
Directions in Current Calvin Research

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From a purely bibliographical perspective, the current field of Calvin research is vast and it is conducted on a truly international scale. This essay, therefore, makes no claim to being exhaustive and necessarily begins with an apology to those scholars whose works are not mentioned explicitly in the text of the essay or in its footnotes.

For a most complete listing of essays on Calvin, I can only point toward the bibliographical efforts of the late Peter de Klerk and to the exceedingly fine continuation of that effort by Paul Fields, Peter's successor both as Curator of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies and as the Calvin Bibliographer for the Center and for *Calvin Theological Journal*. In addition, I make no effort here to look beyond "Calvin research" to research on his predecessors, contemporaries, or successors except insofar as they provide a context for understanding Calvin's own work.

Having made the disclaimer, I would like to point toward an alternative method, more suited to this essay, for covering the field of study: examination of a representative sampling of current literature by type. First, there is the purely textual work that has resulted in a series of editions and translations—work which provides the basis for further study. Some of these efforts, I will note under topical categories, others (notably a group of reprints and new editions of standard works), I will mention as a first group of resources. Second, we certainly can distinguish roughly (granting a bit of overlap between categories) between biographical, socio-political, doctrinal, exegetical or homiletical, and rhetorical studies of Calvin and, I would

suggest, within those categories, between what I would term “textual” and “contextual” studies and more or less “dogmatic” or “ideological” essays. First, the distinction between textual or contextual and dogmatic or ideological presentations: the textual and contextual study of Calvin takes as its *locus* of meaning the text of Calvin’s own writings as they belong to and are interpreted by their historical context, whether exegetical, polemical, socio-political, or doctrinal. What I indicate by a dogmatic or ideological presentation is one that takes as its *locus* of meaning an framework drawn from the writer’s own set of concerns and assumed by the writer to be useful for the reading of Calvin. At best this approach isolates Calvin from his context and offers little or no sense of his originality (or lack of originality) and little or no sense of the actual reason for any given statement of Calvin’s. At worst, the dogmatic or ideological approach reads Calvin’s thoughts in terms of a contemporary intellectual framework for the purpose of ratifying or bolstering a contemporary viewpoint—or, indeed, of making Calvin “relevant” to modernity or post-modernity. Of course, this distinction of types is not as neat in reality as it is in theoretical statement: there is in fact a continuum or spectrum between a purely textual or contextual model and a purely ideological one.

I note these two basic types of essay because I find them exemplified, to some extent, in all of the topical categories that I have indicated. Thus, Parker’s biography of Calvin or the recent biography by Cottret can be identified as genuinely historical and therefore as both textual and contextual.¹ Whereas Bouwsma’s “portrait,” characterized as it is by a near total disregard of the historical context of Calvin’s statements and by its failure to recognize Calvin’s figurative language (notably the references to “abyss” and “labyrinth”) as participating in the standard literary and rhetorical *topoi* of the age, belongs to the dogmatic or ideological category, even though Christian doctrine or dogma was perhaps the farthest thing from Bouwsma’s mind as he wrote the book.²

The distinction between textual and dogmatic studies also obtains in the case of doctrinal studies of Calvin: the dogmatic or ideological study of Calvin’s doctrine is perhaps best illustrated by the spate of essays on “Calvin’s Doctrine of...” (you fill in the blank) that appeared in the heyday of what might be called “neo-orthodox historiography.” Typical of these works—whether one looks to studies by Torrance,

¹ T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975).

² William Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Quistorp, Dowey, or Wallace—is that they take Calvin as his own context and, without so much as a passing reference to the events or ideas of the sixteenth-century, proceed to meditate harmonistically on selected texts from Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries.³ An alternative approach can be found in Barbara Pitkin's monograph on Calvin's doctrine of faith, forthcoming from Oxford, where Calvin's thought is placed into a larger sixteenth-century context and treated with some sense of its development, given that earlier and later statements made by Calvin, some as a result of his on-going exegetical work, ought not to be harmonized.⁴ This basic distinction between contextual and ideological or dogmatic study can be applied to a series of topics characteristic of directions in Calvin research.

1. The text of Calvin. First—some comments on significant issues and reissues of Calvin's works. From my own perspective, first and foremost here is the finely done microfiche collection, *Works of John Calvin: the Institutio; Treatises; Commentaries, Lessons, and Sermons*, edited by Francis Higman and published by IDC of Leiden. We now have accessible in a high quality film library, all of the editions of the *Institutes* published in Latin and in French during Calvin's lifetime, plus the major sixteenth-century editions of all of his biblical commentaries, lectures, and sermons. Simply by making these texts readily available, Higman and IDC have made possible major advances in research—given on the one hand the difficulty of procuring the old *Corpus Reformatorum* edition of Calvin's works and, on the other hand the difficulty of dealing with the idiosyncrasies and imperfections of that edition, once procured. This series, which complements the massive *Reformed Protestantism* series from the same publisher makes affordable to any research library a collection of Calvin's works that would be the envy of any collector and otherwise far beyond the financial means of the researcher.

³ Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, trans. Harold Knight (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1955); Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952; third edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); *idem.*, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959)

⁴ A revision of her dissertation: Barbara Pitkin, "What Pure Eyes Could See: Faith, Creation, and History in John Calvin's Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1994); also note *idem.*, "Imitation of David: David as a Paradigm for Faith in Calvin's Exegesis of the Psalms," in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 24/4 (1993), pp. 843-63.

Beyond this, the sometimes sluggish *Supplementa calviniana* has made some very significant strides—in the appearance of Calvin’s sermons on Acts (1994)⁵; a volume of the sermons on Isaiah (1995)⁶; and if the good Lord and Neukirchner Verlag are willing, the Genesis sermons without undue delay. Also to be mentioned here is *The Bible of John Calvin, Reconstructed from the Text of his Commentaries*, compiled by Wevers, which makes accessible for the first time in one place the entire text of Calvin’s Latin translation of the larger portion of the Bible.⁷

From the editorial hand of Olivier Millet, known for his magisterial study of Calvin’s rhetoric, we have as volume of select works in French, which includes well-known essays such as the *Letter to Sadoleto* but also offers such highly significant, but little studied, essays as Calvin’s two prefaces to the Olivetan Bible of 1534.⁸

On the translation front, we must certainly mention the first translation of Calvin’s *Ecclesiastical Advice*, from the hands of Farley and Beaty.⁹ The Rutherford House project to offer a new set of translations of Calvin’s Old Testament commentaries also moves forward—although, unfortunately, the publisher does not ask its very knowledgeable translators to offer scholarly introductions or a helpful apparatus to the text.¹⁰ We also note the first translation of Calvin’s treatise on *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* by A.N.S. Lane and G. Davies.¹¹ This is a significant moment, inasmuch as the latter part of Calvin’s response to Pighius, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* has long been available in translation (in fact, in two versions).¹² We now not only have the elusive first part of the debate but

⁵ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Willem Balke and Wilhelmus H. Th. Moehn (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1994).

⁶ John Calvin, *Sermons sur le Livre d’Esaïe, Chapitres 30-41*, ed. Francis M. Higman, T. H. L. Parker, and Lewis Thorpe (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1995).

⁷ *The Bible of John Calvin, Reconstructed from the Text of his Commentaries*, compiled by Richard F. Wevers (Grand Rapids, MI: Digamma Publishers, 1994).

⁸ Jean Calvin, *Oeuvres choisies*, ed. Olivier Millet (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Advice*, trans. Mary Beaty and Benjamin W. Farley; foreword by John H. Leith (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Daniel I: (Chapters 1-6)* trans. T. H. L. Parker (Carlisle: Paternoster Press / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); idem, *Ezekiel I (Chapters 1-12)*, trans. D. Foxgrover and D. Martin (Carlisle: Paternoster Press / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹¹ John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davis [*Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought*, vol. 2] (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996).

¹² Thus, John Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God and the Secret Providence of God*, trans. Henry Cole (London, 1856; repr. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, n.d.); idem, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans with an intro. by J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961).

we also have a far better context for understanding the debate as a whole—done, by the way, in an exemplary format, that offers the pagination of the *Calvini Opera* and a significant apparatus.

Also noteworthy here are the wealth of sermons of Calvin now once again available in English: of course there is the fine first volume of Calvin's sermons on II Samuel, translated by Douglas Kelly (we hope the second will follow soon), and the new translation of Calvin's sermons on Galatians from Kathy Childress.¹³ In addition, there is also a project to reissue the sixteenth-century translations that deserves special note—and points to the importance of creating and sustaining a connection between scholars and the churchly community: a small evangelical publisher, Old Paths Publications, has produced a fine set of Calvin's sermons: the sermons on Galatians, Election and Reprobation, and Psalm 119 all published as re-set printings of the sixteenth-century translations by Arthur Golding, Thomas Stocker, and others.¹⁴ The volumes are finely done in modern type and the more obscure words are supplemented with modern synonyms in brackets. When these volumes are added to the recent new translations and the several facsimile volumes available,¹⁵ we find that there are now more of Calvin's sermons in print in English than ever before.

2. Biographical studies of Calvin: here, perhaps more than in any other category of Calvin research, directions are unclear, particularly given the unsatisfactory nature of the most recent work. In order to underline the problem, a note of comparison between Calvin research and Luther research is in order: in the case of Luther, there

¹³ John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel, Chapters 1-13*, trans. Douglas Kelly (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992); John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*, trans. Kathy Childress (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997).

