Calvin the Humanist in Calvin the Reformer

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The young John Calvin came of age in a time fraught with change. As differing approaches to philosophy, theology, and politics roiled Western Europe, he progressed through his schooling. He ventured from the notoriously traditionalist faculty of the Collège de Montaigu to more modern faculties, influenced by the humanist movement which stressed rigorous commitment to linguistic scholarship and careful attention to primary sources in argumentation. This progression from Paris through faculties like that in Orleans led him to the publication of a serious work of humanist scholarship, his 1532 commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia.* After his mysterious conversion to Protestantism, Calvin wasted little time on his next major treatise, publishing the first edition of his most arduous literary work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536. While initially intended as a handbook for new converts and Catholic opposition, this work would eventually swell to become perhaps the most important educational resource for pastors since Gregory's *Book of Pastoral Rule.* Coinciding with his many literary endeavors, Calvin became an influential voice for the reform projects in Strasbourg, Geneva, and his own native France. While the sharp-witted Picardian rejected and combatted many humanist ideals which he saw as contrary to Scripture, Calvin's indebtedness to his humanist education can be seen over the course of his work as a reformer, especially in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*. Here, his constant appeals to classical literature serve as appeals to authority, but they also serve a pedagogical purpose, informing future ministers how one might interact with timeless errors thoughtfully, critically, and with style. For this reason, Gordon may well be right to note that "As a literary voice on doctrine, Calvin was alone."[1]

[1] Bruce Gordon, *John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion: A Biography*, Lives of Great Religious Books 25 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 16.

In order to demonstrate Calvin's ongoing debt to his humanist background and its outworking within the *Institutes*, this paper will first begin by painting in broad strokes an image of early modern humanism as a movement, before sketching Calvin's involvement in this movement before and during his early career as a Reformer. This contextualization will be followed by a discussion of Calvin's 1559 *Institutes*, which will first consider the stated purpose for the edition and then briefly categorize Calvin's use of classical sources. Finally, the argument will conclude with a more detailed discussion of Calvin's interactions with several classical authors within the fifth chapter of Book 1 of the *Institutes*. All of this will be followed by a brief assessment, and will demonstrate clearly both Calvin's debt to the humanist movement and his willingness to use the tools of humanism, which were often associated with doctrinal ambivalence and indifference, in order to promote doctrinal clarity and conviction among his audience.

I. What is a Renaissance Man?

Before demonstrating Calvin's debt to the movement, Renaissance humanism must first be described. In its most basic form, humanism was a movement which began in earnest in Italy during the fourteenth century.[2] It is the principle part of the movement frequently called the Renaissance, or "rebirth." Thompson notes that this rebirth was "not of things in general but specifically of classicism."[3] In other words, among its devotees, this intellectual movement fostered an environment which believed "that the quintessential expression of human culture…was

[2] For a useful introduction to the period, complete with color photographs, see Bard Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers: A History of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996); for an intellectual assessment of the Renaissance and its place in European history, see especially Wilcox and McGrath. Donald J. Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self: Renaissance and Reformation Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975); Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK ; Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Carlos Eire also offers a detailed account of the movement in the fourth and fifth chapters of his massive work, *Reformations.* Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 64-113.

[3] Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers*, 5.

to be found in the artistic and literary remains of the ancient world."[4] This 'rebirth' ultimately resulted in the rise of popularity of the *studia humanistas*: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and ethics.[5] From its earliest days, figures like Petrarch devoted their time to understanding figures of a bygone age like Cicero and Augustine in a manner which was new and distinct from the way the universities around them would.[6] While early attempts to describe humanism decidedly framed it as a movement either of individualism or republicanism, Kistreller and those following him, like McGrath, take a more restrained approach which accommodates the broad stream of humanist thought far better. McGrath, describing Kistreller's views, states that "humanism [was] a cultural and educational movement, primarily concerned with written and spoken eloquence, and only secondarily concerned with matters of philosophy and politics."[7] Humanism, then, was a matter of letters and literature. Rhetoric itself was to this movement "the discipline which brings out the distinctively human dimension to man."[8]

One must be careful, of course, to offer this with the cautionary remark that the humanists did not necessarily care more about the classics than their medieval counterparts did.[9] Medieval scholastic writers were indebted to ancient Christians—especially in later years to the newly translated works of Aristotle which would prove so influential to Aquinas.[10] The Holy Roman

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[4] Thompson, 9.

