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Calvin's Training as an Interpreter of Scripture

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1. INTRODUCTION

John Calvin was not born as a great interpreter. But by God's providence he became one of the great interpreters of Scripture in the history of Christianity. This article investigates John Calvin's training as a great interpreter.¹⁾ It deals

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1) Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p.525. Here he calls Calvin an exegetical genius of the first order, and says, "If Luther was the king of translators, Calvin was the king of commentators." L. Floor, "The Hermeneutics of Calvin," in *Calvinus Reformer: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society*, ed. B. J. van der Walt (Potchefstroom: University for Christian Higher Education), p.181, says: "Calvin was an exquisite exegete. Apart from his *Institutes*, which can be regarded as a monument of exquisite and accurate exegesis, there is the impressive row of his commentaries." F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 343-344, describes Calvin as one of the greatest interpreters as follows: "He is one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture who ever lived. He owes that position to a combination of merits. He had a vigorous intellect, a dauntless spirit, a logical mind, a quick insight, a thorough knowledge of the human heart, quickened by rich and strange experience; above all, a manly and glowing sense of the grandeur of the Divine. The neatness, precision, and lucidity of his style, his classic training and wide knowledge, his methodical accuracy of procedure, his manly independence, his avoidance of needless and commonplace homiletics, his deep religious feeling, his careful attention to the entire scope and context of every passage, and the fact that he has commented on almost of the Bible, make him tower above the great majority of those who have written on Holy Scripture." For the general studies of Calvin as a brilliant interpreter, see F. W. Farrar, "Calvin as an Expositor," *The Expositor* 7 (1884): 426-444; Paul Traugott Fuhrman, "Calvin the Expositor," *Interpretation* 6 (1952): 188-209; I. H. De Long, "Calvin as an Interpreter of the Bible," *Reformed Church Review* 13 (1990): 162-182; W. McKane, "Calvin as an Old Testament Commentator," *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif* 25

with how the young Calvin trod the path of learning. Then it explores what, before his sudden conversion (*subita conversio*), he learned from the humanists²⁾ and his masters³⁾ at the colleges which he attended. Farther, it examines how he applied the humanistic methods to the interpretation of Scripture.

2. Calvin's Training

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

John Calvin, a French theologian and ecclesiastical statement, was one of the most important leaders of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Theological, ecclesiastical, and political ideas that he advanced in many publications, a model church that he created and many publications, a model church that he created and directed in the city of Geneva, and the assistance he provided to the political and intellectual leaders of several countries profoundly influenced the development of Protestantism in many parts of Europe and in North America.⁴⁾

(1984): 25-259; T. H. L. Parker, "Calvin the Bible Expositor," *The Churchman* 78 (1964): 23-32; A. T. Robertson, "Calvin as an Interpreter of Scripture," *The Review and Expositor* 6 (1909): 577-578; Philip Schaff, "Calvin as a Commentator," pp. 462-469; Robert Wierenga, "Calvin the Commentator," *Reformed Review* 39 (1978): 4-13.

2) For the study of the influences of the humanists, see Myung Jun Ahn, "The Influences on Calvin's Hermeneutics and the Development of his Method," *Hervormde Teologische Studies* 55 (1999): 228-239.

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

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

In order to illuminate Calvin's position as one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture, one first has to take cognisance of his educational background.⁵⁾

John Calvin was born at Noyon,⁶⁾ a celebrated town in Picardy in north eastern France, on July 10th in 1509.⁷⁾ Noyon was once famous as the place where bishops like St. Merdad and St. Eloi lived,⁸⁾ and where Charlemagne (later Holy Roman emperor) was crowned king of the western Frankish kingdom of Neustria in 768 and Hugh Capet, king of France and founder of the Capetian dynasty (which ruled directly until 1328), was also crowned in 987.⁹⁾ Will Durant, an historian, relating Noyon to Calvin's idea of theocracy, says, "It was an ecclesiastical city, dominated by its cathedral and its bishop; here at the outset he had an example of theocracy - the rule of a society by clergymen in the name of God."¹⁰⁾