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Sermons upon the Epistle of Saint Paule to the Galatians*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1574; reissued, Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1995); *Thirteen Sermons of Maister Iohn Calvin, Entreating of the Free Election of God in Iacob, and of Reprobation in Esau. A treatise wherein every Christian may see the excellent benefites of God towards his Children, and his marvellous iudgements towards the reprobate*, trans. John Fielde (London, 1579; reissued, Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1996); *Two and Twentie Sermons of Maister Iohn Calvin, in which Sermons is most religiously handled, the hundredth and nineteenth Psalme of David, by eight verses aparte, according to the Hebrew Alphabet*, trans. Thomas Stocker. (London, 1580; reissued, Audubon, NY: Old Paths Publications, 1996); and see my review of these volumes in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 32/1 (April, 1997), pp. 153-57..

¹⁵ In facsimile: *Sermons of M. Iohn Calvin upon the Fifth Book of Moses called Deuteronomie*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Henry Middleton, 1583; facsimile repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987); *Sermons of Maister Iohn Calvin, upon the Book of Iob*. London: George Bishop, 1574; facsimile repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993); *Sermons of M. Iohn Calvin, on the Epistles of S. Paule to Timothie and Titus*, trans. L. T. (London: G. Bishop and T. Woodcoke, 1579; facsimile repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983).

was a major biographical and theological project eminently represented by scholars like Köstlin at end of the last century,¹⁶ marking the four hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth. This was followed by the detailed studies by Heinrich Böhmer, Heinrich Bornkamm, and Ernest Schweibert¹⁷—and then brought to a magnificent development, in time for the five hundredth anniversary, by Martin Brecht.¹⁸ Lest the point be missed, we are speaking here of a series of vast efforts, culminating in a massive three-volume biography. In Calvin research, quite to the contrary, the massive efforts of Doumergue, for the four hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth (seven volumes of biography, a volume of iconography, and two volumes on the city of Geneva in Calvin's time)¹⁹ have not been followed by any work of real substance except for Ganoczy's brilliant *Young Calvin*.²⁰ Parker's biography of Calvin is barely a sketch;²¹ McGrath's is unscholarly in the extreme, resting largely on a compilation of secondary sources²²; Cottret's new study is a fresh, genuinely historical effort,²³ but it is not much more detailed than Parker; and Bouwsma's effort is so ignorant of the history, chronology, and the background or context of Calvin's ideas that it does not really fit into the category of "biography," or even, indeed, as the title indicates, "portrait."

On the other hand, the editors of the *Opera denuo recognita* are engaged in a painstaking editing of Calvin's correspondence, which promises to bear fruit in

¹⁶ Thus, Julius Köstlin, *Martin Luther: sein Leben und seine Schriften*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Wiegandt & Schotte, 1889); idem, *The Theology of Luther: in its Historical Development and Inner Harmony*, 2 vols. trans. Charles E. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897; repr. Saint Louis: Concordia, 1986).

¹⁷ Heinrich Boehmer, *Luther and the Reformation in the Light of Modern Research*, trans. E. S. G. Potter (London: G. Bell, 1930); idem, *Martin Luther: Road to Reformation*, trans. John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946); Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, ed. Karin Bornkamm, trans. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Ernest G. Schweibert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1950).

¹⁸ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3 vols., trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985-1993).

¹⁹ Emil Doumergue, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 vols. (Lausanne: G. Bridel, 1899-1927); idem, *Iconographie Calvinienne* (Lausanne: G. Bridel, 1909); and idem, *La Genève calviniste*, 2 vols. (Lausanne: G. Bridel, 1905).

²⁰ Alexandre Ganoczy, *Le jeune Calvin: genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1966); *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987).

²¹ T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975).

²² Alistair E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

²³ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: Biographie* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Claude Lattès, 1995)

renewed biographical study. On two other fronts, both of which will be noted as separate topics, there are also signs of major progress that will yield biographical materials. The editors of Calvin's previously unpublished sermons are also uncovering significant details concerning Calvin's work in Geneva that ought to bear biographical fruit and the publication of the critical text of the Registers of the Consistory will also provide detail concerning the immediate context of Calvin's life and work. Nor should we pass from this topic without reference to Oberman's stimulating essay on the origins of Calvin's work, *Initia Calvini*, which stands as a rather tantalizing first result of a projected large-scale study of Calvin's life and thought that promises to take into consideration background, context, and the detail of Calvin's correspondence.²⁴ Noteworthy here also is Naphy's somewhat cautionary article on the use of Calvin's letters in studying Genevan history,²⁵ and, from a totally different vantage point but equally cautionary is Davis' essay on the view of Calvin provided by nineteenth-century historiography.²⁶

3. Social and political studies of Calvin: during the past year, Calvin scholarship has made a massive advance in this category—or, more precisely, one of the greatest advances in Calvin scholarship made in the last several decades has, in the last year begun to be readily available to a wider audience. I am speaking here of the publication of the first volume of the critical edition of the records of the Consistory of Geneva during the time of Calvin. Of course, the critical edition did not descend on an unsuspecting world without prior notice: not only has the unedited transcript been available to scholars, but Kingdon and a group of other scholars have offered us a series of essays that illustrate the singular importance of the Consistory registers.²⁷ Nonetheless, the appearance of the first volume must be announced as a major event in the field of Calvin studies: we have here not only a finely done transcript of the documents, but a detailed critical text that identifies even the most obscure of the

²⁴ Heiko A. Oberman, *Initia Calvini: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1991).

