Was John Calvin a 'Rhetorical Theologian'?

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Rhetoric has become something of a 'flavour of the month' in Calvin studies. Most recently Serene Jones has written on *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (1995), but too soon to take account of the mammoth work of Olivier Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique de la parole. Étude de rhétorique réformée* (1992), partly summarised in his 1994 Edinburgh Congress paper, "Docere/Movere': Les catégories rhétoriques et leurs sources humanistes dans la doctrine calvinienne de la foi". A few years earlier one of the main thrusts of William Bouwsma's *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (1988) was trailed in advance by part of one chapter's presentation under the title "Calvinism as *Theologia Rhetorica*" as the core text of a Colloquy of Berkeley's Center for Hermeneutical Studies (1986). In the 1970s appeared Benoît Girardin's monograph *Rhétorique et théologique: Calvin, le commentaire de l' Epître aux Romains* (1979) and David Willis's essay, "Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology" (1974), which like other studies pays special tribute to Quirinus Breen. The latter's earlier book *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism* (1931) was followed in 1957 by an article on "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition". Other volumes had focussed on Calvin's humanism after Breen, notably Josef Bohatec's *Budé und Calvin* (1950), and François Wendel's *Calvin et l'humanisme* (1976), to say nothing of

the extensive labours on *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's 'De clementia'* by Ford Lewis Battles and A.M. Hugo (1969). Worthy of more than a bare mention is Francis Higman's most judicious analysis of *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* (1967).[1]

If the focus of this brief survey has shifted back from rhetoric to humanism, this may serve as a reminder that this more recent concentration on rhetoric in Calvin is but a narrowing of interest in his undoubted humanist formation. This latter needs no labouring here, but two brief comments are in order.

First, a more precise preoccupation with the rhetorical elements in Calvin's intellectual training in France may lead to fresh understanding of some facets of his exposure to humanism, as we shall shortly see Millet proposing. But secondly, and more to the converse, the two terms 'rhetorical' and 'humanist' seem at times almost interchangeable, to our confusion rather than enlightenment. A carefully differentiated use of the two epithets (and their nouns) will assist clarity of discussion. However large rhetoric may have loomed within humanism, it did not exhaust it. One thinks of the fundamental philological and textual pursuits of humanists from Valla to Erasmus which do not obviously fall under rhetoric.

Here is Olivier Millet's definition:

> Rhetoric, as a tradition inherited from antiquity, cultivated without interruption in the Middle Ages and revitalised at the Renaissance, is the doctrine which in practice is entirely concerned with the exercise of speech [whether written or spoken], *to the degree to which it wishes to be effective*, that is to say, persuasive.[2]

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1 . Serene Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (Columbia Series in Reformed Theology; Louisville, KY, 1995); Olivier Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique de la parole. Étude de rhétorique réformée* (Bibliothèque littéraire de la Renaissance, ser. 3:28; Paris, 1992); id., "Docere/Movere: Les catégories rhétoriques et leurs sources humanistes dans la doctrine calvinienne de la foi", in W.H. Neuser and B.G. Armstrong (eds), *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* (Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 36; Kirksville, MO, 1997), 35- 51; William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York, 1988); id., *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, ed. William Wuellner, *Protocol of the Fifty-fourth Colloquy*: 28 September 1986, Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture (Berkeley, CA, 1987); Benoît Girardin, "Rhétorique et théologique: Calvin, le commentaire de l' Epître aux Romains" (Théologie historique 54; Paris, 1979); E. David Willis, "Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology", in A.J. McKelway and E.D. Willis (eds), *The Context of Contemporary Theology. Essays in Honor of Paul Lehmann* (Atlanta, GA, 1974), 43-63; Quirinus Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1931); id., "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition", *Church History 26* (1957), 3-21; Josef Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin. Studien zur Gedankenwelt des französischen Humanismus* (Graz, 1950); F. Wendel, *Calvin et l' humanisme* (Cahiers de la Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses 45; Paris, 1976); *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's 'De clementia'*, ed. and transl. F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo (Renaissance Society of America, Renaissance Text Series 3; Leiden, 1969); F. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* (Oxford, 1967).

2 Millet, 'Docere/Movere', 35 (conference translation, as in all the quotations given here).

Rhetoric had its classical ancient *fontes* - chiefly a handful of works of Cicero, the Ps-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, together with book 4 of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* - and a wide range of modern textbooks and manuals to which Calvin would have been generously exposed in France — by Mathurin Cordier, Guillaume Budé, Andreas Alciati, Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus and others.

'The New Germanic Rhetoric'

It is one of the distinctions of Millet's *maximum opus* (which it will surely take students of Calvin no little time to assimilate) to draw attention to the currency at Paris in the early 1530s of what he calls "the new rhetoric" issuing from Germanic humanism.[3] Its leading exponents at Paris were Jean Sturm (1507-89) from the Rhineland (later distinguished as the head of the new educational system in Strasbourg, whence he joined Bucer and Capito in inviting the displaced pastor from Geneva in 1538), and Bartholomaeus Latomus (c. 1498-1570), a native of Luxembourg who had taught at Fribourg, Cologne and Louvain - and who later became not a colleague of Bucer's but his determined counter-reform opponent. The teaching and writings of Sturm and Latomus were inspired especially by the works of Rodolphus Agricola and Philipp Melanchthon. Sturm's rhetorical publications in the early 1530s in Paris were largely editions of Cicero and the Greek rhetor Hermogenes, but Latomus published an *Epitome* of Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* in the year in which he became the royal reader (regius professor) of Latin eloquence in Paris, 1534. He had earlier, at Cologne in 1527, issued a handbook entitled *Summa totius rationis disserendi uno eodemque corpore et dialecticas et rhetoricas partes complectens*.[4] Soon after his settlement in Strasbourg, in 1539, Jean Sturm's *Partitionum dialecticarum libri duo* came out in both Strasbourg and Paris, the fruit of his years of teaching in the latter city.[5]

These titles alert us to a distinctive character of Millet's 'new rhetoric', which he can also call 'the new dialectic'. Paris saw within the years 1522-34 at least twelve

[3] For what follows see Millet, *Calvin et al dynamique*, 113-35.

[4] Latomus' *Epitome* probably appeared in Paris earlier in 1531, 1532 and 1533, along with Cologne editions from 1530. For the *Summa*, *Epitome* and *Artificium dialecticum et rhetoricum* see *Bibliotheca Belgica*, ed. F. Van der Haeghen, Marie-Thérèse Lenger, III (Brussells, 1964), 720-40.

