸ Calvin, Institutes, IV, ii, 3.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., IV, ii, 8; IV, ii, 10.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., IV, iii, 10; IV, iii, 11; IV, iii, 12.

doctrine and the commendable behavior of early Christians and clerics as the goal toward which the Reformed Church must strive. In this regard, Calvin was similar to many humanists in venerating antiquity. The difference lay, again, in Calvin's theology.

John Calvin's philosophy of history was influenced by the historical methodology of humanist rhetoric, but was largely dominated by his theology. Calvin accepted the necessity of imposing a structure on the events of temporal existence to provide order and meaning to them. Calvin further agreed that the noumenal could be found expressed in the flux of phenomena; that the event could sometimes be transcended to the pure cause of which the occurrence was merely a sign. What Calvin could not adopt from humanist rhetoric was their refusal to wrestle directly with the causal relationship beyond the fact. Calvin felt deeply that God could be known other than through his works. The a priori knowledge of God professed by Calvin was rejected by the rhetors, in large part, because the problematic aspect of language rendered absolutes almost impossible to symbolize.

With respect to the history of man, Calvin was much more influenced by Renaissance historiography. He appears to have accepted the cyclical theory with few reservations. The major difference was part of Calvin's religious doctrines which not only rejected the secular mood of the Renaissance historian, but also was concerned most deeply over the history of man's relationship with God. The examples cited above do not represent nearly all the uses of the cyclical theory which are depicted in the pages of the Institutes. They are enough, however, to note that Calvin regarded the Reformed Church as the rebirth of the church, the start of a new cycle of Christian history.

There exists one more aspect of the connection between rhetorical historiography and Calvin's philosophy of history that should be explored. Historical methodology in Greece and Rome passed through three fairly distinct phases. The initial phase was dominated by broad philosophical maxims which involved a preoccupation with aesthetics. The second phase was the development of rhetoric as a method of controlling the aims and purposes of aesthetics by recognizing the instability of both language and the action it describes. The final phase grew out of a political decline and a boredom with the debate between philosophy and rhetoric. History became ruled by philosophical aims which have absorbed some of the methods of rhetoric.²⁰¹ As Nancy Streuver remarks of the third phase: "In the Hellenistic period the rhetorical historians forego their historical purpose (of confronting their constructed reality and extracting meaning from it alone) to create a tragic or pathetic scene which would move their readers to pity or terror."²⁰² In the third phase rhetorical history is of two personalities. On the one hand, it attempts to provide a set of philosophical (or theological) absolutes, which rhetoric had renounced as unknowable; on the other, rhetorical history degenerated into a pragmatism that was an exercise in praise or blame, flattery or slander.²⁰³

Calvin's philosophy of history reflects many facets of the last phase: his rhetorical methods are overlaid and altered by his theological concerns to a great degree. When Calvin extracted meaning from the history of man, he did so not from the "created reality" alone, but from the

²⁰¹Streuver, The Language of History, pp. 7-23.

²⁰²Ibid., p. 24.

²⁰³Ibid., pp. 24-25.

theological universals which provided the true meaning of man's phenomenal existence. His rhetoric did not degenerate to pragmatic political writing, of course. However, Calvin did view history from beyond not from within and in doing so, adopted some of the methods of rhetorical history within the larger scope of his theologically determined analysis of history.

A philosophy of history can be difficult to properly assess when it is extracted from other than a work of history. There are, however, other signs of humanist influence in Calvin's view and understanding of history. Once such indication is the historical sources which Calvin used in the Institutes.

V. CALVIN'S HISTORICAL SOURCES AND HIS USE OF HISTORY

While Calvin's view of history retained certain aspects of Renaissance historiography, the pervasiveness of his Christian theology was so complete that only with reservation can humanism be said to have maintained any significant influence after Calvin's conversion. A study of Calvin's historical sources and his use of history in the Institutes reflects a more positive image of the sway that humanism held over him than any other aspect of his historiography. There were differences in the priorities of the Christian humanist who penned the Seneca Commentary and the dynamic leader of the Reformed Church of Geneva who struggled for years over the pages of the Institutes. The most obvious dissimilarity was the almost complete lack of biblical quotations in the Seneca Commentary as opposed to the barrage of scriptural citations that assailed the reader of the Institutes.²⁰⁴ The increased importance of the Bible, Church Fathers, and other ecclesiastical authorities in the post-conversion thought of Calvin comes as no surprise. However, Calvin did not slight the pagan authors, although his regard for them as reliable founts of historical knowledge was always determined by their lack of conflict with Scripture. Calvin not only used ancient histories, both pagan and sacred, he also used the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, documents of the papacy and Church Councils, and collections of letters as sources of history in the

²⁰⁴In the Seneca Commentary only three quotations were taken from the Bible. Wendel, Calvin, p. 32.

Institutes. In fact, Calvin brought the entire weight of his erudition to bear upon historical questions, using any fountain of knowledge which would shed light upon his object of study.

Calvin used historical events and personages from a multitude of sources to verify the correctness of his doctrinal position. History was, in one sense, the record of facts which he believed supported his confrontation with the Roman Church. In another sense, history was a tool which Calvin wielded in order to rebuild the Church of God on earth. Calvin consistently sought to establish his position within the temporal stream of history and, at the same time, to prove that the traditions of the ancient church were his to claim as rightful heir. The great number of historical sources, especially those from antiquity reflect in great part Calvin's humanist education. His deep concern and respect for the ancient past, including pagan antiquity, were definite indications of the continued influence of the Renaissance upon the reformer.

