

## UNDERSTANDING CALVIN

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### FORMATIVE YEARS

John Calvin was born in Noyon in Picardy in 1509. His forebears had been boatmen on the River Oise, and the family had its roots in the small village of Pont-l'Eveque, some two miles away from Noyon. John's grandfather may also have been a cooper by trade. His two sons Gerard and Richard left Pont-l'Eveque to find their fortunes elsewhere. Richard went to Paris and established an ironmongers business and the young John was later to lodge with him during part of his stay while at the university. Meanwhile Gerard, John's father who had managed to procure a good education had established a legal practice in Noyon, securing a number of ecclesiastical appointments for himself including that of legal secretary to the Bishop, Charles Hangeste, a member of the local aristocracy and one of the twelve peers of France.

At a very early age John's attractive personality and exceptional ability had captured the attention of the Hangeste family, and he was taken from the local primary school, the Cappettes, to be tutored in the household of the Montmors, a branch of the Hangestes, with three of their boys and also with Claude d'Hangeste, who was to become Abbe of St. E'loi, and to whom Calvin was to dedicate his Seneca commentary. Thus Calvin's own family had given him his religious background, but the Hangestes were to provide him with a firm educational foundation and to polish his manners, which was to account for the distinctive aristocratic bearing of his adult life.

When John was eleven the boys were sent under the guidance of a tutor to Paris, to the University, which in those days offered a secondary as well as a higher education. The Spanish philosopher, Anton Coronel, may have been his teacher of Aristotelian philosophy. Aristotle's golden mean influenced Calvin's hermeneutical principle of moderation, which as we shall see was used by him to iron out difficulties of exegesis as he sought to argue for the unity of scripture. At the Montagu he also studied logic which, there, being nominalistic in its bias carefully examined the relationships between words and concepts and was to give rise to Calvin's frequent contentions in his later writings that although Catholics and evangelicals used the same theological words they attached quite different connotations to them.

### CALVIN'S CONVERSION

Shortly after Calvin had received his bachelor's degree, pressures of a new kind began to alter the direction of his life. His education in Paris had been paid for chiefly from the income of two benefices connected with the Diocese of Noyon. It is likely therefore that he had been intended for the priesthood, but his father persuaded him to change to law, possibly because he felt that since the Reform was gathering momentum the plum livings of the church which he hoped would be open to his son would soon disappear. Calvin may now therefore have set his sights on becoming an ordained lawyer. He went to study at Orleans Jaques Lefevre. Also moving to Orleans at that time was Melchior Wolmar with whom he had been on the bachelor's course. He had already proved himself to be distinguished in Greek and encouraged Calvin likewise to study the language. Meanwhile Marguerite of Angoulenne was building up her new university at Bourges. Wolmar moved there after only a year. Calvin was attracted to follow him, not merely to continue his Greek studies but primarily to study law under Andreas

Alciate, a lawyer of the highest esteem in Europe. While Calvin turns out to have been disappointed by Alciate, he nevertheless learned from him elegance of style, having already benefited from Lefevre's training with a more deeply penetrating mind, and thus developing two more characteristics to be displayed throughout his writings. But he received something far greater from his association with Wolmar. The latter was a Lutheran, convinced by the Reform, and no doubt influenced Calvin's conversation which took place about that time and is best described in some of his own words.

"God...turned my course in another direction by the secret rein of his providence. What happened first was that by an unexpected conversation he tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years...I was so strongly devoted to the superstitions of the Papacy...this mere taste of true godliness that I received set me on fire with such a desire to progress that I pursued the rest of my studies more coolly."

#### THE DE CLEMENTIA COMMENTARY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Calvin received his licentiate in law in 1531. By this time his father had died and the pressure for his becoming a ecclesiastical lawyer was removed. At the same time he came to feel increasingly estranged from the Roman Church. He therefore returned to Paris to try to establish himself as an academic. Hopeful of making his mark in this field he produced his first major literary work, his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*, which is seen by some to be an oblique appeal to Francis I for more tolerance towards his evangelical subjects. Although it was not viewed at all well and has become virtually forgotten amongst the students of classics its significance for us is that it is the prototype of his New Testament commentaries. The preparation of it consolidated his skills in training, bringing him to the threshold of his life's work. Those who are familiar with these commentaries will immediately see the resemblance. The *De Clementia* commentary takes the text section by section, making explanatory, historical, philosophical and other comments. It carefully examines the linguistic material, heaps up references from fifty to seventy Latin authors and twenty-four Greek, and seeks to improve the Erasmus text. It was this latter exercise which was chiefly the cause of the coldness of the academics who regarded it as the arrogance of youth to wish to correct the most venerable scholar in Europe, although Calvin was only responding to Erasmus's invitation for anyone to do so.