[5] See Jean Rott, "Bibliographie des oeuvres imprimées du recteur strasbourgeois Jean Sturm (1507-1589)", *Actes du 95e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes (Reims, 1970). Section de philologie et d'histoire jusqu' à 1610* (Paris, 1975), I: 318-404.

editions of the three successive versions of Melanchthon's *Rhetorica* and at least four of the two versions of his *Dialectica*. (Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* (and Latomus's *Epitome*) lessened the demand for Melanchthon's treatise on dialectic.) Before us here is not the old-fashioned dialectic of the scholastics, from which the rhetorical humanists of the Renaissance had so definitively parted company. Agricola's treatise expounds ground rules for rhetoric as well as dialectic, or if you like a rhetorically oriented dialectic, conceived as an *ars disserendi*, modelled on court-room discourse, in which not formal deductive logic but the clarity and evidence of the argument carries the weight. "The logic is contained within the rhetoric", as stated by Agricola's modern editor. [6]

Melanchthon was a discriminating pupil of Agricola, and further accents the methodological and pedagogic slant of the new dialectic, which he defines as *ars, seu via, recte, ordine et perspicue docendi*, still distinguished from rhetoric, which is *via ac ratio recte et ornate dicendi* (which in turn he distinguishes from eloquence, *facultas sapienter et ornate dicendi*).[7] Nevertheless, there is evident in Melanchthon a genuine degree of assimilation of dialectic to rhetoric. Millet stresses, as particularly relevant to the style of Calvin's prose, the decisive quality of clarity, and the disciplining and channeling of the resources of rhetoric by the didactic aim.

> It is a measured style, intellectually lucid, always controlled by an efficacious economy of arguments and ideas. The grand style, with its ornament and movement, is not excluded, but it is subordinated to the evidence of the arguments which the writer orders clearly, in the logical and restrained unity of a sentence or a paragraph.[8]

In the round, Calvin's style will be markedly different from Melanchthon's, but nevertheless "one can recognise certain essential features" of Calvin's prose expression. Millet notes that the only previous writer to suggest a link between Calvin's prose style and the 'rhetorical logic' of Agricola, Sturm and Melanchthon is Francis Higman in analysing Calvin's French polemical treatises. This relationship between logic and rhetoric was worked out in terms of teaching.[9]

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[6] W. Risse, cited by Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique*, 126.

[7] Cited Millet, *ibid.*, 127-8, from *Corpus Reformatorum* 13, 419, 417-18.

[8] Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique*, 135 (my translation).

[9] Millet, ibid., 135; Higman, *Style of John Calvin*, 45.

The Didactic Genre

Millet traces in a few dense pages the emergence in the successive versions of Melanchthon's *Rhetorica* of a fourth rhetorical genre, in addition to the three classical genres, deliberative, forensic or judicial, demonstrative or epideictic.[10] It is first a *genus dialecticum* but then becomes (1531) a *genus didascalicon*, a didactic genus of rhetorical speech. It still "pertains to dialectic" but, according to Melanchthon,

> at the present time has its greatest use in the churches, where not only are persuasive sermons to be given but much more often people have to be taught in the manner of dialectics about the dogmas of religion, so that they can know them perfectly.[11]

Melanchthon picks up the didactic genre also in his treatise *De officiis concionatoris* in the later 1530s, where it is focussed especially on a thematic method in teaching and preaching which comprehensively covers the sum of Christian doctrine - guidelines which seem addressed directly to the author of the *Institutio*, comments Millet.[12]

Millet devotes two chapters to this new Melanchthonian dialectical rhetoric partly because he believes that it has not been given due significance in its Parisian reception (Sturm and Latomus) but also because he discerns telling parallels with Calvin's written corpus, not least the *Institutio*. After tracing how Latomus in particular enriched the didactic genre, not least in overcoming Melanchthon's disdain for polemics by linking it with the demonstrative/epideictic style, Millet draws attention to its suggestiveness for making sense of the compositions of Calvin. Breen had declared that the *Institutio* is "a tissue of forensic, deliberative and epideictic discourse,"[13] and now Millet will add the doctrinal or didactic to the *mélange*. For Calvin's treatises he fastens especially on the marriage of judicial/forensic rhetoric and the doctrinal genre. Latomus's *Summa* "illustrates... the fusion of the twofold rhetorical culture, on the one hand classical and essentially judicial, and on the other "dialectical" and modern, of which Calvin was the heir."[14] Such a pointer is not irrelevant to the concerns of this paper.

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[10] For what follows, see Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique*, 137-51.

[11] Cited Millet, ibid., 139 from *Corpus Reformatorum* 13: 421 (my translation).

[12] Millet, ibid., 140.

[13] Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism*, 2nd edit. (Hamden, C.T, 1968), 168 n.4.

[14] Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique*, 151 (my translation). In one of the responses to Bouwsma's Colloquy paper, Karl-Heinz zur Muehlen questioned his sharp dichotomy between rhetoric and dialectic, citing the necessary connection between the two in Melanchthon; *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, 54-7.

Calvin's Rhetorical Formation

If there is no questioning the depth and thoroughness of Calvin's immersion in humanism, so too no doubt can be entertained about his devotion throughout his reforming career to the effective, persuasive communication of Christian truth, whether as preacher, lecturer, counselor, deliverer of admonitions, disputant, polemicist, and so on. The widespread pervasiveness of his familiarity with and use of rhetoric is inescapable. To quote Millet's Edinburgh lecture:

> This rhetorical dimension concerns not only the literary forms employed by Calvin, but also the methods and procedures of reasoning, the exact significance and status of utterances, the processes in the preparation of a discourse, and finally the ways in which it is delivered...Thus rhetoric is present everywhere... even in the hermeneutical rules which govern the interpretation of biblical texts.[15]

This generalised judgement assumes the enlarged scope of the rhetorical matrix in which Calvin was reared, with its inclusion of the new Melanchthonian rhetorical dialectic. Millet's probings point to fresh research possibilities - and Tony Lane has more recently drawn attention to the relative neglect of Calvin's relation to Melanchthon in studies of Calvin.[16]

One important question emerges: to what extent, if at all, do rhetorical categories and procedures determine the content of Calvin's teaching, as well as the forms in which it is presented? Millet himself poses this question and while proceeding to spell out one model of an affirmative answer, urges caution in the use of "too facile or too vague a term such as "rhetorical theology"."[17] This phrase has been applied to Calvin's theology at least since David Willis's essay of 1974,[18] and the usage appears to be increasing in frequency. How valid is it?

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[15] Millet, *'Docere / Movere'*, 35, 36.

[16] In the translation of Calvin's *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* which he has edited (Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought 2; Carlisle and Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), 3 n.1.

[17] Millet, *'Docere / Movere'*, 36.

[18] The actual phrase is used only in a sub-heading, Willis, "Rhetoric and Responsibility" (n. 1 above), 50. Cf. Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 14: "The rhetorical culture of Renaissance humanism left a profound mark on every aspect of Calvin's mature thought." Bouwsma, *ibid.* (cited by Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric*, 16), reports that Calvin was asked to teach rhetoric at a convent in Bourges while studying there. His (unidentified) source is presumably E. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps* I (Lausanne, 1899), 168, who took the information from one of the small pamphlets of the local savant Nicolas Catherinot (1628-88) entitled *Le calvinisme de Berry* (issued in November 1684). On Catherinot see the "Bibliographie raisonée..." by Jacques Flach in *Nouvelle revue historique de droit français et étranger* 7 (1883), 73-98, at 88 no. 97.