Calvin did not hesitate to use the Bible as a historical authority, recognizing as he did the truth of divine intervention in human affairs. Although the Scriptures were authentic without need of proof by reason, Calvin proceeded to present some evidence to support the validity of biblical history.²⁰⁵ Calvin, as a humanist, could not fail but be impressed by the antiquity of the Bible which lent it at least an air of authority. Calvin wrote:

Besides those points which I have already touched upon, the very antiquity of Scripture has no slight weight. For however much Greek writers may talk about the Egyptian theology, no monument of

²⁰⁵ Calvin established the authentic nature of scriptural history within his argument that the Scriptures relate the Word of God, the truth that transcends all. Calvin, Institutes, I, viii, 5.

any religion is extant that is not far later than the age of Moses. And Moses devised no new god, but rather set forth what the Israelites had accepted concerning the eternal God handed down by the patriarchs age after age.²⁰⁶

Calvin supported his belief that Scripture was more ancient than any other religious work when he cited Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, Eusebius, and Augustine to reject Egyptian claims that their religious heritage extended six thousand years into the past.²⁰⁷ These authors were being referred to as historians, in this case. Calvin also anticipated the arguments of those who rejected the miracles recounted in the writings of Moses when he asked: "Inasmuch as Moses published all these things before the congregation, among eyewitnesses of the events what opportunity was there for fraud?"²⁰⁸ According to Calvin, the fulfilled prophecies of the Scriptures also pointed to the historical validity contained in them.²⁰⁹ After indicating the truth contained in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, Calvin became manifestly impatient with those who doubted the divine authority of the Bible when he sharply challenged them in these words: "Let the dogs deny the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles; or even let them deny history."²¹⁰

The Church Fathers were held in high esteem by Calvin as sources of history because of the vast amount of material on the practices, doctrine, and discipline of the ancient church contained in their writings. They were of great value to him also because they were very close to the origin

²⁰⁶Ibid., I, viii, 3.

²⁰⁷Ibid., I, viii, 4; I, viii, 4 n. 4.

²⁰⁸Ibid., I, viii, 5.

²⁰⁹Ibid., I, viii, 7; I, viii, 8.

²¹⁰Ibid., I, viii, 11.

of all truth, Jesus Christ, and to the apostles who evangelized at Christ's command. John Chrysostom, Jerome, Origen, Tertullian, Irenaeus, as well as Augustine became more than theological supporters of Calvin's doctrine, they also gave witness to the degeneration of the Roman Church and the purity of the early church.

For example, Jerome provided historical data for Calvin, delineating the offices of presbyter, bishop, and deacon as well as their historical development. The office of bishop, Jerome reported, only became raised above that of presbyter out of the necessity for having one of their number responsible for halting dissension. The office of bishop was not only a creation of man and not based in Scripture, but was an ancient institution dating back to the time of Mark at Alexandria.²¹¹ Calvin contended that the bishop was required to fill his office by actively preaching and teaching. When the church at Alexandria prohibited the bishop from preaching, Jerome made known his displeasure.²¹² The same ancient leader of the Christian Church also fought against the unnecessary decoration of churches for he felt, as Calvin did, that the treasury of the church was to be used in helping the poor.²¹³ Jerome was also a source of support in Calvin's argument against the primacy of Rome.²¹⁴

To cite another example, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, used the terms "brother" and "colleague" when writing to Bishop Cornelius of Rome, but did not regard Cornelius as his superior. He further indicated this

²¹¹Ibid., IV, iv, 1; IV, iv, 2.

²¹²Ibid., IV, iv, 3.

²¹³Ibid., IV, iv, 8.

²¹⁴Ibid., IV, vi, 17.

when he chastised the successor of Cornelius, Stephen, for ignorance and arrogance.²¹⁵ Calvin used comments by Cyprian as sources which provide historical credence to infant baptism.²¹⁶ This early bishop also indicated that even in matters of church discipline he felt he had to turn to the people for the consent.²¹⁷ With Jerome, Cyprian also insisted that the people must assent to and witness the ordination of priests.²¹⁸

As far as Calvin was concerned, the most influential of the ancient leaders was Augustine of Hippo.²¹⁹ In Calvin's refutation of confirmation as a sacrament, he noted that Augustine regarded this in his day as a prayer. The laying on of hands after completion of instruction was, in Calvin's view, a public confession of faith.²²⁰ The frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper which Calvin espoused found historical precedent in Augustine's testimony of such practices in his day.²²¹ The practice of shaving the head of the ministers as part of ordination rites, once a sign of piety, had degenerated to a mystery of faith, falsely credited to the Word of God. Augustine clearly indicated, for Calvin, that the tonsure was the result of an effort by men to clearly mark the clergy.²²² Calvin

²¹⁵Ibid., IV, vii, 3; IV, vii, 7.

²¹⁶Ibid., IV, xvi, 8; IV, xvi, 30.

²¹⁷Ibid., IV, xi, 6; IV, xii, 6.

²¹⁸Ibid., IV, iii, 15.

²¹⁹Ibid., IV, xv, 26. Calvin remarks that Augustine was the "best and most reliable witness of all antiquity." See also Wendel, Calvin, p. 124.

²²⁰Calvin, Institutes, IV, xix, 12; IV, xix, 13.

²²¹Ibid., IV, xvii, 45.

²²²Ibid., IV, xix, 27.

relied very extensively upon the authority of Augustine in writing his Institutes. The few mentioned are sufficient to indicate that the Church Fathers such as Jerome, Cyprian, and Augustine, as well as Hilary, Chrysostom and others were used by Calvin both as primary sources of history and as historians.