²⁵ William G. Naphy, "Calvin's Letters: Reflections on their Usefulness in Studying Genevan History," in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 86 (1995), pp. 67-90.

²⁶ Thomas J. Davis, "Images of Intolerance: John Calvin in Nineteenth-Century History Textbooks," in *Church History* 65/2 (1996), pp. 234-48.

²⁷ Thus, e.g., Robert M. Kingdon, "A New View of Calvin in the Light of the Registers of the Geneva Consistory," in Wilhelm Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong (eds.), *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex: Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion*. Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung, vom 13. bis 16. September in Edinburgh (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), pp. 21-33.

persons mentioned and offers a vast resource of collateral information and of cross references to histories, articles, monographs, and to Calvin's own works and correspondence. Far more than standing as a result of decades of editorial work, the critical edition of the *Registres* stands as a beacon to guide further study of the Genevan Reformation. And the results promise to be dramatic: as Kingdon points out, nearly ninety-five percent of these records have lain unexamined by scholars of Calvin and the Genevan Reformation.

As the editors of the first volume comment, the *Registres* underline the danger inherent in so much of the writing about Calvin and Geneva of making the doctrine of predestination (or, we add, Christology or Trinity) the center and primary issue of Calvin's thought and work. By way of juxtaposition and contrast, the singularly important place of ecclesiastical discipline in the thought of Calvin and, equally importantly, in the day-to-day life of the Genevan church comes to the fore with the *Registres*. Here is the concrete illustration and proof of the centrality of discipline, both in the sense of moral supervision and of church order or polity, to our understanding of the Genevan Reformation and, indeed, of Calvin's thought. These materials also turn us back to the issue of biography: since here, for the first time, is a clear record of the immediate ecclesial context of Calvin's life and thought.

The impact of examination of the consistory records together with a close examination of Calvin's sermons for contemporary references is evident in Naphy's work on the Genevan Reformation—where a shift in the consistory's attention from catechetical matters to domestic morality, including the naming of children, taken together with popular unrest and a highly moral turn in Calvin's preaching, points toward a major consolidation of the Reformation in 1546.²⁸ Substantive use of as yet unedited portions of the *Registres* transcript can be seen in Witte's essay on "Moderate Religious Liberty in the Thought of John Calvin."²⁹ Another fine example of the social direction is Maag's recent study of the Genevan Academy.³⁰ Her work examines not only the official records of the Academy but also correspondence of the faculty and students in order to assess both the educational impact of the course of study and the intention of the Academy and Geneva in structuring the work of the

²⁸ William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

²⁹ John Witte, "Moderate Religious Liberty in the Thought of John Calvin," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 31/2 (1996), pp. 359-403.

³⁰ Karin Maag, *Seminary or University? The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560-1620* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1995).

school around a well-paid, internationally known faculty. Here again, as in the case of the *Registres* of the consistory, we have a glimpse of materials that are necessary to the understanding of Calvin's enterprise and, given the breadth of the book, that of his successors. An essay by Naphy on the evolution of Genevan schools in the sixteenth century adds to this picture.³¹

4. Doctrinal or theological studies of Calvin: we can make an initial division here between the more general monographs on Calvin's theology as a whole and the monographs and shorter essays that deal with specific themes in Calvin's thought. Among the works that have appeared in the first group, Barth's *Theology of John Calvin* deserves mention as an old essay that has recently been offered in a new critical edition and made available to English-speaking public—and as a primary example of the dogmatic or ideological essay. When we find out that Calvin's *Institutes* evidences a theology in "crisis" and that in Calvin's theology "Christ stands once more between the contradictions or rather above them, as the principle of knowledge,"³² we can be sure that the sixteenth-century context has disappeared and that this is a book not at all about Calvin's theology but about the theological struggles of the young Karl Barth. It does not illuminate Calvin. To compound the problem, we even have a volume, edited by Hans Scholl, dedicated to the study of Barth's Calvin-lectures, in which the editor offers a study of Barth's interpretation of Calvin's *Psychopannychia*.³³ The old scholastic maxim (which still holds good), *theologia symbolica non est argumentativa*, has here been violated. We now have an essay interpreting an interpretation—and the possibility of returning the line of argument to the actual analysis of Calvin's text has become nearly impossible.

On the opposite side of the scale stands Parker's *Introduction*,³⁴ a work that must be recommended for its careful reading of Calvin's theology through the glass of the *Institutes* and that can only be faulted for its lack of reference to the background and the context of Calvin's thought and its unwillingness to look past the *Institutes*. I

³¹ William G. Naphy, "The Reformation and the Evolution of Geneva's Schools," in *Reformations Old and New: Essays on the Socio-Economic Impact of Religious Change*, ed. Beat A. Kümin (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1996).

³² Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 165.

³³ Hans Scholl, "Karl Barth als Interpret der Psychopannychia Calvins," in *Karl Barth und Johannes Calvin: Karl Barths Göttinger Calvin-Vorlesung von 1922*, ed. Hans Scholl (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchner Verlag, 1995), pp. 155-71

³⁴ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995).

cannot claim that there is a crying need for another introduction to Calvin's theology, but Wendel's essay, now in translation some thirty-five years old, has little real competition in the field.³⁵

At the point of transition to studies of individual themes in Calvin's thought, we come to an article on Calvin and "free will" by A. N. S. Lane and its companion piece, the preface to the translation of Calvin's treatise on *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. Lane's essays have added some precision to the discussion of this topic. We can also, at this point, take note of *Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux*, which marks the culmination of a series of essays on this subject by A. N. S. Lane.³⁶ Like his other studies, which we will mention under the topics of biblical interpretation, these essays offer a sense of Calvin's gradually increasing acquaintance with medieval sources, carefully, even microscopically, documented to the editions that Calvin must have used, that carries on the trajectory of Ganoczy's arguments on Calvin's education and that is light-years ahead of the dogmatic assertion of Calvin's early competence in all matters medieval that we have seen in the works of Reuter,³⁷ Torrance,³⁸ and McGrath. With Lane, we can study Calvin's doctrine in the context of the early sixteenth-century materials with which Calvin worked. In the same context, we can note Tamburello's study of Calvin and Bernard, which offers a useful comparison of ideas and demonstrates once again the affinity of Calvin's thought for elements of Bernard's—but which could profit from the precision of Lane's studies.³⁹ Some note ought also to be given here to Van Oort's careful study of Calvin's use of the church fathers, which has appeared as one piece in the monumental introduction to the

³⁵ François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (N. Y.: Harper & Row, 1963).

³⁶ A. N. S. Lane, *Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux* [Studies in Reformed Theology and History, NS 1] (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996); cf. idem, "Calvin's Sources of St. Bernard," in *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 67 (1976), pp. 253-83; idem, "Bernard of Clairvaux: A Forerunner of John Calvin?" in *Bernardus Magister*, ed. J. R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), pp. 533-45; and idem, "Calvin's Use of Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Bernhard von Clairvaux: Rezeption und Wirkung im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit*, ed. K. Elm (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1994), pp. 303-32.

³⁷ Karl Reuter, *Das Grundverständnis der Theologie Calvins* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1963).

³⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988).

³⁹ Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

question of the “reception of the fathers” edited by Irena Backus.⁴⁰ Here too we have not so much a doctrinal essay as a historical investigation that should at least give pause to those who would press Calvin’s thought easily into dogmatic categories.⁴¹

I should also note a few of the monographic studies that have appeared in the last several years. Here we encounter the entire spectrum of methodological possibilities from the contextual presentation of Calvin’s thought, to the de-contextualized yet textually sensitive exposition, to works that demonstrate varying degrees of dogmatic overlay. Schreiner’s essay on “nature and the natural order” in Calvin’s thought offers a fine contextual examination of this subject, sensitive to the historical background and the contemporary context of Calvin’s thought, and free of the trammels and complications generated by the Barth-Brunner debate.⁴² Davis’ study of the development of Calvin’s eucharistic theology has the advantage of identifying stages in Calvin’s thought and outlining what might be called a process of development from a more or less Zwinglian to more Bucerian theology that was pressed to achieve peaceful consensus with the Zürich of Bullinger. Davis’ work has the disadvantage of not presenting much discussion of the context of this development except for drafting of the *Consensus Tigurinus*. On this score, Paul Rorem’s detailed work on the *Consensus* and on the relationship between Calvin’s and Bullinger’s theology is most helpful for its careful analysis of the debate and of the nuances of each theologian’s work.⁴³ Here too we should mention Gerrish’s *Grace and Gratitude*: on the one hand, it offers a topical discussion of Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper that is more sophisticated in its theological presentation than Davis’ work—but on the other it remains a dogmatic study of Calvin’s eucharistic theology that worries little about chronology, dismisses Calvin’s polemics as less than significant to the understanding of Calvin’s teaching, and omits examination of Calvin’s exegetical context.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Johannes van Oort, “John Calvin and the Church Fathers,” in Irena Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 661- 700.

⁴¹ E. g., Thomas F. Torrance, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 25/2 (November, 1990), pp. 165-193.

⁴² Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature & the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1991; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995).

⁴³ Paul Rorem, “Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper: Part I. The Impasse,” in *Lutheran Quarterly*, NS 2 (1988), pp. 155-184; “Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper: Part II. The Agreement,” in *Lutheran Quarterly*, NS 2 (1988), pp. 357-389.

⁴⁴ Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace & Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Fortress Press,) and see my review in *The Journal of Religion*, 75/1 (1995), pp. 119-21.