#### "THE NIGHT OF THE PLACARDS" and the FIRST INSTITUTES

France was experiencing a period of religious tolerance at the time because Francis I was trying to live in rapprochement with the English and German protestant princes. Nevertheless there was tension with the Sorbonne, whose rigorous Catholicism caused it to condemn the Reform. Matters came to a head when Nicholas Cop, a boyhood friend of Calvin having become Rector at the University delivered an inaugural address which turned out to be influenced by the ideas of Erasmus and Luther and contained reference to the doctrine of justification by faith. By modern standards, even among Catholics it would appear to be very moderate in its sentiments. The Sorbonne however was in an uproar, and Calvin whom some said was the author of Cop's address was advised to leave Paris quickly. He went to Angouleme, where he stayed with another old student friend sympathetic towards the Reform, Louis du Tillet, a wealthy Canon of the Cathedral who had a fine library. There Calvin was able to study the early fathers, and may have begun work on the first edition of the Institutes. On May 4th 1534 he went to Noyon where he resigned his chaplaincy which had provided his income as

a student. By this time he was able to return to Paris where during that summer he may have written his first major theological treatise, Psychopanychia - Against soul sleep, which was not however published until 1542. In October 1534 an event occurred which caused Calvin to flee Paris for his life. Throughout France in the major cities placards appeared during the night denouncing the Mass. This became known as "the night of the placards". Francis saying that this was inspired by anarchists, began rigorous persecutions against the Protestants, and many executions took place. Calvin narrowly escaped to Basle which had been won for the Reform by Oecolampadius. There he became earnestly involved in the production of the first edition of the Institutes as a means of elementary instruction for the many converts, as well as in the production of the Serrieres Bible for Waldensian Christians.

In the epistle dedicatory of the Institutes which he published in August 1536, addressed to Francis I, he argued that Christianity which was the religion of France was defined by the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creed according to the Scriptures. It was the Roman Catholics not the evangelicals who had moved away from this definition and so the latter not the former should be recognised as the true Christians in France. Certainly evangelicals were scattered through Europe in sects, while the Romans were held together in an impressive edifice. But the true church of Christ did not need to be visible. The church was where the Gospel was preached and the Sacraments practised in the Spirit of the New Testament and not in a historic structure subservient to the Pope.

The first edition of the Institutes contained a powerfully experiential theology orientated around justification by faith and assurance of salvation. Its publication brought Calvin into the front line of the Reformers. Yet he was dissatisfied with it, beginning very soon afterwards to work on its first major revision, having established more firmly in his mind his theology of the inspiration and authority of scripture.

Calvin did not remain in Basle much more than a year. He intended to lead the life of a scholar, but needed some means of support. He left Basle early in 1536 to go to Verona where he secured a secretarial position in the service of the Princess Renee, Duchess of Verona, sister of Francis I and Marguerite de Navare. Calvin made a further journey to Basle in November 1536 before he settled in Geneva, where he remained for a short time as a reader in theology and as a pastor, lecturing on the Pauline Epistles "with great applause", and as well as undertaking preaching, pastoral and administrative duties, he worked on his first revision of the Institutes, which this time contained a much stronger emphasis on the authority of the scripture, to which we return for a moment's consideration.

Calvin came to regard Holy Scripture not only divinely inspired, and authoritative, but also infallible in its teaching, and the only clear revelation of God and his ways. He argues that while God reveals himself in creation, and indeed to such a degree that nature itself may be said to be almost identifiable with God - certainly it is the mirror of God - mankind is unable properly to receive the revelation there. In order that he may recognise God's activities both in creation and the affairs of men, God has as it were provided him with both a pair of spectacles and new sight. Scripture constitutes the spectacles. The new sight is the illumination of the Holy Scripture which believers receive in their regeneration. Scripture must have rule in the church, Calvin maintained.