The Humanists' Theologia Rhetorica

The term seems to have been introduced into this field of discourse by Charles Trinkaus in 1970 in his study *'In Our Image and Likeness': Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*.[19] There it is predicated of Renaissance writers such as Lorenzo Valla and the lesser-known Aurelio Brandolini, chiefly in respect of their espousal of rhetoric, rather than logic/dialectic/philosophy, as the favoured handmaid of theology. The humanists themselves cannot be shown to have used the precise phrase *theologia rhetorica*, but Trinkaus found a partial anticipation in Nicholas of Cusa's *theologia sermocinalis*:

> namely where we receive speeches concerning God and the power of a word is not entirely excluded, there you have reduced a sufficiency of difficult matters into an easiness of mode in forming truer propositions about God... Hence this is *sermocinalis theologia* in which I strive to lead you towards God through the power of speech in a manner in which I can more easily and more truthfully do it.[20]

Cusa's definition, says Trinkaus, "will more than suffice for our term *theologia rhetorica*" - which may not take us very far. Later with reference to Brandolini he calls it

> the humanist thesis that since matters of faith cannot be proved by logic, they must be induced by rhetoric - the word of man in the service of the Word of God.[21]

He quotes Brandolini to helpful effect:

> Certainly the end of [rhetoric] is to persuade and its art lies in speaking aptly for the sake of persuasion, and nothing is so incredible that (as Cicero said) it cannot be made probable by speaking. Indeed, I do not see how divine matters, which not only exceed all our faith but our thinking also, can be written or pronounced so that they are approved by the people without the greatest power and eloquence of speech. For who has such facility of mind that, when he hears either that a man was born of a virgin without sexual intercourse, or that the entire body of Christ is enclosed in the tiny figure of the host, or that there are three persons in one substance, which are all positions of our dogma, he can easily be induced to

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[19] Chicago and London, 1970, 2 vols (pagination continuous). For what follows see I: 126-9, 141-3, 298-9, 305-7, II: 601-3, 610-13, 770. Trinkaus is using for Valla chiefly his *De vero bono* (1431, 1433). On the highly versatile Neapolitan Brandolini (c.1454-1497), known as 'Lippo' because half-blind, see A. Rotondò in *Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani* 14 (1972), 26-8. Trinkaus refers here especially to his retelling of the Old Testament, *In sacram ebreorum historiam*.

[20] Trinkaus, *'In Our Image and Likeness'*, I:127-8. See also *idem.*, *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1983), 254, where Trinkaus (in a conference paper of 1972 first published in 1974) cites Coluccio Salutati's description of his own discipline as *scientia sermocinalis* or *philosophia sermocinalis*.

[21] Trinkaus, *'In Our Image and Likeness'*, II: 611.

> believe? The greatest rhetorical power and infinite eloquence is needed for persuading of this, which indeed cannot be done without eloquence.[22]

The general drift is clear enough. Two years later Trinkaus found *theologia rhetorica* best exemplified in Erasmus, adducing his late work on the Christian preacher, *Ecclesiastes*.[23] This approach to Erasmus has been pursued by other writers, especially Marjorie Rourke O'Boyle and Manfred Hoffmann, the former basing herself centrally on Erasmus's *Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam*, [24] the latter on both the *Ratio* and the *Ecclesiastes*. This is Hoffmann's expansive definition in *Rhetoric and Theology. The Hermeneutic of Erasmus*:

> Erasmus...espoused what can be called *theologia rhetorica*. He committed himself to returning theology to its scriptural sources by means of the art of rhetoric, that is, by the knowledge of ancient languages and the humanist interpretation of literature. Purified in this way from textual corruption and liberated from misguided comments, Scripture would regain the original power of its divine authority. Its essential message, the philosophy of Christ, would engender the restitution of Christianity to its genuine ethos - much the same as it would restore nature to its original goodness. God's word would regenerate Christians to become believers who realise true religion in the world.[25]

It is from the perspective of his 'rhetorical theology' that Hoffmann believes Erasmus is best understood. His book unfolds a forceful characterization of the sophisticated hermeneutics of this "rhetorical theologian imitating the divine speaker and his manner of speaking."[26]

At first sight, to judge from this paragraph from Hoffmann, Erasmus's program might seem not too much different from that of another *soi-disant* rhetorical theologian, John Calvin. Yet a common nomenclature does not narrow the gulf between the two. (There is no evidence that Calvin sought out Erasmus in the last months of the latter's life at Basel.) What the impressive label 'rhetorical theologian'

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[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Trinkaus, *Scope*, 257-8. He suggests that in Erasmus *theologia rhetorica* and a *theologia philologica* combined to make Cusa's *theologia sermocinalis*. This approach to religion had important echoes in Calvin (258).

[24] Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto and Buffalo, 1977), especially 117-27.

[25] Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology. The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1994), 5.

[26] *Ibid.*, 59-60, 126. The trend in Erasmian studies to treat him seriously as a theologian is defended by Peter Walter, *Theologie aus dem Geist der Rhetorik. Zur Schriftauslegung des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Tübinger Studien zur Theologie und Philosophie 1; Mainz, 1991), 16-26, especially against J. Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Erasme*, 2 vols (Paris, 1981), I: 16- 24.

conceals even in Hoffmann's attractive portrait of Erasmus - for example, a basically Platonic dualism in which allegory bridges the divine and human realms should, as Millet cautions, at least give us pause before we pin it on Calvin.

Millet enunciates two precautions which we should do well to note at this point. In the first place, rhetoric was able to serve Calvin as an intellectual model in working out in his mind the substance of theological doctrine *to that extent, and only to that extent*, that rhetorical tradition puts forward categories capable of shedding light on the divine revelation as a process of effective verbal communication between God as divine speaker and human beings (specifically believing humans) as hearers of the divine word. In the second place, there cannot be, for all sorts of reasons, any direct transposition from rhetoric to the Christian doctrine of revelation.

These are "in certain aspects two incommensurable realities," so that any "recourse to the rhetorical model of communication results in an indirect and complex transposition of the categories in question."[27]

I suspect that these precautions are less limiting than Millet supposes. The rhetorical shaping of Calvin's theology might cover, *ex hypothesi*, a wide range of the heads of theological discourse, including God the revealer and his self-revelation in prophecy and incarnation, the divine Word spoken and written, some aspects at least of anthropology, together with church ministry of teaching, preaching and sacraments, along with parts of pneumatology, and the human response focussed in faith. And overarching or undergirding it could well be some general convictions about theology itself.

The rest of this paper will focus on three issues that emerge from the literature I have been surveying in this paper. My discussion will reflect undeniable unease with the accents of some of these writers while at the same time treading with some caution, seeking firm ground on which to take a stand. Above all I hope to contribute to a clarification of the terms of this emerging debate about the character of Calvin's theology.

Faith as Persuasion

This was claimed briefly as an aspect of Calvin's rhetorical theology in David Willis's prescient 1974 essay.[28] Millet develops the argument at length both in his book and in

[27] Millet, *'Docere / Movere'*, 36.