[5] Eire, *Reformations*, 68.

[6] Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 60-65.

[7] McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, 33.

[8] McGrath, 35.

[9] Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 57.

[10] Wilcox, 43.

Empire, too, was named as a supposed continuation of the Roman Empire.[11] Wilcox effectively explains the difference between the two modes of intellectual interaction: "…classical literature was approached and studied in a new way [in the Renaissance] as men posed new questions and sought new standards of values."[12] To figures like Petrarch and his intellectual followers, the point of literature was not exclusively finding ultimate truth. Instead, it was more concerned with understanding the past on its own terms in order to better understand the people of the present.

Out of the concern for communication came the humanist commitment to the dual roles of education and scholarship. Concerned with philology—the study of languages—along with history and literature more broadly, humanist education stressed both individual interests and the importance of producing capable citizens as a result of its works.[13] By pressing the need to understand language effectively in order to communicate properly, many humanists developed strong stylistic tastes.[14] Latin flourished, with Cicero's works as the primary stylistic influence. The printing of classical texts, Greek and Latin alike, flourished as a result of these emphases.[15] Scholars like Erasmus worked tirelessly to produce editions of Latin and Greek texts based on as many available manuscripts as possible; since words themselves were so valuable, they

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[11] Giving rise, of course, to the common quip that 'it was neither holy nor Roman—and not even an empire.'

[12] Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 57.

[13] Jean-François Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, trans. Karin Maag, 1st edition (Kirksville, Mo: Penn State University Press, 2005), 142; François Wendel, *Calvin; the Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*. The Fontana Library, 1054 L (London: Wm. Collins, 1965), 36.

[14] McGrath notes that this lent a degree of accidental sympathy between early Reformers and humanists who did not leave the church—as both heavily criticized the scholastics, the former for their content and the latter for their style. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, 41-42.

[15] For instance, see the documentation about the publication offered by Wilson-Okamura. David Scott Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 20-30.

painstakingly compared previous manuscripts to determine their relative accuracy, establishing the basis for modern textual criticism.[16] Another humanist contrarian Lorenzo Valla used the tools of early modern linguistics and historiography to determine with ease that the *Donation of Constantine* was in fact an eighth century forgery and not an authoritative grant from Rome's first Christian emperor to the papacy.[17] While many of these scholars—Erasmus and Valla included—were men of the church, their works sowed the seed of a reform movement extending past their own suggestions for moral reform.[18]

While it can be dangerous to treat any historical movement as a monolith, Renaissance humanism as a movement possessed several features which would prove influential to Calvin as he went on with his studies. By emphasizing philology it spawned a wide range of interests in ancient Latin and Greek along with a rebirth in the study of Hebrew.[19] Too, the emphasis on the study of texts coincided with the creation of the printing press and allowed for rapid expansion of the humanist intellectual project. Finally, the intense stress on educating future generations to consider languages and literature allowed for the excited proliferation of humanist ideals for several generations. This brings us to the humanist student in question: John Calvin.

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[16] For a useful history of this development and the role played by Erasmus and other Renaissance figures, see Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 142-152.

[17] See Eire, *Reformations*, 71-73.

[18] Hugo, writing in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, ed. Ford Lewis Battles and A. M. Hugo (Brill Archive, 1969), 32*-35*; Eire, *Reformations*, 74.

[19] Eire, *Reformations,* 92, 95; Bruce Gordon, *Calvin*, (New Haven ; Yale University Press, 2009), 32.

II. From Failed Humanist to Failing Reformer

The relationship between a student and his teachers is a complicated one. This is no less the case with John Calvin than any other student. Originally a student at the Collège de Montaigu, a profoundly anti-humanist institution which was famously reviled by its more famous students.[20] Nevertheless, at his coming of age Calvin left this stream of education to pursue a more lucrative career in law, likely at the behest of his father. Moving to Orleans, Calvin came to study under the leading legal scholar of his day, Pierre de l'Estoile.[21] Here, he also worked diligently to learn Greek under the German scholar Melchior Wolmar, a Homer scholar who would prove deeply influential to Calvin in the years to come.[22] Wolmar's attitude towards his opponents became particularly helpful to Calvin for many years to come, as he could say in 1554 write of "that most distinguished man, adorned with the rarest virtue, whose firmness was so inflexible, that it never gave way to their brutality, and yet he never repelled their violent attacks so much by his vehemence, as he destroyed the effects of them by a calm and equable temper."[23] Calvin sought out the most able teachers in order to become a master of the new learning. From Orleans, he returned to the University of Paris to study at the Collège Royale, where a number of leading linguists were