The Church is built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles. Scripture defines the Church, nourishes it and must always be revered by it. Whenever the Church ignores Scripture it is acting outside the will of God.

It was not the Church which provided the Scripture, as the Romans taught. That would be as if the daughter gave birth to the mother. Calvin argues that only when one becomes a true believer does he really appreciate the divinely inspired nature of Scripture. First of all he recognises that Scripture is self authenticating, the majesty of it captivates the mind. Secondly he has the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit of its divine authority. The believer can neither have nor need any higher persuasion than these. Whenever he approaches Scriptures as if it were the Word of God he is very soon confirmed in his experience that it is so. Calvin often alludes to the Scriptures as having been dictated by the Holy Spirit. In doing so he is speaking metaphorically and seems to have meant that the end product was, as it were, dictated. He fully recognised that Scripture contains the records of divine activity, written down by ordinary human writers, and yet their writings were inspired. The Holy Spirit controlled them and directed them in such a way as to make them his own, and so Calvin regards the Spirit to be the true author of Scripture. Hence he frequently comments as he examines a text "here the Holy Spirit teaches us". The student of Scripture who is inwardly illuminated by the Holy Spirit as he reads the Bible is brought into an encounter with the living God by means of the dual operation of the Holy Spirit: on the one hand working objectively through the text of Scripture, and on the other subjectively in the believer.

Calvin recognises the difficulties which begin to arise. The one possessed with the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit is not automatically bestowed with the ability to understand everything which is contained in the Bible, although even the simplest believer has a perceptiveness which the most profound scholar can never grasp if he be not regenerate. To understand the Scriptures clearly and fully, the student must equip himself with the necessary tools. Scripture has many dark sayings and only patience and perseverance will discover their meaning. Calvin realised that even the most able of men were limited especially by time and thus could not do all the work which was required. It was to help such students that he was to embark on his commentaries and reviews of the Institutes.

Calvin held that the Scriptures were doctrinally inerrant, infallible in what they taught, and the yardstick of Christian experience. Whether or not he believed in what today is called verbal inerrancy is a matter of much discussion. His constant references to the Spirit's authority in the text suggests that he did so. For Calvin, to disagree with the Scripture was in effect to disagree with the Spirit, and for anyone in Geneva to persist in so doing could well lose him his head. And yet there are several passing remarks which demonstrated that Calvin believed the Biblical authors could be inaccurate. It should be noted however even in such cases Calvin either excuses the authors, or else provides a reason to render insignificant their apparent mistakes. He does not allow any of them to affect his theology.

Calvin was no Bibliolator. The Bible, he fully recognised, was an earthly document. He saw in it, to use his own language, God lisping to us like a mother or nurse in talking to her baby. It seeks to communicate in language which men can understand truths which are really far above comprehension. At the same time it is ever the Word of God and is to be treated as such with due reverence and awe. Its language is always controlled, restrained and directed to fulfill its divine purpose of reconciling God with man.

## STRASBOURG AND GENEVA

Calvin's major literary work really began during his stay at Strasbourg. Firstly he brought about the publication of the second edition of the Institutes in 1539 followed by its translation into French and subsequent publication in March 1540. Calvin's first commentary, that on the Epistle to the Romans, was published by Richelius, the Strasbourg printer. Calvin was probably also planning a Commentary on 1 Corinthians and then a further series of commentaries, working steadily through the Pauline Epistles. Richelius had helped Calvin financially and therefore it is likely that he felt beholden to him to allow the publication of these works.

With the decline of the Artichauds Calvin was pressed to come back to Geneva and he consented, although only with mixed feelings. His return brought about the establishment in Geneva of church order and worship which was claimed to be after the style of the New Testament and the early church. The Ordinances Ecclesiastiques which set it up provided a church government under four orders, Pastors, Doctors, Elders and Deacons. The Pastors would do the preaching and catechising and the visiting of the prisoners and the sick - no-one was to be confined to bed for more than three days without informing the ministers. The Doctors were responsible for instruction in the faith and for drawing out error, and also for supervision of the school curriculum. The Elders were laymen and responsible for church discipline, and the Diaconate responsible chiefly for the material care of the sick. Worship established in Geneva on Calvin's return centred round preaching.