[28] Willis, "Rhetoric and Responsibility', 50-52.

his Edinburgh Congress paper.[29] His case makes two main points, which I suggest should be distinguished, even if they cannot be kept separate. One is a philological one, that Greek πιστις is badly rendered in Latin by *fides* and that *persuasio* would be altogether more appropriate. This had been argued lucidly by Bucer in *loci* on faith, notably in his Romans and Gospels commentaries. The latter *locus communis*, following the display of the Capernaum centurion's 'such great faith' (Matthew 8:5-13), analyses the Hebrew, Greek and Latin terms, appeals to Valla's opinion with a glowing tribute to Valla himself (*non sui modo saeculi miraculum*), and records that Guillaume Budé, *immortale decus Galliarum*, subscribed to Valla's judgement - that *pistis* should ideally be rendered *persuasio*.[30]

Calvin in *Institutio* 3:2:7 reasons his way to a similar definition of faith:

> firm and certain knowledge [*cognitio*] of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

He reaches this by engagement with the biblical evidence and distorted scholastic and Roman viewpoints, without invoking linguistic arguments at all. Nevertheless he may well be dependent on Bucer, and through him on Bucer's authorities, as Millet claims. With Calvin the sequence of thought appears more as an internal reflection on biblical usage and sometimes vocabulary.

This first point of philology or definition is combined by Millet with a second, larger claim, that Calvin's understanding of faith as persuasion is elaborated by means of a transposition (not a direct application) of the rhetorical doctrine of persuasion, which identifies the three roles of the orator as *docere*, *conciliare* and *movere*. In Calvin the 'teaching' function is parallel to the external word of the preacher, the *conciliatio* is transposed into the illumination of the Spirit, "whose role (so Millet argues) is to establish, or rather re-establish, the authority of God and his word with the faithful," and the "moving" is represented by the *affectus* which alone seals the word on human hearts and stirs them to obedience.[31]

The force of Millet's case cannot be adequately displayed in an essay. It requires close evaluation with the texts open before one. Before raising some

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[29] Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique*, especially 212-24; *'Docere / Movere', passim.*

[30] Ibid., 37-42; Bucer, *Enarrationes Perpetuae in sacra quatuor Evangelia...* (Strasbourg, 1530), ff. 86v-89r, especially 86v. The locus on faith from Bucer's 1536 Romans commentary is translated in my *Common Places of Martin Bucer* (Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 4; Appleford, 1972), 171-200.

[31] Millet, *'Docere / Movere'*, 37, 42-4, etc.

questions about it, let me draw attention to the twofold contribution of Augustine to Millet's argument. The Calvinian transposition of the oratorical schema goes back to the Augustinian original in *De Doctrina Christiana* 4, where the African bishop cites the threeford function of the rhetor (*docere, delectare, movere*[32]), and stresses that all three are effective only as God works through human agency. Secondly, "the keystone of Calvin's doctrine of faith as *persuasio*" is the Augustinian idea of Christ or the Spirit as the *interior magister*, from *De Magistro* or perhaps *De Trinitate*. This point may be another original contribution by Millet, for although Jean Cadier asserted precisely this dependence on Augustine in 1954, it does not seem to have been incorporated into the bloodstream of Calvinian learning.[33] Luchesius Smits' two volumes record no Calvinian references or allusions to *De Magistro* at all, which should make us pause, as should the fact that Augustine does not actually use the phrase *interior magister* in the work (as Millet notes). The other puzzling aspect of Calvin's indebtedness to Augustine is that of his handful and a half references or echoes of *De Doctrina Christiana* 4 (there are many more to the three earlier books), none picks up the specific rhetorical discussion of Augustine.[34] Calvin is, to be sure, notoriously reticent to name the writers he draws upon or dissents from, but Millet should not be too insistent on this point.

I remain unconvinced by Millet's demonstration of the Calvinian transposition of the Ciceronian model in his presentation of faith as persuasion. The "fit" is not persuasive, the fluidity is too pervasive. Let me briefly expose what might seem the most coercive textual evidence Millet advances when, in commenting on Psalm 143:10 ('Teach me that I may do your will..., may your good Spirit lead me...') Calvin explicitly enumerates three *magistri officia*: God "instructs us by his word, enlightens our minds by the Spirit, and engraves instruction upon our hearts, so as to bring us to observe it with a true and cordial consent." Augustine cites this verse in *De Doctrina Christiana* 4:16:33. Millet emphasises that we are dealing here with transposition, not least from a human orator (in Cicero and still Augustine) to a divine agent of persuasion. But the Spirit's illumination of minds is nowhere near Ciceronian *delectatio* or *conciliatio*, and Calvin often enough distinguishes between only two operations — the teacher's or preacher's address of words to human ears, and the

[32] in Cicero *delectare* is standard rather than *conciliare*

[33] Millet, *ibid.*, 47-8; Jean Cadier, "Calvin et saint Augustin", in *Augustinus Magister* (Paris, 1954), II, 1039-56 at 1043: "Calvin emprunte à saint Augustin sa notion du Maître intérieur" (*Institution*, IV, xiv, 9).'

[34] See L. Smits, *Saint Augustin dans l' oeuvre de Jean Calvin*, 2 vols (Assen, 1957-58), II: 171.

swaying of the mind or heart which alone issues in obedience — not three. Millet seems tacitly to recognize this by constant reference to the twofold *docere / movere* contrast, but the diversity of terminology and imagery that Calvin uses in contexts like this resists assimilation, even to this simplified model.[35]

Furthermore, Calvin will frequently attribute the response of faith to the teaching itself. Listen, for example, to his comments on Acts 8:6, where "the Samaritans embraced the teaching of Philip":

> As hearing is the beginning (*exordium*) of faith, so it would not be sufficient in itself, if the *doctrinae maiestas* did not influence our souls at the same time.... The teaching itself that is contained in God's Word acquires (*acquiret*) authority for itself; so attention will spring spontaneously from hearing... Luke commends the force and effectiveness of the preaching in the fact that a great number of people was suddenly made to listen seriously with common consent.[36]

How Calvin speaks of oral teaching is not unimportant. For Augustine, of course, it is the purely external human word, and Calvin sometimes appears to speak likewise. In commenting on 2 Corinthians 3:6, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life," he not only takes 'letter' to be "an external preaching which does not reach the heart... literal preaching which is dead and ineffective and perceived only by the ear," but insists that it is "death-giving."[37] But more frequently, as in the exposition of Psalm 143 above, human instruction is divine address to the hearer.

Millet draws out the significance of his case in the following terms:

> In describing the process of faith born in preaching as a process of plenary persuasion in which the *docere* has to be cogently relayed by the *movere*, and in having recourse for this to ideas or schemas serving to describe that genuine eloquence which truly brings conviction, Calvin is only showing forth his humanistic culture. Following Budé and Bucer, he invites us to find in the *Verbum Dei* a truth which is also power. Moreover this pattern which is biblical, and especially Pauline, is expressed in language which makes constant allusions to rhetorico-humanist culture.[38]

Two substantial reflections are called for. In the first place, I question whether Millet gives sufficient prominence to the biblical inspiration of the field of discourse

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[35] Millet, *'Docere / Movere'*, 47-8. The parallel would be more compelling if Calvin had used the verse thus aside from his commentary. Are we to suppose that in compiling his commentary Calvin recalled Augustine's quotation of the verse *en passant*? Contrary to Millet's claim, Augustine does not comment on the verse, which is one of a catena compiled to make his point.