The documents of Church Councils, with their judgments upon doctrinal and moral issues, were employed by Calvin as both theological and historical sources. The Councils were often subject to criticism by Calvin who defended himself in this manner:

The fact that I shall here be rather severe does not mean that I esteem ancient councils less than I ought. For I venerate them from my heart, and desire that they be honored by all. But here the norm is that nothing of course detract from Christ. Now it is Christ's right to preside over all councils and to have no man share his dignity. But I say he presides only when the whole assembly is governed by his word and Spirit.²²³

On this basis, Calvin accepted the Council of Chalcedon (451) and rejected the second Council of Ephesus (449), the "robber synod."²²⁴ Calvin compared the results of each council against others, a historical comparison, and indicated when they contradicted one another. Augustine's opposition to the decisions of the Council of Ariminum (359) provided historical support for rejection of council decrees.²²⁵

Church decrees were used by Calvin either as historical evidence to support his view on a given subject or, as often was the case, to give proof of how far man had fallen from the practices of the Apostolic Church. The council of Elvira (ca. 305) recognized the dangers in using images in

²²³Ibid., IV, ix, 1.

²²⁴Ibid., IV, ix, 9.

²²⁵Ibid., IV, ix, 7.

worship and decreed that pictures could not be used in churches to depict objects of reverence.²²⁶ Yet, by 787, the second Council of Nicaea, called by Empress Irene, restored the images and required that they were to be worshiped. This came in face of the decisions against the use of images by the Council of Elvira and the Council of Constantine (754), the latter held only a few years prior to the second Council of Nicaea.²²⁷ Calvin thus used historical comparison of councils to note that they were capable of error and established from ancient authority the right to dissent from such decrees.

The biblical and theological sources of Calvin's historiography also included the papal decrees as well as the letters of the men who held the bishop's chair at Rome. However, Calvin often saw this literature in the worst light. He stated:

I know how many letters there are, how many rescripts and decrees, on which the pontiffs allot everything to their see and confidently claim it. But all men even of small wit and learning know this: most of these documents are so insipid that at first taste it is easy to detect from what shop they came.²²⁸

Thus, Calvin was ready to apply historical criticism and comparison as well as scriptural norms to these documents before accepting them as truly Christian. In Calvin's time, the fraudulent decretals of the Pseudo-Isidorian decrees were being discovered although Gratian's Decretum cited them as genuine.²²⁹ Calvin often made use of their deceptive nature to claim that the contents were just as untrue. The letters of Leo, Bishop of

²²⁶ Ibid., IV, ix, 1.

²²⁷ Ibid., I, xi, 14; IV, ix, 9.

²²⁸ Ibid., IV, vii, 11.

²²⁹ Ibid., IV, vii, 11 n. 27; IV, vii, 11.

Rome, are used to show the arrogance of Roman bishops even in the fifth century, while the letters of Gregory I of Rome, who fought against the universal patriarch claims of the bishop of Constantinople, led Calvin to judge his cause as honorable and just in the light of historical evidence.²³⁰

The histories to which Calvin turned were varied to a great degree, although ancient ecclesiastical authors were much preferred. Eusebius wrote the Ecclesiastical History, Life of Constantine III, and the Praeparatio evangelica, all of which were sources of the past for Calvin.²³¹ The works of this fourth-century Christian historian gave a historical basis for arguing spiritual doctrines. Socrates, another fourth-century Christian historian, and his Ecclesiastical History became part of Calvin's knowledge of the past.²³² A third historian, roughly contemporary with the two previously mentioned, was Sozomen. The three ecclesiastical histories written by these men were combined by Cassiodorus into a Tripartite History in the sixth century. These combined works were used often by Calvin.²³³ Calvin also used the works of the third-century Christian historian, Lactantius, Divine Institutes and Epitome, not so much as history of events as intellectual history, a record of ancient thought.²³⁴ Calvin often made reference to Theodoret of Cyrrhus, a fifth-century Christian chronicler, and his Ecclesiastical History in the Institutes.²³⁵

²³⁰Ibid., IV, vii, 16.

²³¹Ibid., I, viii, 3 n. 4; IV, vii, 8 n. 19; IV, vi, 14.

²³²Ibid., IV, vii, 8; I, xiii, 5. Only two among many references by Calvin to Socrates. This is not the Socrates of ancient Athens.

²³³Ibid., "Prefatory Address to King Francis," p. 19, n. 15.

²³⁴Ibid., I, v, 3 n. 6.

²³⁵Ibid., IV, iv, 11.

Pagan historians were less noted by Calvin but they were not neglected. The general impression from reading the Institutes is that Calvin did not appreciate them as much for history as for their ability to express themselves. The only references noted in the Institutes to either Livy or Herodotus are literary and not historical.²³⁶ Calvin seemed to regard the Jew, Josephus, as almost a Christian historian because he felt that the same God guided his way toward a truthful history. Yet, the Jewish historian was only infrequently cited by Calvin.²³⁷ Evidence exists that Calvin relied upon Suetonius' Lives of the Caesars, although the reformer only alluded to incidents that are traced to his work.²³⁸ The pagan historians were less referred to than the Christian writers and even then were mainly used as models for style. Secular history was not as important to Calvin, the reformer, as it might have been, yet, even here he displayed an effect from his Renaissance education.