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[20] Eire records that students called it the "cleft between the buttocks of Mother Theology," both for its strict nature and miserable conditions. Eire, *Reformations*, 289; Breen also notes that this fit would prove at odds with Calvin's later life: the college was not well known for producing capable Latinists. Breen, *John Calvin; a Study in French Humanism,* 124-125.

[21] Wendel, *Calvin; the Origins and Development of His Religious Thought,* 24; Gordon, *Calvin*, 19.

[22] Wendel, *Calvin; the Origins and Development of His Religious Thought,* 22-23; Breen, *John Calvin; a Study in French Humanism, 132-133*; Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo, 1st American ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 178.

[23] Calvin, Letter CCLIII, to Charles Dumoulin, Geneva, July 29, 1554. John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters of John Calvin*, trans. Jules Bonnet, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2019), vol. 6, 48.

teaching Greek and Hebrew and where he could grow further in his classical training. However, his humanist career would only begin after his schooling.[24]

In 1532, Calvin was left at an impasse. Torn between the classical schooling he so strongly loved and his training as a jurist, he set out towards a career as a humanist scholar. A self-funded, nameless scholar of only twenty three years, Calvin had taken up a challenge leveled by the single most famous scholar of the era, Erasmus. Many years earlier, Erasmus had published an edition of the Stoic philosopher Seneca's works. His first edition was an embarrassment; in the preface to the second, the Dutchman challenged readers to do better themselves.[25] In his own preface, Calvin only obliquely references this moment;[26] nevertheless, the influence is clear. Calvin's work, while demonstrating both zeal and competence as a classicist,[27] failed to achieve its principle goal: establishing Calvin's reputation as a scholar. In part, it seems it did so because of Calvin's rigid unwillingness to participate in the system of patronage so deeply entwined with the humanist project.[28] Calvin had already demonstrated "an unwillingness to submit to the intellectual agenda of another."[29] Without adequate funds or a network to broadcast his work, Calvin was left

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[24] A.M. Hugo writing in John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, ed. Ford Lewis Battles and A. M. Hugo (Brill Archive, 1969) 3*; Battles and Hugo render an excellent service in this commentary on Cavlin's commentary.

[25] Hugo writing in John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentary,* 32*-34*.

[26] Calvin, *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia,* ii.

[27] Gilmont, 164-165 notes that Calvin's classical quotations from this time seem to have been derived principally from secondary sources. While this may well be the case, to do so at the time, particularly at his age, was not necessarily an indication of bad scholarship per se, but of limitations.

[28] Michael Leonard Monheit, "'The Ambition for an Illustrious Name': Humanism, Patronage, and Calvin's Doctrine of the Calling," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23, no. 2 (19921231): 267–87, 274-275.

[29] Gordon, *Calvin*, 21.

distraught, forced to pay for his own work's publication and to wait for any word, critical or otherwise.[30] There is little to suggest he heard much.

Calvin's initial failure to break into the world of classical scholarship nevertheless did not keep him from further pursuing his studies. Over the course of several years, he became influenced by Protestant thought and was eventually forced, twice, to flee Paris as a result. Eventually, he settled for a time in Basle, home of Erasmus himself and site of the most prolific printing industry in Europe. Here, Calvin would write and publish his first major work as a Protestant, his 1536 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Initially prepared as both to aid the catechesis of Protestants and explain their theology to the broader world, the book gained a significant readership quickly. This initial edition was brief. At once rudimentary and elegant, the book contained an appeal to the King of France, Francis I, to cease his persecution of the Protestants. Infused with the rhetorical flourish one would expect from an able humanist lawyer, one scholar goes so far as to suggest that in it "Calvin had become Seneca, and Francis his Nero."[31] Named in the tradition of the first century Roman scholar of rhetoric Quintilian, the little primer proved more influential in Calvin's own life than he might have anticipated; within a few years, he had accidentally parlayed his status as an author into a pastorate in the Swiss city of Geneva.