[36] *Calvini Opera* 48, 177-8; tr. W.J.G. McDonald, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, ad loc. (Edinburgh, 1965), 230.

[37] *Calvin Opera* 50, 39-41; tr. T.A. Smail, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, ad loc.* (Edinburgh, 1964), 42-3.

[38] Millet, *'Docere / Movere'*, 50-51.

under consideration here. Readers should revisit *Institutio* 3:2 to determine how much of it is driven by, or framed in terms of, Calvin's 'rhetorico-humanistic culture' rather than Scripture and earlier theological formulations. This question widens out into a second, which focusses on the methodological criteria for conducting this investigation of Calvin's rhetorical make-up. Serene Jones cites *Institutio* 1:2:2, "Our knowledge should serve first to teach us fear and reverence; secondly, with it as our guide and teacher, we should learn to seek every good from him, and, having received it, to credit it to his account." She then comments as follows:

> Turning to 'us', Calvin again exploits the technical language of oratory to describe a contrasting form of knowledge that serves as "our guide and teacher" (*dux ac magister*) and thereby "teaches us fear and reverence" in the hope that "we should learn to seek every good from him."[39]

Where is "the technical language of oratory"? Her note at this point speaks of Calvin's "pedagogical vocabulary," citing simply the phrases from Calvin's text that her comment quotes.[40] When in *Institutio* 1:2:1 Calvin states that we need to be "persuaded that [God] is the fountain of every good," the mere use of the verb *persuadere* is sufficient to recall Cicero's *Orator* and "its emphasis on persuasive dimensions of understanding."[41]

At times in Jones' book one feels that every mention of teaching and persuading and every reference to dispositions or affective states (fear, hope, hatred, praise, etc. etc.) and their encouragement or discouragement are rhetorically determined.[42] If this is so, then we are mired in a creeping pan-rhetoricism in which, if everything is rhetorical, then nothing is rhetorical. Bouwsma illustrates his claim that Calvin recognised the Bible to be "throughout a rhetorical document" by quoting this comment of Calvin's:

> Because bare history would not be enough, indeed would be of no value for salvation, the Evangelists do not simply narrate that Christ was born, died and conquered death, but at the same time they explain for what purpose he was born, died, and rose again, and what benefit thence comes to us.

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[39] Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric*, 138.

[40] *Ibid.*, 152-3 n.20.

[41] *Ibid.*, 131.

[42] Cf. *ibid.*, 29. When "Calvin addresses "us" with a specific end in view, namely, the turning of ourselves over to God..." (*Inst.* 1:2:1), his "concern to transform the audience dispositionally in the process of addressing them also finds its parallel in the civic context of Cicero's discussion of oration", *ibid.*, 134.

This shows to Bouwsma that "The Evangelists were not annalists but artists."[43] There are presumably other options - perhaps they were evangelists, as Calvin makes plain in his *Congrégation* on John 1:1-5.[44] Millet's more erudite tome is not above evoking a similar reaction, as he chalks up this or that parallel or equivalent to *docere* and *movere*. Oddly enough, I do not think he ever displays both actual words together in an appropriate context in Calvin. There is, to be sure, a problem when the words in question are so basic and common, but this fact alone requires that we face it squarely and establish credible criteria for handling it.

God as Rhetorician

I turn to a second theological topic in this enquiry whether Calvin is a rhetorical theologian. Professor Jones repeatedly refers to God as "the Grand Rhetorician" or "the Grand Orator," a usage which is paralleled less brazenly in other writers like Millet. For Jones, the content of God's rhetoric whereby he persuades us, his "captive audience," is the history of his acts on humanity's behalf, speech which reaches us in the tangible forms of Scripture, creation and Christ.

> When viewed through the lens of classical rhetoric then, the 'powers' [*virtutes Dei*, *Inst.* 1:2:1] represent the content of the orator's argument, or *inventio*, and the three mediating sources of scripture, creation, and Christ the Mediator appear as the ornamentation of God's actual rhetoric. In other words, these mediating sources represent the style, rhythm, tone, and texture of God's discourse.[45]

Here we may encounter nothing more worrying than the exaggeration of the significance of imagery - for exaggeration it certainly is when Calvin's description of "the way we come to the knowledge of God" (cf. *Inst.* 1:2:1) is read by Jones as "suggesting the scene of a public oration," an "oratorical scene."[46] From another angle, we touch again on my recent general question about analytical criteria: What justifies the interpreter of Calvin in treating his language of speech as reflecting a rhetorical portrait of God?

From Calvin's depiction of God as the Grand Rhetorician, Jones draws the deduction that God's spokespersons must be effective rhetoricians also

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[43] *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, 7 (= *John Calvin*, 121), citing the Argumentum of the commentary on John's Gospel, *Calvini Opera* 47, vii.

[44] *Calvin Opera* 47, 466-9.

[45] Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric*, 133-4; "rhetoric is not just descriptive of Calvin's activity in constructing the text; it is also determinative of the conceptual arena from which his doctrine of God emerges" (134). Cf. *ibid.*, 28, 144-5, 187.

[46] *Ibid.*, 133.

> Theologians are required to write eloquently... The rhetoric of theology must be persuasive and hence accommodating because God's own word is inherently persuasive and accommodative.... For Calvin, the practice of constructing rhetorically eloquent theology mirrors the persuasive character of God.[47]

These statements, and the drift of thought they represent, call for a series of comments.

First of all, Calvin's assessments at various places in his writings of the role of human eloquence by no means support the conclusion Jones draws from her Grand-Orator theology. Indeed, on some such occasions Calvin in the most explicit terms grounds the powerful persuasion of the divine Word precisely in the absence of rhetorical gloss. In *De Scandalis* he addresses the 'scandal' of cultured disdain for Scripture's unpretentious language and unpolished style. He will not yield an inch. Paul contends, he asserts, that

> where there is no brilliant oratory to blind people the heavenly wisdom blazes forth all the more powerfully... [He] teaches [that] faith is properly founded on the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit only when human minds are not captivated by elegance of speech and clever artifice... Of course, if the teaching of John or Paul had been embellished with all the colorfulness of a Demosthenes or a Cicero, perhaps it would have possessed more attractiveness for winning (*alliciendos*) readers; but of its power for moving consciences and its value for gaining authority for itself not even one percent would be left.... We may take this as our principle, that no philosophers can argue so keenly as to be more powerful in persuading us, that no orators can influence us more forcibly with their fulminations, than Scripture with its plain, unvarnished style.[48]

On 1 Corinthians 1:17 ("Christ sent me...to preach the gospel, not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power"), Calvin unfolds an extended thoughtful discussion, whose balance is not always reflected by selected quotation. For example, his affirmation that *artes* like eloquence are *praeclara...Dei dona* is made in a paragraph which commends their usefulness for "the general affairs of human society," before he confronts the "slightly more difficult question" of the place of eloquence in the preaching of the gospel.[49] Calvin first sets Paul's emphasis in its Corinthian context; the Corinthians' passion for "high-sounding talk" had to be deflated. Yet, more generally, "from the beginning God has so arranged it

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[47] *Ibid.*, 187.