The name of his father was Gerard Cauvin ("whose surname, latinized as 'Calvinus', became Calvin in French"¹¹⁾), who was a man of hard and severe character. His mother, Joan Franc (Jeanne Lefrane), was noted for her personal beauty and great religious fervor and strictness.¹²⁾ Both of them were persons of good repute in this town.¹³⁾ Gerard had "a prominent position as apostolic secretary to the bishop of Noyon, proctor in the Chapter of the diocese, and fiscal procurator of the county."¹⁴⁾ He was highly esteemed by the noble families in Noyon and had a good relationship with them. This close connection

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- 5) For the study of the educational preparation for the great exegete of Scripture, see Dean Greer McKee, "The Contribution of John Calvin to New Testament Exegesis." (S.T.D. diss., Biblical Seminary in New York, 1931).
- 6) Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, pp. 297-298: "an ancient cathedral city, called *Noyon-la-Sainte*, on account of its many churches, convents, priests, and monks, in the northern province of Picardy, which has given birth to the crusading monk, Peter of Amiens, to the leaders of the French Reformation and counter Reformation (the Ligue), and to many revolutionary as well as reactionary characters."
- 7) Theodore Beza, "Life of John Calvin," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 1, ed. by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 21. Here Beza recorded Calvin's birthday as "the 27th July in the year of our Lord 1509".
- 8) B. J. van der Walt, *From Noyon to Geneva: A Pilgrimage in the Steps of John Calvin (1509-1564)* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for CHE, 1979), p.3.
- 9) "Noyon," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia*, 15th ed.
- 10) Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*, The Story of Civilization: Part VI (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 469. He considers Geneva as the city of God in the world, citing an example that Valentin Andraea, a Lutheran minister from Wurttemberg, praised the life of Geneva enviously. *Ibid.*, pp. 472-476.
- 11) Richard Stauffer, "Calvin," p. 15.
- 12) Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, p. 298.
- 13) Theodore Beza, "Life of John Calvin," p. 21.
- 14) Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, p. 298.

offered Calvin good circumstances to develop as a great exegete, as he did not have to worry about money.

There were two important elements in his early training. First, the starting point of his illustrious career was the great ambition and the sacrificial support of his father. Although he never knew that his youngest son Calvin would become a great exegete, Gerard Cauvin, having ambition for his sons, made his son study the courses of the college of the Capettes in Noyon. It has not been known what courses Calvin studied in the college of his home town. One would probably suppose that because the college had only a few professors, there were not academic courses like law, philosophy, rhetoric, and the original languages including Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. But not satisfied with Calvin's attending this college, his father sent Calvin to the college of La Marche in Paris in 1523 when he was just fourteen years old.¹⁵⁾ At that time, like other European cities, Paris also was buzzing with the fire of the Reformation set off by Luther in Wittenberg and Zwingli in Zurich.¹⁶⁾ His father devoted his life to the education of Calvin, giving him a cathedral benefice.¹⁷⁾ The devoted support of his father offered Calvin a great blessing.¹⁸⁾ The fact that, unlike Luther,

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

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

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

18) Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Origin and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1963), p.17. Here on the devoted support of Calvin's father with great ambition for his son F. Wendel says, "As for the father, he had, it seems, great ambitions for his sons and especially for Jean. His good relations with the bishop and the

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

Secondly, in the process of his becoming a great interpreter, the essential influence upon young Calvin was his friendships at the college of the Capettes in his hometown. At that time his native town, Noyon, was ruled by Charles de Hangest. From his childhood Calvin had come in touch with the sons of this family, especially with the sons of Montmor. In 1523, with three young men of the Hangest family, Calvin was sent to Paris.¹⁹⁾ One of them was Claude de Hangest, Abbot of St. Eloi's at Noyon, to whom Calvin dedicated his commentary on the *De Clementia* of Seneca in Paris on April 4 in 1532. Calvin called him the most saintly and most wise prelate in his day.²⁰⁾ Williston Walker describes the situation in the hometown and the friendships of Calvin with them as follows:

Quite as influential in the development of the boy's life as this instruction in the schoolroom of the Capettes were the friendships

Chapter enabled him to obtain for Jean a chaplaincy to the altar of La Gesine in Noyon Cathedral. Jean Calvin was then twelve years of age: this benefice must have enabled him to pursue his studies without drawing too heavily on his father's revenues: he resigned it, for unknown reasons, in 1529, but resumed it in 1531. In 1527 he became the occupant of another benefice; this time it was the curacy of St-Martin-de-Martheville, which he afterwards exchanged for that of Pont l'Eveque, the place from which the Cauvin family had come. In procuring these benefices for his son, Gerard Cauvin was only doing what was customary at the time. He may have had to commit himself to guide Jean towards the study of theology, which however would not be surprising on the part of an episcopal official."

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

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

which he formed with his contemporaries among the sons of the noble family of Hangest, notably with those of Louis de Hangest, lord of Montmor, and of his brother, Adrien, lord of Genlis. To Claude, son of the nobleman last named, Calvin was, years later, to dedicate his first book, when Claude had become abbot of Saint-Eloi at Noyon. With Joachim and Ives, and a brother of theirs whose name is now lost, sons of the seigneur of Montmor, Calvin stood in intimate school fellowship; and his relations to these households of Montmor and Gelis seem indeed, to have been much closer than merely those of the schoolroom.²¹⁾

Gerard's relationship with the noble family explains the fact that the young Calvin was "from a boy very liberally educated in the family of the Mommors, one of the most distinguished in that quarter."²²⁾ Afterwards a son of de Mommor followed Calvin to Geneva.²³⁾ Calvin's friendships played an important role in developing his humanistic study before his sudden conversion. This background of Calvin's education helped him to make rapid progress in learning, and let him acquire "a refinement of manners and a certain aristocratic air, which distinguished him from Luther and Zwingli."²⁴⁾

In an attempt to understand Calvin's intellectual development, one should keep in mind that before his theological studies, he first studied law with leading humanists. Therefore his hermeneutical method was influenced by his humanistic learning.²⁵⁾ Then Calvin learned from the humanists rhetoric, philosophy, and philology skills needed by a great interpreter of Scripture.

The first steps in Calvin's development as an interpreter were set when he went to the college of La Marche. This college was imbued with a humanistic

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

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

23) Ibid.

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

25) For the studies of the humanistic formation of Calvin, see Josef Bohatec, *Bude und Calvin: Studien zur Gedankenwelt des französischen Frühhumanismus* (Graz: Verlag Hermann Bohlaus Nachf., Ges. M.B.H., 1950), pp. 119-483, and *Calvin und das Recht* (Graz: Verlag Hermann Bohlaus Nachf., Ges. M.B.H., 1934), pp. 1-93; Quirinus Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), pp. 146-164. This book is the best to show how Calvin became a humanist and how, after his sudden conversion, he made progress in humanism. Cf. A. E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, pp. 51-67; F. J. M. Potgieter, *De Verhouding tussen die teologie en die filosofie by Calvin* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1939); Francois Wendel, *Calvin et l'humanisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), pp. 7-34, and *Calvin*, pp. 27-45.