Calvin did not depend on ancient sources alone, he was, after all, often comparing the practices of the ancient church with that of the Middle Ages or his own day. The editors of the most recent English edition of the Institutes have suggested that much of Calvin's information on the popes may have come from the works of Bartholomew Platyna, who published his De vita Christi et omnium pontificum in 1479, and Robert Barnes, who published Vitae Romanorum pontificum in 1536. John Sleidan, a close friend of Calvin, also wrote on the ancient empires in De quatuor summis imperiis which was not published until 1559. All three followed the exposure of the Donation

²³⁶Ibid., III, ix, 4 n. 5; III, vii, 2 n. 4.

²³⁷Ibid., I, viii, 4; II, viii, 12.

²³⁸Ibid., "John Calvin to the Reader," p. 4, n. 4; I, iii, 2 n. 6.

of Constantine by Reginald Pecock, Nicholas of Cusa, and Lorenzo Valla.

Platyna was generally satisfied with the papacy and was especially favorable to the pontificates of Zachary and Gregory VII.²³⁹ Calvin considered Gregory VII "an unclean and wicked man," which agreed with the estimates of Barnes and Sleiden. Calvin's estimation of both Zachary and Gregory VII grew out of his belief that the papal temporal power, which these two popes brought to reality, was a corrupting influence upon the church.²⁴⁰ There were references to medieval popes or scholars such as Aquinas. Those concerning Aquinas generally indicated a refutation by Calvin, as Calvin often opposed the scholasticism that Aquinas represented.

The majority of Calvin's sources in the Institutes were those concerned with the past prior to the reign of Gregory I in Rome. There are two reasons for this imbalance. First, Calvin depicted the practices or doctrinal positions of the ancient church, explained how they began to change over the years prior to Gregory, and then moved to the position of an observer of the church in his own day. He quibbled with the medieval thinkers, but refuted them by appealing to the earlier thought of Augustine, Cyprian, or Chrysostom. The total effect was to use the history of the ancient church as a model with which to compare the Renaissance Roman Church. In Calvin's description of the growth of papal power, he devoted one paragraph to the time between Boniface III and Bernard of Clairvaux. He then voiced the complaints of the Cistercian abbot over the state of the church in the following section. Calvin escaped from the age of Bernard to

²³⁹Ibid., IV, vii, 17 n. 38; IV, xi, 12 n. 23.

²⁴⁰Ibid., IV, xi, 10; IV, xi, 11; IV, xi, 12; IV, xi, 13 n. 25.

his own and expressed his dissatisfaction with the Roman Church.²⁴¹

Another example of the imbalanced use of history can be found in Calvin's discussion of church jurisdiction. Calvin defined at great length the relationship of civil and ecclesiastical authority, citing from the Bible both Christ and the apostles. The gradual assumption of temporal power by bishops was regarded by Calvin as a corruption of the church. In this he again turned to Bernard of Clairvaux for support just as the twelfth-century abbot had been called to adjudicate disputes in his own day.

Calvin wrote:

At last, the Roman pontiff, not content with modest baronies, first laid his hand on kingdoms, then upon the Empire itself. And that he may retain by some pretext or other the possession obtained by mere robbery, he sometimes boasts that he has it by divine right, sometimes pretends the Donation of Constantine, sometimes another title. I answer first with Bernard: "Though we admit that he claims this for some other reason, yet it is not by apostolic right. For Peter could not give what he did not have; but he gave to his successors what he had, the care of the churches."²⁴²

In Bernard, Calvin found support for his case. Yet Calvin had, at that point in the argument, said little of the medieval papacy except to complain generally of its shortcomings. Calvin attacked the Donation of Constantine and Gregory VII in turn, but only briefly. The claims of secular power by Gregory VII were then refuted by appeals to Gregory I and the church of the Roman Empire which had subjected itself to secular rulers in temporal matters. In this chapter, Calvin devoted only three paragraphs out of sixteen to any history of the medieval papacy and one of these was concerned with the admonishments of Bernard. Calvin's preference was always to emphasize

²⁴¹Ibid., IV, vii, 17; IV, vii, 18; IV, viii, 19.

²⁴²Ibid., IV, xi, 11.

the authority of the early church and not the decline of the Roman Church.²⁴³ Calvin was interested in a comparison not with a narrative of spiritual decline. Certainly the former method left sharper contrasts and was thus more dramatic.

Calvin approached the use of history as many humanists had before him. History provided a paradigm of the past which could be used to either despair of the present or to call for reform. History was not the end but a means for Calvin. He utilized history to define the position of the ancient church and to expose the alterations imposed by man upon a divinely ordained institution. Thus Calvin, by focusing attention upon the temporal flow of church history and ignoring the timelessness of tradition, attempted to define the church as ordained by God and then changed by man. Here Calvin turned man-centered in his use of history, and tried to show the utter hopelessness of ever expecting man to find the way to God through his own devices. Only when God's glory was uppermost in the hearts and minds of men did the church retain spiritual and doctrinal purity.

The strand of continuity between Calvin the Christian humanist and Calvin the reformed theologian can be defined in two ways. His sources were typically those of humanists, that is, they were generally ancient writers from prior to the Middle Ages. Of course, this distinction must be defined in such a way as to include the historical value of the Bible and church theologians and to realize that all other sources must be judged first in the light of the Scriptures. The second way existed in Calvin's use of history. Human events of the past were set up as future

²⁴³Ibid., IV, xi.

possibilities for man. Calvin's interests in humanism and Christianity could not be separated from their ties to the past.