The Holy Communion was to be held only four times a year. The service proper other than the sermon lasted for only about 15 minutes although there was added to it a great deal of praise. Calvin looked on music as a force for God, to be rescued from Satan and to be used to His glory. He objected to harmony and felt that the Psalms were the best songs since they were written by the Holy Spirit. Aided by French refugees he produced a Psalter for worship in the Genevan church. Calvin's return to Geneva was to mark the beginning of the era of his great commentaries on Scripture.

### CALVIN'S APPROACH TO BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Clearly the Bible is not a manual of instructions and directives from Heaven. Even in Holy Scripture, God speaks to us obliquely, for instance through the record of historical events or in doctrinal arguments written on specific occasions.

The text had one meaning for him and that was what was natural to what it actually said, taking into account of course figures of speech. Where the Old Testament was merely unfolding history, the reader is not to start spiritualising it but rather to take it as an account of God's dealing with men as he unfolded his redemptive plan.

The Psalms for their part are genuinely concerned about the feelings of their authors towards God and are not, as Faber Stapulensis had contended, more about Christ than David.

The New Testament is the fulfilment of the unfolding of God's purposes in Christ, to which the text bears clear and adequate testimony. The same text can be understood in two different ways, according to the state of mind of the reader. Either, illuminated by the Holy Spirit he accepts in faith what the Bible has to teach him, or else while understanding it intellectually he rejects its message through unbelief. What is believed and accepted or disbelieved and rejected is the plain meaning of the story,

incident or argument, that is, of the text of the document.

Having decided that it was in the plain meaning of the text that the mind of the reader and the Holy Spirit is to be found, Calvin argued, in his dedicatory epistle to the Commentary on Romans, that the task of the interpreter of Scripture was merely to make its meaning clear, "since it is about his only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author." The expositor is not therefore to turn the meaning of Scripture about as though it were some game that we were playing. Moreover at the very outset he takes very great care to try both to establish the best texts, and to ascertain the most accurate translations, frequently because he complains that this or that translation does not express the mind of the particular author concerned.

Calvin had a further problem to tackle, which was once having attained the right text, how to interpret it adequately, and yet without obscuring it with his comments. Melancthon, for example, had isolated matters of particular importance for the text and enlarged on these, passing over lesser matters and paying little or no attention to nuances, and in Calvin's view he did not adequately reflect the mind of the writer. On the other hand Bucer had almost obscured the text by saying everything he could about it and going into detail over all the doctrinal issues raised. With this in mind, Calvin wrote to Grynaeus "Both of us felt that Perspicua Brevitas constituted the particular virtue of an interpreter". Calvin devised the method as he wrote his commentary on Romans of separating the doctrinal from the general comments of the text. He then systematically set out the points of doctrine in the revision of the Institutes. The New Institute was to become the doctrinal handbook to the Commentaries, as he clearly teaches in the Epistle to the Reader of the 1539 edition. Meanwhile, the Commentaries, starting with Romans, were to follow the style of the Seneca Commentary, the text having been split up into small thought units was commented on by means of brief descriptions, explanations, and arguments, precisely expressed, and so as to form a running commentary on the text, leading the reader all the time into an engagement with the text itself.

Calvin, committed to the "plain meaning" as he was, nevertheless devised qualifications where he felt it necessary. The interpretation of a text must be in keeping with the sum of theology which he believed emerged from Scripture. Where a problem arises therefore he resorts to one or other of a number of literary devices, which he feels will very readily resolve it.

Let us look at one or two of these devices. First of all there is the principle of accommodation. Theologically Calvin could not accept any suggestions within Scripture that God had similar feelings and passion to men, or that he really manifested any kind of human behaviour. God is holy, other, spiritual, immeasurable, immutable. When dealing with anthropomorphisms therefore Calvin frequently appeals to the principle of accommodation which we have already noted. The Bible - the Holy Spirit - is using language which our limited capacities can take on about the otherwise incomprehensible God. It is the effect of God's activity among us which makes him appear to have behaved in a human way. Thus when Paul tells us that the wrath of God is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, we are not to understand the Bible as telling us that God has anything like human anger, but rather that what we term wrath is how his active opposition to our sin appears to be.