[48] *Opera Selecta* II: 170-71; tr. John W. Fraser, *Concerning Scandals* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1978), 16. We may note *en passant*, how, in this last sentence, the dialectical and rhetorical are linked. In this passage, Calvin refers to 1 Corinthians 2 and 4 and 2 Corinthians 4, where further reflections on this topic are to be found and a note more favorable to eloquence is sounded.

[49] *Calvini Opera* 49: 321. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric*, 27, cites out of context.

that the gospel should be handled stripped of any support from eloquence," for reasons we have noted already in *De Scandalis*. "Could not he who designs human tongues for eloquence be himself skilful in speech if he wished? While he could be so, he did not choose to be so." What price the Grand Rhetorician in the sky? Calvin asks

> But what if someone in our day speaks in a somewhat more polished (*nitidius*) fashion and makes the teaching of the gospel sparkle with his eloquence?... I answer first of all that eloquence is not in conflict with the simplicity of the gospel at all, when, free from contempt of the gospel, it not only gives it first place, and is subject to it, but also serves it as a handmaid serves her mistress... We must not condemn or reject it, because...its aim is to call us back to the pristine simplicity of the gospel, to set on high the preaching of the cross and nothing else by humbling itself of its own accord, and finally, to carry out, as it were, the duties of a herald, to obtain a hearing for those fishermen and uneducated common people, who have nothing attractive about them except the power of the Spirit.[50]

There is room at the present time for a modest monograph in English setting out what Calvin had to say about rhetoric and eloquence. A good start could be made with the material collected in Wencelius's *L'esthétique de Calvin*.[51] Most of Calvin's remarks are triggered, as we might expect, by the content or the characteristics of Scripture, with its mostly austere unvarnished style.

It is worth noting in this connection that the plain unadorned visage of the Bible was something of a stumbling-block to those humanists of whom rhetorical theology was originally predicated. Brandolini, for example, was bothered by why Jerome, that eloquent Christian rhetorician, left the Bible so crudely literal when he translated it. Brandolini's own re-writing of sacred history was intended to deck out the Bible with some literary and rhetorical flourish. There was no need to be stuck with Jerome for ever.[52] To Erasmus too the *rusticitas* of the Scriptures was something of a snag, even for his theory of biblical allegory, for which the biblical letter was its carnality, its fleshly character, separated by a chasm from its spirit. "Break through the husk and extract the kernel," as he put it in different imagery. When we find Erasmus advising "Of the interpreters of divine Scripture choose those especially who depart as much as possible from the literal sense," we become aware how generously accommodating this umbrella of rhetorical theology has to be.[53]

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[50] *Calvini Opera* 49: 321-2; tr. John W. Fraser, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, ad loc.* (Edinburgh, 1960), 32-5.

[51] L. Wencelius, *L' esthétique de Calvin* (Paris, 1937), 309-73. Wencelius cites solely by reference to the *Calvini Opera* volumes and columns, and not always accurately.

[52] Trinkaus, *'In Our Image and Likeness'*, II: 612-13.

[53] Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology*, 132-3, 102-3.

This brings us not only by verbal association to the theme of divine accommodation, which is probably the most commonly cited *topos* on which Calvin's doctrine of God is regarded as rhetorically shaped. Here we touch base again with David Willis's essay in 1974:

> Calvin presents a view of God who as a loving Father strategically adjusts his dealings with his people in order to inform, delight, and move them (cf. the three classical aims of rhetoric) to doing his will... A favorite term used for this revelatory activity is 'accommodation'.[54]

For Bouwsma, Calvin's "rhetorical Christianity is most profoundly apparent in his emphasis on Scripture as everywhere accommodated by God's decorum to human comprehension."[55] Since Calvin spoke of the incarnation in the language of accommodation, it may have been this motif that Bouwsma had in mind at one point in the colloquy when, pressed to identify "the unique contribution of humanism to the substance of Calvin's theology," he suggested a little tentatively his understanding of the incarnation, since to Anselm's question *Cur Deus homo*?, Calvin gave a very different answer from Anselm's.[56]

Since I have written on accommodation in Calvin more than once, I will not linger over it here. Nevertheless, a handful of remarks are unavoidable. First, I remain less than convinced that accommodation in Calvin is a rhetorical borrowing.[57] It is at the very least a far-reaching transposition if the rhetorical category of *decorum* is its basis. I do not know of one place where *decorum* in Calvin has to do with accommodation. (It is amusing in the Berkeley colloquy exchanges to find one or two contributors picking up the Latin word without fully grasping its frame of reference and substituting the English 'decorous'. At least we are spared 'decoration'.)

Secondly, in Calvin accommodation not only speaks of adaptation to human lowliness and sinfulness but also accounts for elements of grossness, crudity, barbarity and injustice in the Bible.[58] If this is rhetorically driven, then it is a stark reminder that rhetoric and eloquence are not synonyms. Divine accommodation

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[54] 'Rhetoric and Responsibility', 53.

[55] '*Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*,' 10 (= *John Calvin*, 124)

[56] *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, 74.

[57] Cf. my "Calvin's "Accommodation" Revisited', in Peter De Klerk (ed.), *Calvin as Exegete. Papers ...Ninth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies...* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995), 171-90, at 172-6.

[58] Cf. my "Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart and Divine Accommodation in the Mosaic Harmony Commentary", *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), 33-50; "Accommodation and Barbarity in John Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries", in A.G. Auld (ed.), *Understanding Poets and Prophets. Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson* (Sheffield, 1993), 413-27.

undoubtedly results in Calvin's book in the utterly indecorous! It explains those raw harsh features which alerted Origen and now Erasmus to discern allegory. [59] Calvin applies the accommodation theme more drastically and boldly than any of his contemporaries, and perhaps his predecessors. If accommodation in origin is rhetorical, then Calvin indubitably bursts its rhetorical bands asunder.