Hesselink's study of Calvin's doctrine of the law and his very recent presentation of Calvin's thought through the glass of the 1538 catechism also belong to the category of doctrinal study.⁴⁵ In both cases, Hesselink provides a review of Calvin's thought—and in the study of Calvin's doctrine of the law, provides us with the only detailed doctrinal study of the subject in English. Hesselink places Calvin's conception of the law firmly into the context of Calvin's doctrine of creation and his conception of the covenant of grace—what remains to be done is the close examination of Calvin's exegesis of the law in his Deuteronomy sermons and his *Harmony of the Four Last Books of Moses*. The other work, although a survey of Calvin's thought that could be classed above with Parker, so closely follows out the form of the 1538 catechism that it has a somewhat monographic status—and it therefore also cannot replace either Parker's introduction via the *Institutes* or a more broadly based introduction, like that of Wendel.

Zachman's work on Calvin and Luther takes a comparative approach to the old dogmatic model of study, offering a point for point comparison of the two thinkers on the problem of assurance that allows theological definition to provide the context for analysis rather than looking to the historical dimensions of the various works cited—there is a sense, therefore, in which Zachman harmonizes both thinkers without asking either the immediate contextual or the exegetical background of their remarks.⁴⁶ Similarly, Wyatt's monograph on Calvin's Christology offers little that is stimulating in its summary of Calvin's words and much that is misleading in its attempt to press a grid over Calvin's thought, interpreting it as "sapiential" in the line of, believe it or not, Thomas Aquinas, rather than as "existential" in the mode of Luther.⁴⁷ Wyatt apparently did not realize that Calvin knew little of the work of Aquinas and, when he attacked "scholastic" theology, most probably directed his remarks toward the contemporary "school theology" of the Sorbonne. Nor does Wyatt recognize that the force of Calvin's rhetoric—in the *Institutes*, polemical treatises, and sermons, where Calvin engages with contemporary issues—conveys a profound "existential" dimension of Calvin's own thought.

⁴⁵ I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992); idem, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary; featuring Ford Lewis Battles' translation of the 1538 Catechism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997).

⁴⁶ Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁴⁷ Peter Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1996).

A more successful version of doctrinal study than Wyatt's can be found in Butin's study of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity, the reissuing of De Kroon's analysis of Calvin's *Institutes*, and Haas' recent monograph on Calvin concept of equity. Butin not only indicates clearly that his purpose is to examine Calvin for the sake of drawing Calvin's thought into play with modern theology, he also carefully surveys all of Calvin's trinitarian works, including the massive treatise against Servetus. Butin offers an assessment of the entire structure of Calvin's theology as resting on a trinitarian model, mediated through the division of the subject into knowledge of God and knowledge of man or, as it can also be defined, the relationship between God and human beings. The results of the study indicate, doubtless, the thoroughgoing importance of trinitarian orthodoxy to Calvin's thought—although there are times, as in Butin's crediting of the distinction between justification and sanctification to the dominance of the trinitarian theme rather than to the more proximate need to remove works from the forensic calculus of salvation, that the analysis appears dogmatically forced.⁴⁸

DeKroon's work, some decades old in its original edition, appears again, with a new chapter, up-dating its scholarship.⁴⁹ The work offers an analysis of Calvin's *Institutes*, salutary for its refusal to oblige various central-dogma theories, that drawn on the division of the first two chapters of book I, knowledge of God and knowledge of man, and proposes the relationship between God and humanity as a way of developing the various theological themes of the work. The value of the work is, certainly, that it is free of various neo-orthodox overlays—its defect is that, even more than Parker, it holds the *Institutes* in isolation from the rest of Calvin's work and treats it as an independent theological system.

Haas, too, pays close attention to context by offering a significant survey of early sixteenth-century thought on the concept of equity, with attention to the way in which humanists and reformers appropriated the ancient legal tradition. Haas' study also offers a salutary corrective to the Barthian view of Calvin's ethical thought that so identified Calvin as a "theologian of the Word" that it virtually forbade examination of the secular and legal sources of Calvin's thought on human nature and conduct.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Philip W. Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ M. J. P. de Kroon, *De Eer van God en het Heil van de Mens: Bijdrage tot het Verstaan van de Theologie van Johannes Calvijn naar zijn Institutie* (Roermond, 1968; repr. 1997).

⁵⁰ Guenther H. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).

5. Studies of Calvin's place in the history of biblical interpretation: this field of Calvin study rather naturally divides into the utterly textual or editorial effort to produce usable modern editions of Calvin's interpretive work, and the examination of Calvin's interpretive results (in some cases by the same scholars). In recent years this textual work has most notably focused on the production of critical editions of his previously unpublished sermons. Here we note again the Balke/Moehn edition of the sermons on Acts, and the Higman/Parker/Thorpe edition of the sermons on Isaiah 30-41, and hopefully soon to appear, Engammare's edition of the Genesis sermons. Not only in the simple fact of the availability of these works, but also in the very finely tuned observations concerning Calvin's style and method found in the introductions to these editions, we have significant ground for further study. Indeed, like Kingdon's work on the consistory records, this effort to recover the text of Calvin's sermons for a modern scholarly audience promises to offer a basis for study for many years to come.