spirit with which Calvin now came into contact. Calvin fortunately had a chance to meet a famous professor in the college of La Marche. His name was Mathurin Cordier, the best Latin teacher in the country and one of the founders of modern pedagogy. He had a great influence upon Calvin who learned to read and to write Latin from him.²⁶⁾ He was also the first master who introduced Calvin to the philosophy of humanism and Christian piety.²⁷⁾ T. F. Torrance points out correctly that M. Cordier "not only laid the foundation of Calvin's education and taught Calvin the true method of learning, but imbued him with such a taste for literary studies that Calvin could trace the progress he made in later years to Cordier's instruction."²⁸⁾ When Calvin founded the Academy of Geneva in 1559, he provided Cordier with the position to instruct Latin. There he died at the age of eighty-five in the same year as Calvin did in 1564. Cordier's influence upon Calvin was demonstrated when Calvin dedicated to his old teacher his *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Thessalonians* on February 17th, 1550. Here Calvin called him "a man of eminent piety and learning, principal of the college Lausanne."²⁹⁾ Calvin expressed his heartfelt thanks as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

taught by you the true method of learning, in such a way that I might be prepared afterwards to make somewhat better proficiency.³⁰⁾

According to John T. McNeill, it was Cordier who let Calvin discover the delights of good learning and acquire that unfailing sense of style and diction that marked all his writings.³¹⁾ Then under him Calvin learned "in large measure something that was to be one of his greatest assets: his style, so that Calvin could be both an excellent Latinist and a writer with the capability of expressing an elegant French."³²⁾ Later his Latin study made it possible that he could read the Fathers' writings and the rhetorical writings of Cicero and Quintilian.³³⁾ In Latin Calvin probably began to have a chance to understand the theological thoughts of the Fathers. From the writings of Cicero and Quintilian, Calvin also was able to learn the terms and the concepts of *brevitas et facilitas*, which had long been used by Plato and Aristotle in their rhetorical writings.

Generally speaking, rhetoric³⁴⁾ is closely connected with the interpretation of Scripture because Scripture itself employs many rhetorical devices. C. J.

30) Ibid.

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

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

33) For the relation between rhetoric and Calvin's theology, see Benoit Girardin, *Rhetorique et Théologique: Calvin, Le commentaire de l'épître aux Romains*, *Théologie Historique* 54 (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1979); Lynda Serene Jones, "Fulfilled in your hearing: Rhetoric and Doctrine in John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1991); David E. Willis, "Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology," in *The Context of Contemporary Theology*, eds. Alexander J. McKelway and E. David Willis (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), pp. 43-63. Willis insists on Augustine's influence on Calvin's rhetorical theology: "Augustine is the father to whom Calvin has special recourse, and it is in Calvin's reading of him that we find the primary source of his rhetorical theology. In Augustine, Calvin found the ancient rhetorical tradition turned to the true philosophy of Christ. One of Augustine's chief contributions is that he extended and altered the Ciceronian tendency in the rhetorical tradition and used this latter to shape a distinctively Christian eloquence."

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

Labuschagne writes, for instance, that there are many rhetorical questions in the Old Testament. As an example he indicates that especially when the author of Scripture expresses Yahweh's incomparability, such questions are employed. He writes as follows:

Rhetorical questions are frequently used in the Old Testament to express the absolute power, uniqueness, singularity and incomparability of a person. The rhetorical question is one of the most forceful and effectual ways employed in speech for driving home some idea or conviction. Because of its impressive and persuasive effect the hearer is not merely listener: he is forced to frame the expected answer in his mind, and by doing so he actually becomes a co-expressor of the speaker's conviction.³⁵⁾

Some scholars argue that Paul's rhetoric was a focus of the Reformers like Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin.³⁶⁾ The Reformers influenced by the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla employed a rhetorical approach in their commentaries on the New Testament.³⁷⁾ On rhetorical method H. D. Betz argues that Paul's epistles had "classical categories of invention, arrangement, and style in mind."³⁸⁾ He also regards these as "an interpretive tool."³⁹⁾ Kennedy maintains that Matthew employed "rhetoric in the most comprehensive way, attending to invention, arrangement, style, and amplification."⁴⁰⁾

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

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

37) Ibid.

38) Ibid., p.107.

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

40) Ibid., p.116.