Finally under this head may I raise a question for the christologians: does Calvin's use of the vocabulary of accommodation in speaking of the incarnation touch the substance of his Christology? Is accommodation more than one of the categories of imagery which he applies to a dogmatically determined conception of incarnation? Does it, for example, play a role at all comparable to the Logos theology of the second and third centuries in explaining how the immutable God could assume humanity? If I grant for the sake of this argument that accommodation in Calvin is a rhetorical feature, this raft of questions is surely highly pertinent to our larger enquiry whether he is rightly credited with a rhetorical theology

Rhetoric and the Nature of Theological Discourse

In the colloquy on *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, William Bouwsma was pressed at one stage on the relationship between this *theologia rhetorica* and argument, intellectual assent, rationality. He replied as follows:

> Rhetorical communication, I would describe as communication, not of information, knowledge, but as communication that is intended to make something happen - to make something happen in another human being, or in a group of beings. Now in order to make something happen, you've got to appeal to the deepest possible levels of their personality, to appeal to the heart. Calvin is constantly contrasting that sort of communication with argument, that is, a kind of communication which he says settles only in the top of the brain - for which he has very little respect.[60]

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[59] Having in a previous essay asserted, with original insight, so I thought, that for Calvin accommodation was the alternative to allegory, I have been fascinated to read Hoffmann's exposition of Erasmus which correlates them within the humanist's 'rhetorical theology'. See my "Calvin's Accommodating God", in Neuser and Armstrong (eds), *Calvinus* (n. 1 above), 3-19, at 7; Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology*, 106-12; "the divine wisdom employs allegory to accommodate itself to the level of human comprehension" (107). "The pivotal role which allegory plays in Erasmus' exegesis is analogous to the crucial place which accommodation obtains in his theology... We can conclude that allegory is to language, what accommodation is to reality" (106). See also Michael H. Keefer, "Accommodation and Synecdoche: Calvin's God in *King Lear*", in *Shakespeare Studies* (New York) 20 (1988), 147-68, at 149: "In a scriptural context, the notion of accommodation confers authority upon the practice of allegorical exegesis."

[60] *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, 80. In the paper itself Bouwsma wrote that Calvin "was more concerned to sway a particular audience than to achieve the "absolute balance" of a detached and systematic theology" (2 = *John Calvin*, 116, amended).

I link this with Serene Jones' discussion of the 'functionalist leanings' of Calvin's theology. She pulls back from foisting upon him "a strictly functionalist interpretation," but nevertheless says this of "his understanding of how doctrines acquire meaning":

> According to Calvin's textual practices, it appears that the meaning of a doctrine is to be measured by the quality and character of the social disposition it encourages. Thus, one can only assess its meaning in light of the context in which it is deployed, for it is in the reception of doctrine that its meaning happens and dispositions are formed.[61]

Calvin, she reckons, did not have to spend time "establishing normative criteria for assessing truth claims" since most of his interlocutors agreed that "God's word is true." Hence,

> the majority of Calvin's energy in the *Institutes* is poured into arguments about what doctrine and the scriptures do, not just whether they are true or false.[62]

Professor Jones discerns in Calvin a "predilection for attending to the affective dimensions of doctrine," especially "in passages where he discusses theological topics for which he has no use apart from their character-forming potential for Christians."

> Caught between his respect for tradition and his commitment to teach only things that are 'sure and profitable,' Calvin deploys an interesting strategy. He reclaims what he believes would otherwise be confusing doctrines - such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the belief in the devil and angels, and the complicated incarnational language used in traditional Christologies - by asking the question: what aspect of this doctrine might serve either to strengthen the faith of believers or to judge the impiety of the reprobate? Having answered this question, he then forgoes an extended philosophical discussion of these doctrines and directly launches into a rhetoric fashioned to evoke the desired disposition.[63]

It is for all students of Calvin's *Institutio* to evaluate the adequacy of this account of his procedures. Jones' analysis of the first three chapters of the work shows them to be intended "to serve rhetorical functions that are not necessarily wedded to concerns for logical precision, conceptual clarity, or systematic rigor." She believes that "what counts for "coherence" in Calvin's *Institutes* may best be determined scripturally, rhetorically, and socially rather than systematically, logically, or philosophically."[64]

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[61] *Calvin and the Rhetoric*, 198, 199.

[62] *Ibid.*, 202. Calvin spends extensive tracts of the *Institutio* arguing that his doctrine is the true meaning of Scripture.

[63] *Ibid.*, 32; cf. 44 n. 69 for her account of Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in *Inst.* 1:13.

[64] *Calvin and the Rhetoric*, 159, 36.

It is well enough known that famous interpreters of Calvin have disagreed over the early sections of the *Institutio*, but Jones, as it were, declares a plague on all their houses—from Lobstein, Barth and Brunner, and Niesel to Dowey and Parker—for they have all erred in supposing systematic coherence. A rhetorical reading of the work delivers one from this false supposition. Now proponents of such a strongly rhetorical account of Calvin are picking up at this point on his inescapable stress on the *usus*, the benefit and practical value, of true teaching, and his sharp distaste for idle speculation which has no purchase on experience and behaviour. This characteristic of Calvinian theology—'Knowledge as Truth Becomes Efficacious'—is one of the instances of his 'rhetorical theology' isolated by David Willis.[65] How far this insistence on doctrine that possesses the heart and transforms the life is a biblical rather than a rhetorical discipline in Calvin might bear fruitful consideration.

But the more incisive issue is whether a commitment to 'rhetorical communication', in Bouwsma's phrase, entails or implies an indifference to questions of truth or at least to coherence of meaning. That, I take it, is the real challenge posed by thus reading Calvin rhetorically. I want to approach it by drawing on the studies of Francis Higman on Calvin's French style. They seem to me an island of solid incontrovertible sense amid swamps that offer no firm ground on which to take a stand. What in essence he claims is that Calvin developed the French language in order to make it a language capable of sustaining reasoned ordered argument in such an abstract field as theology. This development of the language cannot be separated from the raw material of rhetoric, for it deals with issues as basic as the length of the sentence. "Calvin invented the short sentence... Whereas most sentences written in the sixteenth century (in a debate context) have eight, twelve, fifteen subordinate clauses, Calvin's rarely have more than three."[66] Calvin introduces what Higman calls linearity, whereby he sets out "to expound and follow through the subject distinctly, bringing out one point after another in a clear order."[67] Linearity is used by Calvin as an analytical tool in the organization of treatises and their component sections.[68]

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[65] "Rhetoric and Responsibility", 52-3.

[66] Higman, "Linearity in Calvin's Thought", *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991), 100-110, at 106. "What Calvin creates is not only a way of writing French but an intellectual weapon for use in the battle of argument" (107).

[67] *Ibid.*, 106, citing from Calvin's treatise against the Anabaptists, *Calvini Opera* 7, 139-40; tr. B.J. Farley, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982), 156-7.

[68] Higman, "Linearity", 107.

Higman illustrates Calvin's practice by reference to the first few chapters of the 1539/1541 *Instituto* (which he regards as more homogeneous than 1559/1560). "At each stage (he comments) there is a linking together of a chain of argument; each chapter follows from the preceding one and introduces the succeeding one. The process is linear."[69] (It is worth noting that Professor Jones does not refer to Higman's article.) The conclusion for Higman is that Calvin wrote "highly systematised and structured theology," for "Linear organisation of thought is an altogether structured and systematic principle."[70] The image of the *via* (much more common in the *Institutio* than *labyrinthus* or *abyssus*) expresses the progressive movement of this systematic order. And a linear procedure was tailor-made for the sermons and the lectures, in which Calvin worked straightforwardly through one verse after another.[71]

Higman's more extended analysis of *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* is concerned with works wherein, "more directly than elsewhere, Calvin is concerned not only to state but to influence; here, more than anywhere, the effect to be made on the reader is a primary concern."[72]

> Persuasion rather than proof is the basis of these treatises... Calvin's task here is not only, perhaps not even primarily, an intellectual one... the object of his treatises is to induce an attitude in his readers even more than to present an intellectual case.[73]

Calvin to this end effectively varies vocabularly, syntax and imagery - the three constituents of style that Higman investigates. The rhetoric comes naturally to Calvin, in what he sees as his quest for simplicity and clarity, "without attractive, and deceptive, ornament."[74]

Yet in Higman's judgement, the rhetoric of these polemical treatises is, to use Calvin's image, the handmaid or servant of the truth. "The rhetoric is a means whereby the full impact of the thought is achieved." After stressing "the rigidity of the doctrinal structure" ('since it is not a structure derived from human reason, but

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[69] *Ibid.*, 107-9, at 108.