Another interesting device used by Calvin in exposition is the principle of moderation. Although he will not allow there to be any external norm of

interpretation of Scripture, his own mind had been fashioned in its formative years in the philosophy of Aristotle, and he demonstrates a definite desire for a golden mean. Moreover he believed that Christ's life was properly regulated and that this also ought to be true of Christians. Calvin saw Scripture continuously giving instruction to this end. But what is to be made of those passages where the Bible seems to approve abnormal behaviour? There is for example the quite extraordinary conduct of some of the prophets, the display of anger by Christ in the cleansing of the Temple, and the moment in Gethsemane when Christ appears to suggest that the immutable God should change his mind, and then of course there are those passages especially in the Sermon on the Mount which call for more unconventional responses. The inspiration of these is to be regulated by the principle of moderation. Christ's prohibition against swearing is moderated to prohibition against swearing lightly, since oaths are not forbidden by the law, and Christ said that he did not come to destroy the law and the prophets. Giving the other cheek is not to be taken literally since this would encourage wrong doing, while the coat taken and the coat given arouses in Calvin the reaction that only the fool would allow the plaintiff to have his way without a proper court hearing. The woman taken in adultery indeed ought to have been stoned, but Christ was not exercising his office of judge, while the parable of the wheat and tares is not to be taken to exclude rigorous purification of the Church.

Calvin justifies his modifications by bringing other teaching from the Scripture to bear on the instance under question. He interprets Scripture by Scripture. Sometimes where there are conflicting accounts, as for example the anointing of the head of Christ in Matthew and Mark, but of the feet in John, he adds the two together and says that Christ was anointed in the whole body.

Occasionally he adds to or modifies the text in itself. When Matthew or Mark say that two blind men were healed on entering Jericho and Luke says two were healed as they left, Calvin argues that there was one when entering, who implored the other as he was leaving, adding that the evangelists were not always concerned about the exactness of detail. Calvin very frequently resorts to the synecdoche, the whole representing the part or the part representing the whole, to rescue divergencies of accounts. Matthew's ass and colt are for Calvin a synecdoche where two is used for the single one mentioned by the other synoptics.

It is by no means always clear why one passage must be interpreted literally and another figuratively, and where there is no obvious criterion personal preference overrules, which he often admits when comparing his own interpretation with that of another authority.

The years between 1540 and 1556 are of the highest significance in that they constitute the period when Calvin produced his Commentaries on the New Testament. Romans had been published in 1540, although it was not to be followed by any other commentary for five years, when 1 Corinthians was to appear. Geneva and commentary writing were not very compatible and Calvin expressed a desire for more time and better health as Farel urged him on.

#### CALVIN'S PREACHING

Throughout this same period Calvin conducted an extensive preaching ministry as well as writing Commentaries, and it was on his expository sermons that his Old Testament Commentaries in particular were based. He initially preached twice on Sundays and once every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

From 1549 he preached every day of alternate weeks after his Sunday commitments. 1549 was the year when his sermons began to be taken down in shorthand by a French emigre and professional secretary who had them transcribed and bound. Hence more is known of his preaching from 1549 onwards. His aim was to preach on the New Testament and occasionally on the Psalms on Sundays, and the Old Testament on weekdays. Prior to 1549 he preached through Hebrews and Psalms from the Service Book, and may well have preached through Romans, John, Philipians, Colossians and the Catholic Epistles since he did not preach on these books after this date. Between 1549 and 1564 he worked through Acts, some Pauline epistles and the Harmony of the Gospels, and on weekdays on Jeremiah, Lamentations, the minor prophets, Ezekiel, Job, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Genesis, 1-2 Samuel and Kings. We can only afford a word on his style of preaching although as T.H.L. Parker has said, "It is impossible to do justice to his work in Geneva unless preaching be given the main place". His belief was that the proper preaching of the Gospel was almost synonymous with the voice of God Himself. Thus the preacher must like the commentator, be concerned with presenting as faithful an interpretation of the text as possible. Calvin's preaching was expository. He would take a clause, verse or passage, carefully explain it, paying particular attention to the difficulties, and apply it to a given set of circumstances. He preached without notes. He had an immense knowledge of the Bible, and was very widely read. He had a good memory and was gifted with the ability to keep to the point. This enabled him to overcome his lack of time for preparation. His style of preaching was from the heart, clear direct, intimate, lively and sometimes dramatic, passionate and even vitriolic. That which was central was the context of the passage under consideration. The chief themes he chose related to God's goodness and mercy, the promises of God, the merits of Christ and the need for obedience and self-sacrifice. Calvin regarded the sermon as being at the heart of the service and worship of God. It was the audible eucharist.