The humanistic aspects of Calvin as expressed in his philosophy of history as well as his sources and uses of history define a possible continuity of both thought and methodology from the Renaissance to the Reformation. There remains another dimension to the relationship between Calvin and history that proposes another link in the chain that binds the two eras. Calvin's attitudes toward various eras of the past, especially the age of antiquity and the Middle Ages, are of importance in that they define more strictly the reformer's view of Christian church history and the reasons why ancient writers were often preferred to more recent authors. In such a manner, Calvin's attitudes can be seen as yet another pattern with which history can be shaped.

VI. CALVIN, ANTIQUITY, AND
THE MIDDLE AGES

A view or understanding of the past presupposes a philosophy of history that patterns the events of the past into coherent rivulets of meaning and intent. Even with a defined way of looking at the past, the sources which are used can have a great impact upon attitudes toward different epochs of history. The measuring rod with which Calvin evaluated history was the Bible. All other works or materials of history of the past were judged in light of the eternal truth of Scripture and the often hidden directions with which God has guided man. Calvin's attitudes toward the age of antiquity and the Middle Ages were best described when he dealt with the history of the church.

Calvin's view of the worth of ancient pagan writers has already been described, but it is useful to restate some of Calvin's feelings toward them. "Read Demosthenes or Cicero: read Plato, Aristotle, and others of that tribe," Calvin invited. "They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, move you, enrapture you in wonderful measure."²⁴⁴ The ancient authors caused Calvin to marvel at their knowledge and to hold them in high esteem.²⁴⁵ Calvin revered the ancient writers of Christianity even more deeply. But Calvin's respect for the Christian theologians ebbed as the temporal distance between the life of Christ on earth and the personage

²⁴⁴Ibid., I, viii, 1.

²⁴⁵Ibid., II, ii, 15.

increased. By the reign of Gregory I, Calvin saw an increasingly sharp decline in the purity of the church.

How important was the era of the ancient church to Calvin? Some light can be shed on this by discovering how Calvin dealt with the matter of filling ecclesiastical offices. He indignantly pushed aside the authority of the papal decrees of Innocent I and Boniface III. He stated:

They will, of course, cite to me those abortive decrees of Innocent and Boniface, whereby monks are received into the honor and power of the priesthood though they remain in monasteries. But what sort of reason is this--that every ignorant ass, as soon as he has occupied the see of Rome, may overthrow antiquity with one little word?²⁴⁶

In crying out against the abuses among the canons of cathedral chapters, Calvin asked them to believe in "Christ's definition" of a presbyter. "But if they cannot bear this hard requirement to submit to Christ's rule, let them at least allow this question to be settled by the authority of the primitive church."²⁴⁷

As can be clearly detected, Calvin's esteem for the power and purity of the ancient church was subordinated to the Word of God. He expressed this in other places by opposing some ancient theologians when they apparently went contrary to the Scriptures. Calvin argued with John Chrysostom and Augustine in one passage that described the limits of the authority of antiquity. In Calvin's words:

Therefore, let no one be troubled by the attempt of ancient writers to differentiate the one thing from the other. We ought not so to value their authority as to let it shake the certainty of Scripture.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., IV, v, 8.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., IV, v, 10.

For who would rather listen to Chrysostom . . . than to Luke. . . ?
 And we must not accept that subtle reasoning of Augustine. . . .²⁴⁸

Through this argument on baptism from which this citation comes, we can clearly sense the priority of the Bible over the writings of the ancients or any other authority.

Calvin viewed the history of the church, isolated from the ages preceding Christ's intervention on earth, in a different manner than his general modified linear cyclical theory that described the history of all mankind. The new attitude expressed in the theory of deterioration which Calvin followed also is descriptive of his attitude toward the Middle Ages. The church grew increasingly corrupt as the temporal distance between the earthly administrators and the age of Christ and the apostles lengthened. The degeneration was general in that there existed instances of a return to pure doctrine. "But as affairs usually tend to get worse," Calvin warned, "it is to be seen from the more recent councils how much the church has degenerated from the purity of that golden age."²⁴⁹

An example of Calvin's use of the historical principle of deterioration as related to the history of the Christian Church is a rather complete discussion of the gradual increase in the use of statues and pictures in worship services. Calvin initially argued from the Scriptures, appealing to Moses, Paul, and the Psalms. But there appeared also an argument that appealed to the common sense of the reader. Invectives were cast upon the participants of the Council of Nicaea in 325 and their decision to use

²⁴⁸ Ibid., IV, xv, 7.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., IV, ix, 8. Calvin's zeal for the past, "that golden age," is also to be noted.

images in worship. The key to Calvin's rejection of images was that God cannot be known to man in his full glory.

From the time of Moses, God denied to men the use of any form to represent him. The Persian sun worship, the animal statues of the Egyptians, and the worship of gods formed as men by the Greeks were all repudiated by God.²⁵⁰ The Lord appeared to men in signs and symbols such as fire and clouds, not as a clearly understood and delineated figure. God retained his "incomprehensible essence" while guiding and teaching men by occasional direct appearances when he deemed them appropriate.²⁵¹ The use of the cherubim by the Jews was not image worship according to Calvin, and in any case, belonged to an age in which men were not so knowledgeable about God.²⁵²

Calvin insisted that the nature of man, whether Jew or Christian, was such that he leaned toward idol worship.²⁵³ The idols were the "works of men's hands"; and, as they were made from inanimate material could not be construed to represent the Deity in any way.²⁵⁴ With the threat of idolatry, Paul found it necessary to call upon the Christians of Athens to cast out images (Acts 17:29). Augustine warned against images as did the Council of Elvira (ca. 305) before him. But the church had returned to the use of images and statues by the time of Pope Gregory the Great, who called

²⁵⁰Ibid., I, xi, 1.