On the textual front we also have the less startling and methodologically speaking less useful effort of the *Opera denuo recognita* to produce new editions of the commentaries. In some of the volumes, notably Parker's, considerable strides have been made in the identification and comparison of textual variants and in the establishment of text. In others, notably those from Feld,⁵¹ the establishment of the text has been accompanied by a less than useful apparatus, at least in his earliest efforts, an apparatus seemingly geared to offering an apologetic for Calvin's Roman Catholic opponents—and at times entirely missing the point of precisely who those opponents might have been, given the oblique nature of Calvin's references.

When we come to the study of Calvin's interpretive results, we come to one of the fields of study that has received great emphasis in the last decade and that, given the appearance of new editions, promises to receive even greater attention in the future. Puckett's study of Calvin's Old Testament interpretation has advanced the broader understanding of Calvin's hermeneutics by a careful examination of Calvin's own work—unfortunately without reference to the ways in which Calvin's framework of interpretation both fits into and develops beyond the patterns established by

⁵¹ *Ioannis Calvini Opera Exegetica, XVI: Commentarii in Pauli Epistolas ad Galatas, ad Ephesios, ad Philippenses, ad Colossenses*, ed. Helmut Feld (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 199) and see my review, in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25/2 (1994), pp. 476-8.

medieval and Renaissance predecessors.⁵² Works by Steinmetz, Thompson, Schreiner, Engammare, and Lane, move away from this broader, generalized theological analysis of Calvin's biblical interpretation to the examination of detail, often in dialogue with the rising scholarship on the work of other pre-critical exegetes, and supply the lack.⁵³ Here we see the roots of Calvin's thought, sometimes, in the very commentaries that he read as he prepared his lectures and commentaries. A series of essays by David Wright has added precision to the concept of accommodation used by Calvin, both in terms of its historical background and Calvin's own usage—specifically by way of overcoming the earlier dogmatic readings of the concept to show both the breadth and diversity of Calvin's application.⁵⁴

A negative note must be given here concerning DeVries's study of Calvin's and Schleiermacher's sermons on the Synoptic Gospels. The work is fundamentally dogmatic or ideological, has no sense of historical context, and fails to recognize, as one colleague has noted, that although there is some Calvin in Schleiermacher, there is in fact no Schleiermacher in Calvin. Perhaps the wisest word on this issue is to draw attention to Parker's finely done study of Calvin's preaching,⁵⁵ a work that accurately portrays Calvin's homiletical style and the patterns of exposition in his

⁵² David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

⁵³ David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Susan E. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); John L. Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, his Predecessors and His Contemporaries* (Geneva: Droz, 1992); idem, "The Immoralities of the Patriarchs in the History of Exegesis: A Reappraisal of Calvin's Position," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991), pp. 9-46; idem, "Patriarchs, Polygamy and Private Resistance: John Calvin and Others on Breaking God's Rules," in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25/1 (1994), pp. 3-28; A. N. S. Lane, "Did Calvin use Lippoman's *Catena in Genesis*?" in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 31/2 (1996), pp. 404-19; idem, "The Sources of Calvin's Citations in his Genesis Commentary," in A. N. S. Lane (ed.), *Interpreting the Bible*, pp. 47-97; Max Engammare, "Calvin connaissait-il la Bible? Les citations de l'Écriture dans les sermons sur la Genèse," in *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 141 (1995), pp. 163-84; idem, "Joannes Calvinus trium linguarum peritus? La question de l'Hébreu," in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 58 (1996), pp. 35-60.

⁵⁴ David F. Wright "Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart, and Divine Accommodation in the Mosaic Harmony Commentary," in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 21 (1986), pp. 33-50; idem, "Calvin's 'Accommodation' Revisited," in Peter de Klerk (ed.), *Calvin as Exegete, Papers and Responses presented at the Ninth Colloquium on Calvin & Calvin Studies, May 20-22, 1993* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Studies Society, 1995), pp. 171-90; and "Calvin's Accommodating God," in Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong (eds.), *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex: Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion: Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung, vom 13. bis 16. September in Edinburgh* (Kirkville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), pp. 3-20.

⁵⁵ T. H. L. Parker, *The Preaching of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

sermons, that catalogues carefully the history of Calvin's preaching, and that offers balanced theological observations concerning the contents of the sermons. If only Parker had done more work comparing Calvin's preaching to the styles of his contemporaries. We also have a brief study by Kelly of themes in Calvin's sermons on II Samuel that demonstrates significant development in Calvin's political thought toward the end of his life.⁵⁶

6. Rhetorical and literary studies of Calvin: rhetorical study of Calvin has finally come into its own as a major direction for research. And, as in the other categories, we must make a careful distinction between the contextual and the ideological or dogmatic study. The benchmarks here are Girardin's work on the rhetorical character of Calvin's commentary on Romans, Higman's analysis of Calvin's French polemical treatises, and the magisterial work of Millet on the rhetoric of Calvin's Latin works.⁵⁷ Each of these works, Millet's in abundance, evidences a mastery of the context: the development and use of classical rhetoric by Calvin's humanistic teachers and his contemporaries, with attention to the precise ways in which Calvin used rhetorical forms like *copia*, *brevitas*, *amplificatio*, *inclusio*, and so forth.