We draw towards a conclusion in taking a brief look at how Calvin's concern for the Church of God inspired some of his other writings. The Romans could no longer be seen as part of the Church of God for the Gospel was conspicuous in its absence. It had imbibed false doctrines and superstitions and distorted the sacraments. It was deprived of the headship of Christ. Calvin would therefore not deal with it as an institution, though he would be friendly towards individual Roman Catholics, but always exhorting them to come out of the mirey clay. He protested against Bucer and Melancthon in their efforts to find common ground between Romans and evangelicals, even without surrendering anything of their own. This approach he maintained was fit only for those who are content with half a Christ. He advocated that unity could only be achieved through obedience to Scripture. These convictions inspired a series of treatises between 1544 and 1549 and especially one of his most brilliant pieces of work, but one in which his polemics became most savage. The Treatise on Relics, "an inventory of all the sacred bodies which are in Italy, France, German, Spain and other kingdoms and countries," and in which he catalogues fourteen nails of the cross, several heads of John the Baptist, endless bones of St Peter and Paul, two bodies of St Anne, and three of Lazarus, the hair and milk of the virgin, and the miraculously saved water pots (albeit the wrong size). Calvin knew where they all were, exposed them as sham, and asked whether any serious man would wish to place his faith in the counterfeit rather than entirely in the truth of God, the Jesus Christ of the Scriptures. While Calvin reserved his elegance of style influenced by Alciate for orthodox theology, he showed his contempt for all deviationary teaching with the language of the farmyard or circus.

On the other hand, Calvin was unfortunately unable to establish his ideal of unity among the Protestant churches. The 1540's and 1550's witnessed

worsening relations between him and the Lutherans chiefly over the nature of the Eucharist. The initial Lutheran attack was against the Swiss churches but Calvin became embroiled. Calvin answered in 1540 with his Little Treatise on the Lord's Supper which with the 1539 Institutes was received well by Luther. A cordial relationship existed between them until 1544 when Luther once again delivered a blast against Zurich and the Swiss theologians. Calvin counselled Bullinger, who had taken over from Zwingli at Zurich, to exercise restraint and endeavour to heal the breach, writing a conciliatory letter to Luther. Unfortunately it was never delivered. Relations with the other reformed churches were also strained on the same issue along with some others relating to Church order, and of course with personalities. Calvin was able however to treat more successfully with Bullinger and managed to bring some of their Swiss reformers to agreement at Zurich in 1549 - the Consensus Tigurinus signed by Zurich, Geneva and two other of the Swiss churches. A Synod of Evangelical Churches which Cramer tried to organise and which greatly interested Calvin unfortunately came to nothing. Had it come about it would possibly have been the Protestant equivalent to the Council of Trent.

Calvin's literary endeavours were powerfully influential beyond the boundaries of Geneva, but his chief efforts outside Geneva were in his own country of France, where under King Francis I, and more especially after 1547 under Henry II, there was prolonged persecution on a similar level to that of Mary I of England. Nevertheless he helped the French Evangelicals to grow. Geneva sent to France upwards of one hundred pastors between 1555 and 1562 and they were fed by the Institutes and Commentaries. He wrote pastoral letters to the persecuted, most notably to the five young men of Lausanne who were burned for the evangelical faith at Lyons. His most illustrious piece of writing directed over the French border was the 1544 Apologies of John Calvin to the Nicodemites on their complaint that he is too vigorous, an appeal to those French clergy who were (privately) sympathetic to or interested in the Reform to come out into the open and obey the Word of God.

"As to my doctrine I have taught faithfully, and God has given me Grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power. I have not falsified a single passage of the Scripture, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge...and always aimed at simplicity".

There, surely, lies the key to understanding Calvin.