²⁵¹Ibid., II, xi, 2.

²⁵²Ibid., II, xi, 3.

²⁵³Ibid.

²⁵⁴Ibid., II, xi, 4.

them the books of the uneducated.²⁵⁵

By way of contrast, the rejection of images by certain pagan writers such as Varro struck Calvin as almost unbelievable. Calvin said of this: ". . . It deservedly ought to strike shame in us that a pagan man, groping so to speak in the dark, arrived at this light, that bodily images are unworthy of God's majesty because they diminish the fear of him in men and increase error."²⁵⁶ The error of imagery did not result from the lack of education among early Christians, but from the priests and their failure to teach a common doctrine to all men.²⁵⁷ "Indeed, those in authority in the church turned over to idols the office of teaching for no other reason than that they themselves are mute."²⁵⁸ The teaching church had failed in its mission.

The failure of the church increased with time. In 787 the second Council of Nicaea called for the use of images in the church seeing it not as worship, but dulia, as removed from latria.²⁵⁹ Calvin rejected this distinction noting that the Greeks, from whom the two words came, still defined dulia as "to worship." Calvin similarly denied the contentions of the Eastern Church that images as pictures were permissible but not statues. The corruption of the Scripture which these men at Nicaea displayed was shocking to Calvin. Calvin castigated them in these words:

²⁵⁵ Ibid., I, xi, 5; I, xi, 6.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., I, xi, 7.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., I, xi, 11. Dulia was "the respectful service of a slave, latria, the worship of a deity." I, xi, 14.

I come now to the terrible blasphemies, which it is a marvel that they have dared to spew forth, and a double marvel that everybody did not cry out against them with greatest loathing. But it is expedient that this wicked madness be publicly exposed, that the pretense of antiquity which the papists allege may at least be torn away from the worship of images.²⁶⁰

How could Theodosius, Bishop of Amorium, pronounce an anathema against all persons who failed to properly adore the images when the prophets, apostles, and martyrs knew no images in their worship and decried any type of idolatry?²⁶¹

The Council of Nicaea was not the first nor the last to go against the commandment of God. Jews and pagans placed "a vast throng of gods under the father and ruler of the gods."²⁶² In a similar manner, the church "rent asunder" the divine glory of God when the saints of the church were elevated to the same level as God. The tendency to give equal honor to God and the saints came easily; therein lay the danger of idolatry. The inclination of man into idolatry had always been a part of church history.

The deterioration of the church insofar as it applies to the subject of images resulted as a change in the leaders of the church. Calvin appealed to the authority of the ancient church during the initial five hundred years of its experience and noted that religion flourished and doctrine remained pure without the use of images. The Scriptures and the early Church Fathers often railed against the use of idols condemning their use in Calvin's eyes. But the increasing demand for statues of the saints, apostles, and Christ, came inevitable, not because God willed it, but

²⁶⁰Ibid., I, xi, 16.

²⁶¹Ibid.

²⁶²Ibid., I, xii, 1.

because the purity of the ministry began to decline.²⁶³ Men were not able, because of their damnation and corrupt nature, to follow the pure doctrine of God.

Calvin's appeal to Christians to reject the use of images in worship rested upon scriptural authority for the most part. His study of the history of God's relationship with man from the time of Moses to the establishment of the Christian church by the apostles led him to reject image use on two levels. The first was his belief that God's glory would be diminished in the hearts of men and that God had expressly forbidden the use of any idols. The second was his fear that men would fall into error by their use. Calvin felt that education of the people in the pure doctrine of the ancient church was the only way to halt error in men. He rejected the contention that images were useful to the uneducated and the less sophisticated Christians. When the church adopted the use of images, it did so against the Word of God and at great peril to the souls of believers. Thus the deterioration of the church from its inception to Calvin's day was viewed by the reformer as the work of men, not God. This error was most unexcusable in Christians. The heathens also lacked an excuse when one considers that the knowledge of one God was known to them also.²⁶⁴ Idol worship was a part of man's history and the history of the church. Part of the decline of the church could be traced to the use of images in place of God.

Calvin had analyzed the idolatry of the Roman Church in two ways. First, he had compared the biblical statements from Moses to the apostles

²⁶³Ibid., I, xi, 13.

²⁶⁴Ibid., I, x, 3.

and had judged the use of images as evil. Second, he looked at the history of the church's struggle with the issue, compared ancient church history with the practices of the sixteenth-century Roman Church and found that corruption had set in over the years. Thus Calvin set the Roman Church against the values in the Word of God and the values in the history of man.

Calvin's view of church history demonstrated his rejection of much of medieval accomplishments. The scholastics were engaged in "deceitful subtleties," and Calvin was often diametrically opposed to them.²⁶⁵ Peter Lombard came in for rather severe criticism when Calvin remarked on Lombard's stand on sin: "In this matter Peter Lombard has betrayed his complete ignorance."²⁶⁶ Calvin's comparison of the ancient writers and the Schoolmen can be detected in these words:

I know that the old writers sometimes speak rather harshly; and, as I have just said, I do not deny they perhaps erred; but those of their writings that were marred with a few spots here and there become utterly defiled when they are handled by these men's unwashed hands. And if we must contend by the authority of the fathers, what fathers, good God, do these men thrust upon us? A good part of those authors from whom Lombard, their leader, has sewn together his patchworks, were collected from the senseless ravings of certain monks. . . . 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 as mysteries. . . .²⁶⁷

Calvin's feeling of contempt for the thought of the scholastics was also descriptive of his attitude toward the Middle Ages. The "golden age" of the pristine church had been buried under a mountain of man-made decrees

²⁶⁵Ibid., IV, xvii, 13.