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

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

At the college of Montaigu there were a few famous scholars such as Beda, Antonio Coronel, and John Major. Probably Calvin began to hear of the Reformation of Luther and the humanistic school from them. A Spaniard, Antonio Coronel, taught Calvin the grammar course of Latin as well as philosophy.⁴³⁾ Through Antonio Coronel's Latin tuition, Calvin, therefore, having already learned Latin from Cordier, became one of the great Latin scholars in the 16th century. This did not only enable him to read the writings of philosophers, rhetoricians, and the Fathers, but also later on to write his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his commentaries in Latin. Here at Montaigu Calvin came into contact with Luther's thought albeit in the negative evaluation that Beda gave of it. Here also Calvin experienced the influence of John Major who taught him "direct knowledge of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and of the Occamist interpretation that he put upon them."⁴⁴⁾ Following F. Wendel, J. T. McNeill writes:

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

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

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

44) F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 19.

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

In 1963 Karl Reuter⁴⁶⁾ on this issue dared to put forward the hypothesis that Major had a decisive influence on Calvin's intellectual development: that he introduced Calvin to a new conception of anti-Pelagian, Scotist theology, a renewed Augustinianism, and positivism in regard to Scripture.⁴⁷⁾ In contrast to him, A. Ganoczy and A. E. McGrath argue that Major's direct influence on Calvin's theology cannot be proved.⁴⁸⁾ It is, however, certain that Calvin knew a little of the theology of John Major. The period in the college of Montaigu was very important for Calvin because he could have a chance to master Latin, rhetoric, and philosophy. This training of Calvin was clearly expressed in his

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

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

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

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

commentary on the *De Clementia* of Seneca and, after his conversion, in his interpretation of Scripture. The period in the college of Montaigu was significant, not as preparation for his role as a Reformer, but in that it exposed him to humanist thinking which had an impact on the method used by him for the exegesis of Scripture.

Later his father, who originally intended him to study theology, changed his mind and ordered Calvin to study law because he expected Calvin to become a person with wealth and honor.⁴⁹⁾ But this second plan of his father to make him a good lawyer for a secure life, providentially turned out to be the best possible way for his future as an interpreter of the Bible. In order to be a lawyer, Calvin studied law and rhetoric from Peter De l'Etoile in the university of Orleans and from Andreas Alciati in the university of Bourges. By studying law, Calvin as a humanist learned the necessary method for the interpretation of an original text. A. E. McGrath argues that the sources of the hermeneutical method of Calvin was found in his study of law in the advanced atmosphere of Orleans and Bourges⁵⁰⁾ Calvin's legal training prepared him to accurately establish the intent of the author of Scripture and the genuine meaning of the text, and to consider the historical background. Donald K. McKim relates Calvin's studying law to his hermeneutical method as follows:

As we have observed, humanist legal scholars were seeking direct access to the corpus of Roman law, not via learned authorities or traditions, but through the study of the history and social customs of ancient Rome. Such study gave them a direct understanding of the intentions and meanings of the legal texts. Calvin applied a similar concern for context to his work with Scripture. Circumstances and culture are always main ingredients to be understood as one seeks to

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

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

interpret the Bible . . . Concern for context led Calvin to seek the divine intention revealed in Scripture. His studies in legal exegesis showed him that the intent of the author is more important than the etymology of words.⁵¹⁾

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

In the college of Montaigu Calvin had contact with the humanists in Paris. For example, he was closely associated with his scholarly cousin, Pierre Robert Olivier, who had favored the Reformation and showed a great interest in the humanism then in fashion.⁵⁴⁾ Olivier (Olivetan) had two friends, Guillaume Cop who was the chief physician of King Francis, and Guillaume Bude who was "the most learned Hellenist of France, and the most effective liberal opponent of Buda."⁵⁵⁾ While Calvin criticized the views of Erasmus in the interpretation of Scripture, he always respected the views of Bude, and in his commentaries never contradicted him. Bude especially had a great influence upon Calvin's hermeneutical method. We shall have the opportunity later on to examine the influence of Bude upon Calvin's method of hermeneutics.