Calvin's early days as a pastor were fraught. Forced out of Geneva within two years, Calvin fled to Strasbourg. Here he was placed as the pastor of the French congregation in the city and mentored by the city's reformer, Martin Bucer, in spite of his struggles in Geneva.[32] After a few

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[30] Monheit offers a telling remark on the psychological distress which this process of waiting and listening must have caused, saying, "In a culture which took the technical quality of a work as indicating the moral qualities of the author who wrote it, any young author was profoundly sensitive to approval and disapproval." Monheit, "'The Ambition for an Illustrious Name,'" 276.

[31] Gordon, *Calvin,* 58.

[32] Gordon, *Calvin,* 82-102; Eire, *Reformations*, 298-299.

short years, Calvin was asked to return to Geneva, which despite calling him back would not bend to the Reformer's will without fights, delays, and difficulty. In one particularly frustrated moment, Calvin prepared a speech, *De Luxu*, against the vanity of the city. It is a blunt speech, grim in its opposition to the vices of the city. As Battles notes, though, "Calvin's most intimate thoughts… are often cast in the form of references to other men."[33] Railing against the city's prime vice—by his lights, luxury—Calvin says "Do you think it's one body for which so much clothing is made ready? You are mistaken: it belongs rather to months and days. Seneca Epist. : "Elegant dress is not a manly adornment." We are worse than children delighted with cheap necklaces; we go in for expensive absurdities"[34] Nearly a decade into reform, Calvin flirted with the idea of addressing the public of Geneva on the basis of classical exempla—not purely Scripture. This speech, however, was left incomplete. While in his private thoughts Calvin was rooted in the dueling streams of classical thought and the biblical tradition, quite clearly in public his models had to be far more biblical in presentation.

Calvin may have abandoned his career as a humanist scholar in order to serve as on the bleeding edge of the Reformed movement. Nevertheless, even well into his established years as the primary reformer of Geneva, he was still influenced by his classical background and took care to consider the thoughts of ancient pagans. His humanist education rooted his philological and historical interests, providing a background for his study of both the Bible and the early church fathers. His career as a reformer certainly prevented his pursuit of humanist's life of detached scholarship, but his education as a humanist provided fertile ground for his later work in the

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[33] Ford Lewis Battles, "Against Luxury and License in Geneva: A Forgotten Fragment of Calvin," *Interpretation* 19, no. 2 (April 1, 1965), 183.

[34] Calvin *De Luxu* 204:25-29, as found in Battles, 193.

church.[35] His concern for beauty of rhetoric, clarity of thought, and the education of the people and pastorate alike all could be attributed to this. Still, the extent of his humanism can best be seen in his final, most famous work: his 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion.*

III. *Humanism and the 1559* Institutes

The *Institutes* were initially planned as a simple work, intent upon informing both Protestant laity and Catholic opponents of the nature of the Protestant movement. The function was catechetical, in line with earlier works of Luther and Zwingli. Unlike the two prior reformers, however, Calvin continued tinkering for decades, meticulously editing his major work. Each of the following releases were done jointly in French and Latin. The French offered simpler language, more accessible to a broad stream of readers. The Latin was rhetorically more sophisticated, crafted in the tongue of the academy.[36] The work was intent on providing pastors useful knowledge for a life of continued study in ministry. As a reflection of this fact, the 1559 *Institutes* in particular makes widespread, detailed reference to numerous ancient thinkers. References vary in nature—some are strictly to works of philosophy, while others deal primarily with works of literature and history. The reasoning for including different references also varies. While Gilmont, among others, has suggested that these references are strictly appeals to authority,[37] this claim is overly broad and fails to account for the depth of interaction Calvin occasionally displays with his sources. As a warning—that Calvin the rhetorician and Calvin the theologian can be difficult to separate—must be taken in stride. This does not mean that Calvin was necessarily disingenuous. It also should not

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[35] Breen, *John Calvin; a Study in French Humanism,* 155.

[36] Gordon, *John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 28-29.

[37] Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, 157.

be used to hand wave away Calvin's citations as 'mere rhetoric' or fallacious appeals to authority. To chart a better course to understand Calvin on his own terms, we must start with his stated intentions.