²⁶⁶Ibid., II, i, 9.

²⁶⁷Ibid., III, iv, 39.

and laws which corrupted the purity of ancient doctrine. The subtleties of Lombard and Aquinas merely added to the order of decay which struck Calvin's senses.²⁶⁸ The Middle Ages were, for Calvin, a period of spiritual decline when men turned their backs on the knowledge contained in the past and sought to improve themselves without the help of God.

Calvin's attitude toward the Middle Ages can be best delineated in his description of the medieval church. For example, he pictured the state of the medieval church by a harsh indictment of the popes:

Now, if we come to actual men, it is well known what kinds of vicars of Christ we shall find: Julius, Leo, Clement, and Paul will, to be sure, be pillars of faith, foremost interpreters of religion, who never grasped anything of Christ except what they learned in Lucian's school. But why do I list three or four pontiffs? As if there were doubt what kind of religion the pontiffs, with the whole college of cardinals, long ago professed, and professes today! This is the first article of that secret theology which reigns among them: there is no God. The second: everything written and taught about Christ is falsehood and deceit.²⁶⁹

This situation within the church was caused by a decay in which gradually the bishops of Rome, in ignorance or by sloth, corrupted the spirituality of the visible church.²⁷⁰ Like the humanists of the Renaissance who turned against the philosophy of the Middle Ages, Calvin turned against the spiritual corruption of that age.²⁷¹ In effect, Calvin appeared to be claiming that the medieval church also turned away from her traditions, substituting for God's commands, the reason of man. Thus the Middle Ages

²⁶⁸Ibid., for example, IV, xiv, 26; IV, xix, 21; IV, xix, 22; IV, xix, 31; III, xix, 15.

²⁶⁹Ibid., IV, vii, 27.

²⁷⁰Ibid., IV, vii, 18.

²⁷¹Herbert Weisinger, "The Renaissance Theory of the Reaction to the Middle Ages as a Cause of the Reformation," Speculum, XX (1945), 461-467.

stood antithetically opposed to the primitive church and the possible church of the future in Calvin's thought.²⁷²

Calvin's view of the past was related in several ways to the humanism which had shaped his youth. Calvin held the ancient past, both Christian and pagan, in high regard. Erasmus and Budé, who had so greatly influenced Calvin, saw the medieval period as one of barbarism and darkness. They felt that in their day the revival of the learning of antiquity was offering men a chance to reclaim the purity of expression of classical works as well as the chance to cleanse sacred literature and the church.²⁷³ With these humanists, Calvin looked to the past and the ideals of ancient civilization. In antiquity, Calvin found the paragon of the future. Calvin rejected the thought and accomplishment of the Middle Ages because he felt they had corrupted the heritage of their history. The pure doctrine of the church of the apostles and the only slightly tarnished righteousness of the church of the fathers were the ideals against which all church history was judged. Calvin subjected the writings of the church fathers to both scriptural comparison and historical analysis. The Bible was not to be judged but understood against the historical context of its own time. The textual criticism understood in his assessments of ancient works was typically humanist.²⁷⁴

²⁷²Wendel notes that Calvin's idea of the sovereignty of God can be related to medieval precepts, especially those of Duns Scotus. Wendel, Calvin, pp. 126-129.

²⁷³Wallace K. Ferguson, The Renaissance in Historical Thought (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), pp. 31-44.

²⁷⁴The Italian humanist historians did not always reject the Middle Ages so vigorously as they often wrote patriotic histories which involved the praise and embellishment of the past of a city and so they could hardly

Calvin's preference for the ancient past over the recent past of the Middle Ages was shaped, in part, by his humanistic training. His deep reverence for the church of Peter and Paul can be ascribed to his theology, of course, but the Renaissance tradition of looking backwards for future models or for purposes of comparison was of significance to Calvin. Indeed, Calvin often preferred to judge the Roman Church of the sixteenth century by ideals of antiquity rather than to satisfactorily trace the historical development through the forces of medieval thought. Thus his objection to scholasticism often appeared as impatience rather than genuine interest in the patterns of change. Of course, to Calvin, alterations in practices and doctrines of the early church came from the inability of man to constantly seek the light of God's truth. Calvin's view of the past was much less altered by the dynamics of his theology than any other aspects of his historiography. His humanism need not be inferred; it need only be stated.

reject their recent past. Ibid., pp. 31-18; Niccolo Machiavelli, History of Florence and the Affairs of Italy from Earliest Time to the Death of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Introduction by Felix Gilbert (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).

CONCLUSION

The humanistic movement of the French Renaissance not only deeply influenced the education of John Calvin, but also markedly affected the intellectual achievements which followed his conversion to Protestantism. This same influence which shaped the style and method of the Institutes can be detected in the reformer's understanding and use of history in this epic work. The transference of certain humanistic characteristics in Calvin from the Renaissance to the Reformation provides a possible thread of continuity between the two eras. Calvin's view of history and his methodology were, in many ways, products of the Renaissance and, as such, point out another possible bridge between the Renaissance and the Reformation.