[70] *Ibid.*, 101 (citing A.E. McGrath), 110.

[71] *Ibid.*, 109-10.

[72] Higman, *The Style*, 10.

[73] *Ibid.*, 120.

[74] *Ibid.*, 154, 157, 121, 6.

comes from the illumination of divine wisdom, it cannot be discussed or modified: it can only be accepted or imposed'),[75] Higman writes:

> The structure is a rhetorical structure, its aim is to convince, just as the essential message of Calvinist doctrine is to have faith. What, on the spiritual plane, is the action of the Holy Spirit, touching the heart, disposing the mind to believe, is, on the psychological plane, the function of the various stylistic techniques and qualities: *opening a way by rhetoric for the penetration and triumph of the doctrine* (my emphasis).[76]

It is in this connection that Higman discerns something similar to the 'rhetorical logic' of Agricola, Sturm and Melanchthon. This is

> logic applied to the explanation of what is given, to making acceptable to the human mind the dictates of Divine reason; it is logic designed to teach and to persuade.[77]

Whether this is in line with what Suzanne Selinger calls Calvin's 'theological rhetoric' I am not entirely clear, but reversing the terms of the phrase may be nearer the truth of the matter.[78]

Quirinus Breen's essay on "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition" also speaks of the logic in Calvin's writing:

> There is a logic in the *Institutes*. In fact, it is full of logic. But the logic is not syllogistic. It is rhetorical logic.[79]

He finds that the deliberative genre of rhetorical discourse prevails in the *Institutes* such that it may be predicated of the work as a whole. "Its intent is to persuade the readers to accept Calvin's version of the Christian religion." Breen recognizes more than once that "rhetoric has perils for theology, for its end is persuasion, and its means include a weakened logic." But he sees no reason why "the truth of theological statement need... be invalidated by a style calculated to move men and women." He even makes the bold statement that Calvin "persistently violates a basic rule of rhetoric in that he seldom if ever tries to persuade by pleasing the reader either in what he says or how he says it."[80]

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[75] *Ibid.*, 121, 161.

[76] *Ibid.*, 161-2.

[77] *Ibid.*, 45.

[78] Selinger, *Calvin Against Himself. An Inquiry in Intellectual History* (Hamden, CT, 1984), 174, 176, 159.

[79] "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition", 13.

[80] *Ibid.*, 9, 5, 18, 8.

Bouwsma's essay on "Calvinism as *Theologia Rhetorica*" ends not with a bang but a whimper. After the fulsomeness of his rhetorical rendering of Calvin, he signs off with the words "he composed few eloquent sermons."[81] If we leave aside how accurately the sermons as we have them may be said to have been 'composed' by Calvin, Bouwsma reminds us of the importance of differentiating between the categories of Calvin's works. On the sermons, and on the lectures (*leçons, praelectiones*), of which most of his Old Testament commentaries are but transcripts, Calvin scholars are agreed. Both genres are little more than running analyses of the biblical text, delivered *extempore*, with virtually no attention to the forms of rhetorical address. T.H.L. Parker comments that Calvin "used rhetoric rather as a tool in the interpretation of documents than for a conscious directive in his own writing"[82] - or speaking, we may add. The sermons have an eloquence of their own, to be sure, which Rodolphe Peter set forth in a fine article on "*Rhétorique et prédication selon Calvin*', which ends with the summary judgement, "*Si en matière de rhétorique Calvin fut l' apprenti de Quintilien, il fut avant tout Verbi Divini minister.*"[83]

This is a fine cue on which to end this paper. Just as, in the sermons and the lectures, the style, vocabulary and imagery, as well as the shape of the oral act, were drawn into those of the biblical text, so more generally in Calvin's work we must reckon with the deductions he drew from his recognition that, for the very great part, Scripture was clothed with a plain, inelegant style. On a number of occasions we find Calvin carefully exploring why a biblical writer departs from Scripture's normal low-key style, which he repeatedly calls 'pure' and 'simple'.[84] This style is the model which Christian communicators must follow. In his tract against the Libertines Calvin wrote this:

> The tongue was created by God to express thought, so that we may communicate with each other... In treating of the mysteries of God, Scripture is for us the rule. Let us then follow the language it shows us without straying. For the Lord, knowing well that, if he spoke to us on the level of his majesty, our understanding would be incapable of attaining such heights, adapts himself to our littleness (*petitesse*). Like a nurse prattling with her child, so he uses a lowly (*grossiere*) manner of speaking to us, with the aim of being understood. Anyone who

[81] *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, 13 (= *John Calvin*, 127).

[82] *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh, 1992), 131.

[83] *Revue d' histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 55 (1975), 249-72, at 272.

[84] E.g., on Jeremiah 49:3, *Calvini Opera* 39: 349-50.

> overthrows this order, succeeds only in burying the truth of God, which cannot be known except in the manner in which he has deliberately revealed it to us.[85]

And finally from the *Institutio*, from "the sufficiently firm *probationes* that serve to establish the credit-worthiness of Scripture:"

> Our hearts are more firmly grounded when we reflect that we are seized with admiration for Scripture more by the dignity of its subject-matter than by the grace of its language. It did not happen without the exquisite providence of God, that the sublime mysteries of the heavenly kingdom should be transmitted largely in contemptibly humble language, lest if they had been displayed in splendid eloquence, godless critics should claim that herein was its only power enthroned. Now since that uncultured and almost crude simplicity evokes greater reverence for itself than any flourish of the rhetoricians, what may we conclude but that the force of the truth of sacred Scripture holds up too powerfully to need artistic language? ...Truth is freed from all doubt when, unbolstered by external supports, it suffices on its own to sustain itself.[86]

This is of course one of the places in the *Institutio* in which Calvin waxed most lyrical. The critical question is this: was his rhetoric here deployed without regard for the coherence of his argument and the truth he otherwise maintained? My judgement is that he was so acutely sensitive to the biblical style of plain simplicity and to the implications he drew from it that we should be very surprised to detect him, as we may from time to time, getting so carried away in flights of rhetoric as to lose sight of coherence and truth. If this is, in a looser sense, rhetorical theology I will not fight over words, although a less elegant compound would be preferable, biblico-rhetorical theology.

[85] *Calvini Opera* 7, 169; tr. Farley, 214-15.

[86] *Inst.* 1:8:1 (*Opera Selecta* III, 71-2; my translation).