Calvin's letter to his readers, perhaps more neglected than other portions of the *Institutes*, merits the attention of any reader intent on understanding both the organization of the work and the intentions of the man who prepared it. In this brief appeal, Calvin states his concerns with writing the book. In addition to his original intentions—to inform the faithful and refute his opposition—he adds a telling note, saying, "Moreover, it has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling."[38] Calvin's purposes were indeed polemical; he especially intended to refute a rumor from the Diet of Augsburg that he had recanted his Reformed faith and returned to Catholicism.[39] In spite of his ongoing physical frailty, Calvin still projects a position of zeal and passion. His zeal for argument unabated, he still declares his own goal that others could advance "the reading of the divine Word."[40] Calvin was a prominent public figure, and dominated the educational scene of Geneva. This was not intended to be mere academic speculation; he did not intend to be a medieval schoolman, unacquainted with ministry in the broader world. Instead, recognizing his frail health and personal limitations,[41] quite clearly realized the need to press on in order to ensure a new generation of pastors and men trained in "sacred theology," who could continue the task of

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[38] John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 1559th edition (Louisville, Ky. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.

[39] Calvin, 4.

[40] Calvin, 4.

[41] Documented quite well in Gordon, *Calvin*, 329-330.

ministering God's Word to God's people.[42] To accomplish this goal, Calvin set about editing the *Institutes* into their final form. With this stated goal in mind, a brief perusal of his own classical citations in this edition can help the reader understand the education which he had in mind.

Speaking generally, Calvin's citations of classical writers can be divided into a few categories. Some are mere allusions, others are deeper interactions. He references Seneca several dozen times.[43] Plato dominates the picture, with around fifty references.[44] Aristotle too is invoked or at least alluded to roughly nineteen times.[45] Writing in Latin, as the academic lingua franca of the day, Calvin is demonstrating through classical rhetoric how his students and readers, as masters of "sacred theology" are to consider the works of major pagan thinkers. The same can be said for appeals to history, which while far fewer still are not lacking.[46]

Most surprisingly, at least to those who consider theology the realm of prose and not prosody, Calvin educates his audience with frequent appeals to classical poetry. He quotes from Statius' Latin *Thebaid* early on in Book 1.[47] He offers an extended interaction with the poet Virgil mere pages later, and cites the Aeneid multiple times throughout the book.[48] He even references a

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[42] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4; cf. Gordon's discussion of Calvin's ideals for ministers in Gordon, *Calvin*, 130-133.

[43] The following tallies include locations in the *Institutes* which directly reference their respective source; dual references are omitted. Calvin, 1.9.2; 1.8.1; 3.8.4

[44] Calvin, 1.3.3; 1.5.11; 1.8.1; 1.8.9; 1.14.12; 1.15.6; 1.15.7; 1.15.8; 2.2.2; 2.2.3; 2.2.14; 2.2.15; 2.2.15; 2.2.22-25; 2.3.4; 3.3.20; 3.5.5; 3.9.2; 3.20.34; 3.28.2; 3.25.2; 3.25.3; 4.10.18; 4.18.3; 4.18.15; 4.20.8; 4.20.14

[45] Calvin, 1.5.3; 1.5.5; 1.8.1; 1.8.9; 1.15.2; 1.15.6; 1.15.7; 1.15.8; 2.1.1; 2.2.2; 2.2.3; 2.2.23; 2.5.2; 2.8.8; 3.6.6; 3.7.3; 3.9.6; 3.14.17; 4.17.26

[46] See, for example, the reference to Suetonius at *Institutes* 1.3.2

[47] The precise quotation is: "*primus in orbe deos fecit timor!"* and is found at *Institutes* 1.4.4; the line in Statius is *Thebaid* III.661, LCL 207:198. Statius, *Thebaid, Volume I: Books 1–7*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[48] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.5; 3.6.7; 4.4.12

line from the notoriously unchristian Ovid positively, suggesting that it has ties with the Christian idea of the image of God.[49] Hazlitt is correct; Calvin does not demonstrate Stoic *apatheia* to arts or the wider world.[50]

