

Lecture 1- Calvin's Institutes: Structure & Organization

Prayer

I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art, my only trust and Saviour of my heart, who pain didst undergo for my poor sake; I pray thee from our hearts all cares to take. Thou art the King of mercy and of grace, reigning omnipotent in every place: so come, O King, and our whole being sway; shine on us with the light of thy pure day. Amen.

Thou art the Life, by which alone we live, and all our substance and our strength receive; O comfort us in death's approaching hour, strong-hearted then to face it by thy power. Thou hast the true and perfect gentleness, no harshness hast thou and no bitterness: make us to taste the sweet grace found in thee and ever stay in thy sweet unity. Our hope is in no other save in thee; our faith is built upon thy promise free; O grant to us such stronger hope and sure that we can boldly conquer and endure. Amen.

Dr. Calhoun starts with an introduction to the course. See course information for outline of the course and reading schedule.

Calvin's Institutes: Structure & Organization

I. Title- *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Meaning: _____ in the Christian religion.

II. Importance of the *Institutes*

- A. Calvin's book "holds a place in the short list of books that have notably affected the course of history" (McNeill).
- B. The Reformation's "most eloquent theological statement" (Ozment).

III. General Characteristics of the *Institutes*

A. Biblical

1. Priority of Scripture
2. Use of Scripture
3. Exegesis of Scripture
4. Textual criticism
5. Calvin's commentaries

B. Theological

1. Orderly arrangement of biblical themes [with unharmonized elements (3,6,1)]
2. No central theme
 - a. Sovereignty of God and decrees; Christ; Union with Christ, etc.
 - b. "Clarity of individual themes, incomprehensibility of their inter-relations" (Dowey)
3. Antithetical structuring (Battles, Analysis, pp. 19–23)
4. Restraint
 - a. Avoids "excessive ingratitude" (3,21,4)
 - b. Avoids "excessive curiosity" (3,21,4)
 - c. Advocates "learned ignorance" (3,21,2)
 - d. Wonder and worship (examples in 1,5,9; 3,21,1; and 4,17,7)
5. Accommodation
 - a. Battles, "God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity" *Interpretation* 31 (Jan. 1977): 19–38.
 - b. Examples in 1, 5, 1; 1, 17, 13; 2, 7, 2; and 3,21,4

C. Rhetorical

1. Scholastic "logic" vs. humanist "rhetoric"

2. Calvin's critique of the scholastics — Epistle to Sadoleto, Institutes 1, 13, 5; Commentary on 1 Timothy (6:4); Commentary on 1 John (3:2)
3. Calvin's humanism
 - a. Content: sources — Scripture, church fathers
 - b. Style: persuasive as well as demonstrative

D. Devotional

1. Title of 1536 edition: *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*
2. Calvin's motto: "My heart I offer you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely."
3. *The Man God Mastered*, by Jean Cadier
4. "Life of the Christian" (3, 7, 1)
5. "Piety is requisite for the knowledge of God" (1, 2, 1)

IV. Purpose of the *Institutes*

- A. Written (1535) to provide instruction to French Protestants
- B. Published (1536) to present a Protestant "confession" to Francis I
- C. Expanded (1536–1559) to serve as an introduction to Scripture
 1. Calvin "added, developed, defined" (Warfield)
 - a. Knowledge
 - 1) Bible
 - 2) Church fathers: Augustine, Chrysostom; also Cyprian, Ambrose, Gregory, and Bernard of Clairvaux
 - 3) Contemporary Protestants: Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Bucer
 - b. Experience
 - 1) Pastoral ministry in Strasbourg and Geneva
 - 2) Theological controversies — Carolli and Servetus (trinity), Anabaptists (Old Testament), Lutherans (Lord's Supper)
 2. And re-arranged [John Calvin to the Reader, 1559 (3,4)]. See appendix A

V. English Translations

- A. Thomas Norton (1561)
- B. John Allen (1813)
- C. Henry Beveridge (1845)
- D. Ford Lewis Battles (1960)
 1. Translation (xxxvii)
 2. Tools and aids
 - a. Editorial strata (xxvii)
 - b. Introduction (J.T. McNeill)
 - c. Titles
 - 1) Book and chapter titles (Calvin)
 - 2) Chapter subdivisions — in parentheses (McNeill)
 - 3) Section headings (Weber; *added or +altered by McNeill)
 - d. Footnotes
 - e. Bibliography
 - f. Indexes
 - 1) Biblical
 - 2) Author and source
 - 3) Subject (computerized concordance)
 - 4) Names and places
 - 5) Hebrew words

- 6) Greek words
- 7) Latin words

See appendix A for the structure of the 1559 Institutes.

For Further Study

Battles, Ford Lewis. *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.

Useful introduction and detailed outline (388 pages) of the *Institutes*.

Battles, Ford Lewis. "Introduction." *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1536 edition*, 1975 xvii–lix.

A study of Calvin's "road toward the Institutes of 1536," with good discussions of the historical context of the 1536 edition, Calvin's intellectual and theological preparation, and Calvin's conversion; summary and analysis of the 1536 edition, including a study of the dedicatory address to Francis I.

Parker, T. H. L. *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995.

Probably the best short introduction to Calvin's theology. By Parker, author of a number of books on Calvin, and reader emeritus at the University of Durham, England.

Reed, R. C., *The Gospel As Taught By Calvin*. Jackson, MS: Reformed Theological Seminary & Presbyterian Reformation Society, 1925-1977.

Helpful, brief chapters on the major themes of Calvin's theology by an important Southern Presbyterian theologian.

Warfield, B.B. "John Calvin: The Man and His Word" & "Calvin as a Theologian." *Calvin and Augustine*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1956.

Great articles by the masterful Princeton theologian.

Warfield, B. B. "On the Literary History of Calvin's Institutes." *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 10 (1899): 193–219. Also published in the recent editions of the Allen translation of the *Institutes*.

Skillful summary of the development of the various editions of the Institutes in Latin and French from 1536 to 1560; history of various editions and translations.

Wendel, Francois. *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*. London: Collins, 1963.

A good summary of the entire theology of Calvin, but some "adjustment" of Calvin toward a less orthodox theology and occasional treatment of Calvin's thought that fail to do justice to his style and content.