Through Olivier, Cop and Bude Calvin probably came into contact with the writings of Luther, Melancthon, and Lefevre d'Étaples. But Calvin's knowledge of the writings of Luther does not give us any decisive proof that Calvin's conversion was related to the thought of Luther. On his conversion he did not mention Luther, but only God. Calvin confessed as follows: "since I was too

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

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

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

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

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

obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame."⁵⁶⁾

In 1528 Calvin, in obedience to his father's order, left Montaigu to study law at the university of Orleans. At the university of Orleans Calvin met many friends like the German Hellenist Melchior Wolmar of Rothweil, Francois Daniel, Francois de Connan, and Nicolas Duchemin.⁵⁷⁾ Calvin's friend, Wolmar taught him Greek so that Calvin could use the grammatical method of interpretation of Scripture. However the hypothesis that he as a convinced Lutheran had a great role in converting Calvin has not been proved because Calvin nowhere in any of his writings mentioned the influence of Wolmar.⁵⁸⁾ Then Calvin came strongly under the influence of humanism. He began to open his eyes to enlightened up-to-date teaching and method.⁵⁹⁾

In 1532 Calvin, after indulging in humanism, wrote his commentary of the *De Clementia* of Seneca.⁶⁰⁾ In this work Calvin demonstrated his ability to make use of philosophy, philology, and rhetoric.⁶¹⁾ There were two reasons why

56) *Comm. on Ps.*, p. xl.

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

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

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

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

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

Calvin wrote this book. First, Erasmus published the second work of Seneca in 1529, but he was not satisfied with that, and appealed to the readers to do better. This appeal probably challenged Calvin's ambition to surpass Erasmus, the leader of humanism.⁶²⁾ Secondly, another reason why Calvin chose to write about Seneca was that against Epicurean hedonistic tendencies, Christian humanists like Erasmus, Zwingli, and Calvin felt that they found an effective counter position in Stoicism.⁶³⁾ In his study of the *De Clementia* Calvin realized that Christianity and Stoicism were "at one in affirming the existence of a supernatural providence which excludes chance and overrules princes."⁶⁴⁾ Wendel insists that the significance Calvin afterwards attributed to this idea of God's providence was "at least partly of Stoic origin."⁶⁵⁾ For Calvin the doctrine of God's providence is important not only for the system of his theology,⁶⁶⁾ but also for his exegetical work. Especially the *Commentary on the Psalms* in which he discussed the experience of his sudden conversion by God's providence shows us that in numerous places Calvin tried to interpret the meaning of the passages from the perspective of God's providence.

62) F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 28.

63) *Ibid.*

64) *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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

66) For studies of the doctrine of God's providence in Calvin, see: Josef Bohatec, "Calvins Vorsehungslehre," in *Calvinstudien. Festschrift zum 400. Geburtstage Johann Calvins* (Leipzig: Rudolf Haupt, 1909), pp. 337-441; Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), pp. 150-156; Wilhelm-Albert Hauck, *Vorsehung und Freiheit nach Calvin* (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1947); Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, ed. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 70-79; Timothy Pavitt Palmer, "John Calvin's view of the Kingdom of God" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 78-89. Here he suggests that Calvin saw the *regnum Dei* as the *providentia Dei*, and that "the soteriological focus of Calvin's doctrine of providence is reaffirmed by the close relation between the *regnum Dei* and the *providentia Dei*." (pp. 88-89); Pieter C. Potgieter, "The Providence of God in Calvin's Correspondence," in *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag*, ed. Willem van't Spijker (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991), pp. 85-94; F. Wendel, *Calvin*, pp. 177-184; Ernst Saxer, *Vorsehung und Verheissung Gottes: Vier theologische Modelle (Calvin, Schleiermacher, Barth, Solle) und ein systematischer Versuch* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1980), pp. 17-79; Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature & the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin*, pp. 7-37; Richard Stauffer, *Dieu, la creation et la providence dans la predication de Calvin* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1978), pp.261-302.