On the dogmatic side of the study of Calvin's rhetoric, we count Bouwsma's essays and the recent monograph by Jones on *Calvin's Rhetoric of Piety*.⁵⁸ None of these studies—quite surprisingly in the case of Bouwsma—pays attention to the actual impact of Renaissance rhetorical forms on Calvin's patterns of expression and argumentation. Bouwsma proceeds as if rhetoric had no impact at all on Calvin's sermons and offers no detail in the examination of Calvin's place in the developing rhetorical tradition of the sixteenth century. Jones' work aims explicitly at the appropriation of findings on Calvin by modern theologians, seeks to illustrate a "rhetorical" as opposed to "systematic" method, and makes no effort at all to look at Calvin's context: Cicero becomes the touchstone for understanding Calvin, without any recognition of the varieties of Renaissance appropriation of the classical tradition not only from Cicero but also from Aristotle and Quintilian—and Calvin is depicted as

⁵⁶ Douglas Kelly, "Varied Themes in Calvin's 2 Samuel Sermons and the Development of His Thought," in Wilhelm Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong (eds.), *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*, pp. 209- 24.

⁵⁷ Francis Higman, *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Olivier Millet, *Calvin et la Dynamique de la Parole. Étude de rhétorique réformée* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1992).

⁵⁸ Serene Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

a theologian virtually lacking in “systematic method” given that nothing he does approximates modern conceptions of theological method.

Again, it is clear that there are two directions in the contemporary study of Calvin—one that promises to be fruitful in the illumination of Calvin’s thought and another that offers little more than a few words of generalized advice to contemporary theologians. The difficulty here, for contemporary Calvinians, is that well-designed studies of Calvin’s rhetoric demand that the modern historian cultivate knowledge of yet another discipline, and one not normally found in the contemporary scholars’ bag of tricks, namely, a knowledge of the content and the historical development of classical rhetoric as it was appropriated in the Renaissance and Reformation eras. This, of course, is the strength of Millet’s work.

We can also include here, precisely because it offers a clear sense of the detail that must be examined, Gilmont’s study of Calvin and the book.⁵⁹ Gilmont reconstructs and analyzes, among other things, the list of books that Calvin assembled for his work in Geneva (a significant adjunct to the 1572 catalogue of the library edited and annotated by Ganoczy). He also offers a study of the biblical text used by Calvin in relation to the various editions of the *Institutes* and the commentaries; a summary of the patristic texts used by Calvin; and a magisterial chapter on Calvin’s writing, dealing with issues ranging from his decisions to publish, his style and choice of language, and his manner of working. On this latter topic, Gilmont takes us farther into the patterns of Calvin’s work than anyone before has done, discussing in detail Calvin’s original autographs, his manner of dictation, and his approach to editing. Gilmont’s work offers a useful adjunct to the kind of rhetorical analysis that Millet has done—inasmuch as there is a necessary link between the style of exposition and the production, not to mention the appearance, of the finished product. Future Calvin studies will need to take more care to ask from Calvin’s original texts precisely what, given the sixteenth-century context and readership, Calvin intended his audience to learn from the pages of his work.

By way of conclusion—Calvin research is certainly moving forward. But it is also moving backward or at least down various pre-established dogmatic *cul de sacs*. And, as Calvin himself might put it, researchers will have to choose between the abyss on one hand and an “order of right teaching” on the other. We do have the inspiration of some very fine text-work, most notably on Calvin’s previously

⁵⁹ Jean-François Gilmont, *Jean Calvin et le livre imprimé* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1997).

unpublished sermons; some exemplary archival spade-work, as illustrated beautifully by the first volume of *Registres*; a series of highly illuminating studies of Calvin's exegetical results set in the context trajectories and patterns of late medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation biblical interpretation; and some detailed studies of Calvin's thought in its historical context, as evidenced among others, by the just noted-work of Millet. Calvin's rhetoric will surely continue to be a fruitful area of study—provided those who address the subject will follow Millet's example and learn sixteenth-century rhetoric! Hopefully, too, there will be more careful historical and contextual study of Calvin's exegesis, preaching, and theology. Here studies of Calvin's on-going ecclesiastical work in Geneva and analyses of his exegesis and preaching ought to serve as guides to theological study and, given the sense of context they can provide, as salutary barriers to dogmatism and ideology. We also surely need to see some concentrated biographical work in the next decade. Where there is text (and I leave you with this thought because we now have more text than ever!) there is hope.