The rhetor-historians used the theory of language to provide a method to pattern phenomena into meaningful schemes of purpose. The imprecision of language ruled out the description of universal causes and, thus, history in the Renaissance tended to be anthropocentric. The obvious result was that man-made and man-controlled causes were sought to explain the flow of events in the past. Another result of this pre-occupation with worldly phenomena was the investigation of the past, for the past was no longer regarded as tradition which endured forever. Calvin's acceptance of the rhetorical methodology was limited in that he knew there was a transcendent cause, a reason for events, that lay beyond history. The decision by the Renaissance historian to posit causal relationships exclusively within the stream of temporal history was rejected by Calvin. On the other

hand, Calvin realized the value of that interior perspective and when dealing with the history of the church often made use of this technique to emphasize that man caused his own troubles. Only when he followed the will of God was man able to avoid the disasters that have marked his past.

In place of the humanist's belief in eternal historical cycles and perennial golden ages marking the seemingly unending progress of man, Calvin substituted cycles with linear eschatological direction because he believed that man ultimately could not save himself. He modified the rhetor-historian's methodology to a far greater degree. Calvin used the anthropocentric orientation of humanist historiography only to display how history without the knowledge of God led to corruption of all that was good. Calvin was willing to grapple with the problem of a universal cause which the rhetors, because the instability of language was such that meaningful description of transcendent causes was impossible, had rejected. Calvin agreed with these historians that the possibility of knowing the noumenal through transcendence of phenomena was possible, but he insisted that an a priori knowledge of God, the universal cause, existed.

The historical sources to which Calvin turned display his erudition and his humanist training. The majority of them were ancient sources and the oldest were considered the most reliable. Because, by definition, it fell into a separate category as the source of all spiritual truth and as being the record of the history of the people of God, Calvin subjected the Bible to historical interpretation but not to textual criticism. Other historical documents were judged in the light of the Scripture. Calvin's willingness to tear down the false tradition of the Roman Church and claim his right as heir to the genuine traditions of antiquity represented a facet

of humanism. Just as Valla exposed the errors in papal documents, so Calvin exposed the historical pretenses of the Roman Church.

Calvin's view of the past, in many ways, was a direct result of humanistic attitudes. Although the biblical past was held in highest esteem, Calvin preferred much of pagan antiquity to the corrupt Christianity of the Middle Ages. He was willing to accept the light of truth that often illuminated ancient pagan texts, but became enraged by the willful corruption of Scripture by the medieval church. The ancient past was a golden age which served as an example for man's future achievements.

The view and understanding of history held by Calvin did not pass unaltered through his conversion. Calvin was ruled by God and only influenced by the forces of humanism. But there exists sufficient evidence in his historiography to demonstrate the intellectual sway which his humanistic view of history still held over him. This residual humanism then implies a continuity between the Renaissance and the Reformation, at least within the development of Calvin's appreciation and use of history.

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THE USE AND UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY
IN CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

by

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The humanism of the Renaissance and the New Learning which grew out of a deep concern for the literature of classical Greece and Rome forms an apparent chain of continuity between the Renaissance and the Reformation. The textual criticism of pagan works was extended to the Bible where new interpretations which challenged the traditional authority of the church grew out of such studies. Humanistic interest in the past also resulted in a new evaluation of the ancient church of the apostles and the Church Fathers which differed from that of the Roman Church. The result was a re-writing of history, first by the Renaissance historians, then by the reformers.

John Calvin's retention of certain humanistic characteristics after his conversion to reformed Christianity has been investigated by Quirinus Breen as a possible bridge between the two eras. Within the general area of Calvin's humanism, one aspect, his view and understanding of history in the Institutes points up a specific case of the effect humanism had upon the Reformation. Many similarities with the Renaissance theories of history can be found in Calvin's historiography. One area of congruence for Calvin with the Humanist historians lies in the assumption that the theory of language, rhetoric, can provide a means to structure the events of history into meaningful sequences.

The anthropocentrism of the rhetor-historian, which grew out of his recognition of the inability of language to adequately describe universal causes, was only partially rejected by Calvin. Believing in an a priori knowledge of God in man, Calvin was willing, however, to use the methods of

rhetoric to give meaning to the history of man as he strayed from God. Calvin believed that the final cause of all events, the real meaning to the existence of man, lay beyond history in the hands of God. Sometimes hidden, sometimes revealed, the meaning of life had to be found by either a priori knowledge or transcending the phenomenal to the universal. Calvin accepted both of these ideas in the Institutes of gaining knowledge of God and the plan he had laid down for man. Calvin's belief that God alone could will the salvation of man resulted in his modification of the Renaissance cyclical theory which had conceptualized an unending spiral of progress. Calvin substituted a linear eschatological direction that recognized man's inability to raise above himself without the aid of God.

Calvin also displayed humanistic traits in his historical sources. The most reliable sources and those employed most often in the Institutes are ancient writers of theology and history prior to the pontificate of Gregory I. Calvin preferred the Bible to all other literature, recognizing the truth of God's Word as the ultimate authority. The Church Fathers and church historians of pristine Christianity received preferential treatment from Calvin as opposed to the secular pagan literature of antiquity. Still, Calvin often felt that the knowledge and truth contained in these works was far greater than the corrupted literature of the medieval church.

Calvin saw history, as re-interpreted in the light of the New Learning and, of course, the Scriptures, as a record which explained the corruption of ancient doctrine by the Roman Church. Calvin used the history of the ancient church as a means to expose the false claims of the medieval church and as a way of laying claim for the Reformed Church to the traditions of Christian antiquity. In turning to the past to gain knowledge of

the pure doctrine of Christianity, Calvin displayed a humanistic belief in the past as a model for the future.

In his philosophy of history, his methodology, his historical sources, and his uses of history can be detected the humanism which shaped Calvin's education. The Institutes displayed not only a preference for the forms of rhetorical use of language but a decided agreement with many humanist concepts of history, its value, and its worth.