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

After the death of his father in 1531, Calvin as a freeman and a humanist went to the college of Fortel in Paris, where the Royal Readers, an illustrious body of humanist scholars recently instituted by Francis I, were teaching the courses.⁶⁹⁾ Having already studied some Greek under Wolmar, Calvin pursued Hellenic studies by following the courses of Pierre Danes, one of the most illustrious of the new Royal Readers.⁷⁰⁾ Calvin began to learn the elements of Hebrew under Francois Vatable, "although the traditional view is that his real learning in that language was gained at Basle and at Strasburg."⁷¹⁾ Although Calvin was a humanist, by mastering the original languages of Scripture he began to prepare himself for his role as an influential interpreter of the Bible which he assumed after his conversion.⁷²⁾ Especially Erasmus, the symbol of the humanists, who first employed the grammatical-historical method and first tried textual criticism, was surpassed by Calvin who showed the correct interpretation of the passage in using that method rigorously. Calvin pointed out in many places the mistakes made by Erasmus' textual criticism - the method of inserting words and changing the word of the original text.

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

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

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

70) F. Wendel, *Calvin*, p. 26.

71) Ibid. Cf. Ant. J. Baumgartner, *Calvin Hebraisant et interprete de l' Ancien Testament*, p. 8, p. 14.

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

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

I was as yet a very boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterward, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy, and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.⁷⁴⁾

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

74) *Comm. on Ps.*, p. xl. Cf. CO 31.21. "*Theologiae me pater tenellum adhuc puerum destinaverat. Sed quum videret legum scientiam passim augere suos cultores opibus, spes illa repente eum impulit ad mutandum consilium. Ita factum esset, ut revocatus a philosophiae studio, ad leges discendas trahere, quibus tametsi ut patris voluntati obsequerem fidelem operam impendere conatus sum, Deus tamen arcana providentiae suae fraeno cursum meum alio tandem reflexit. Ac primo quidem, quum superstitionibus papatus magis pertinaciter addictus essem, quam ut*

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

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

Calvin's conversion from a humanist to one of the great Reformers means the new change of God's calling. One of the workings of God's calling is to interpret and teach Scripture for God's people. The fundamental motive of Calvin's interpreting Scripture was to edify the church. "I have felt nothing to be of more importance than to have a regard to the edification of the Church."⁷⁶⁾

3. Conclusion

Calvin was not born as a great interpreter, but his humanistic training made him not only the great theologian of the Reformation, but also made him one of the great interpreters in the history of Christianity. His humanistic training helped him develop his biblical interpretation. His conversion from a humanist led him to contribute his calling into interpreting and teaching Scripture correctly. Calvin's task ultimately edified Christian community in the world. The academical training for understanding Scripture correctly is necessary for a sound interpreter. An interpreter with having this process can edify the 21th century church. In fact, the many problems of Christianity have come from the

facile esset e tam profundo luto me extrahi, animum meum, qui pro aetate nimis obduruerat, subita conversione ad docilitatem subegit. Itaque aliquo verae pietatis gustu imbutus tanto proficiend studio exarsi, ut reliqua studia, quamvis non abiicerem, frigidius tamen sectarer. Necdum elapsus erat annus quum omnis purioris doctrinae cupidi ad me novitium adhuc tironem discendi causa ventitabant."

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

76) *Comm. on Ps.*, p. xlix.

wrong handling of Scripture without the legitimate method of understanding it. It is necessary for a sound interpreter to require the more through hermeneutical discipline.⁷⁷⁾ If Korean churches facing many problems are interested in understanding Scripture correctly, they can be helped in overcoming the negative things.⁷⁸⁾

77) 안명준, "21세기를 위한 해석자: 칼빈의 해석학에 있어서 성경과 해석의 관계를 중심으로," *복음과 신학* 2 (1999): 164-210.

78) Myung Jun Ahn, "Current Theological Issues in Korea," *Theological Forum* 23 (1998): 23-26

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