Calvin does not just quote from the Latin epic poets. He interacts on multiple occasions with authors like the comic playwright Plautus.[51] He quotes Terence and Horace and Lucan and expresses his disgust with Lucretius.[52] More surprising than all of these, Calvin twice offers aphoristic quotations from Homer without translation.[53] Here, Gilmont's summary serves true; like any good humanist, Calvin of course knew how to sound intelligent and citing anything in Greek—particularly the challenging Greek of Homer—would do just the trick. Calvin may have learned this form of the language under his professor Wolmar, or he may have only gained access to these quotes through the use of someone's *florilegium*.[54] Whatever the case, in citing these works, Calvin certainly does attempt to express the breadth of his learning. There are moments, however, when

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[49] Calvin quotes a portion of the *Metamorphoses* I.84-86, "*pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram / os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre / iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus*." (in Miller's translation, "And, though all other animals are prone, and fix their gaze upon the earth, he gave to man an uplifted face and bade him stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven."); LCL 42: 8-9; Ovid, *Ovid III: Metamorphoses, Books I-VIII*, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 3rd edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3.

[50] Ian Hazlett, "Some History and Histories of Calvin in the Context of the Reformation," *Theology in Scotland* 16, no. 2 (2009), 31.

[51] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.17.3; 3.4.17; 3.8.10; 4.2.10; 4.17.46; 4.19.15

[52] Calvin, 4.17.46; 4.19.15; 1.5.5; 1.9.4; 3.20.5

[53] Calvin, 1.17.3, "*ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἴτιός εἰμι, ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα.*"; 2.2.17, "*οἷον ἐπ' ἦμαρ ἄγῃσι.*"; 4.6.8, "*Οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη.*"

[54] As Gilmont notes, in his earlier years the latter would have been expected. Nevertheless, we are at least aware that at one point Calvin did possess volumes of Homer's works and said he had need of them Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, 165; Calvin, Letter III, to Francis Daniel, September 6, 1529, as found in *Letters of John Calvin*, vol. 1, 30.

he attempts far more. This can most clearly be seen in one of his most protracted interactions with any of these classical authors—his interactions with classical authors in 1.5.5.

The fifth chapter of the *Institutes* is dedicated to the Pauline idea that God is revealed by his works in the world and that human beings nevertheless delude themselves beyond understanding this revelation properly. As the chapter progresses, Calvin argues against those who consider the soul immortal but fail to acknowledge God as the creator of the soul.

First, Calvin argues for the presence of the soul itself. After bluntly rejecting the notion of an atomistic, Epicurean world in which the material world is at best separate from the divine, Calvin turns against those who would by "that frigid statement of Aristotle" deny the immortality of the soul and deprive God of his right as creator of the soul.[55] Calvin's arguments for the reality of the soul vary. First, he cites the intellectual observations, like the work of the astronomer, in which without bodily work or necessity the soul or mind makes determinations about the heavenly bodies. Then, developing an Augustinian theme, he argues that the soul is the seat of the memory in a manner unmatched by the body. To Calvin, these are proofs of the reality of the soul. The soul, though, does more: it points to the reality of God himself. Calvin's judgment, the existence of the soul itself wreaks of immortality and strongly suggests the existence of an eternal God. After all, he says, "Why is it that the soul not only vaguely roves about but conceives many useful things, ponders concerning many, even divines the future—all while man sleeps? What ought we to say here except that the signs of immortality which have been implanted in man cannot be effaced?"[56]

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[55] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.5

[56] Calvin, 1.5.5

Calvin argues too that the human inclination to "distinguish between right and wrong" suggests a greater judge with greater standards. To Calvin, this is a fundamental matter of the glory of God.

It is in this moment that Calvin anticipates the objections of those opposed to his ideas concerning both God and the soul. He says that "Vergil's famous saying" in *Aeneid* 724-740 is pleasing to them.[57] In this portion of the *Aeneid*, the hero Aeneas has descended into the underworld in order to ascertain information from his deceased father Anchises about his future conquests in Italy. Called a katabasis, these descent scenes were common enough in epic literature; Calvin, however, is not interested in speculations about the underworld itself.[58] Rather, he is concerned with a response given by Anchises to one of Aeneas' questions. In the surrounding scene, Aeneas is startled to see men thronging the banks of the River Lethe. After Anchises remarks bluntly these are ('They are souls, who by fate are owed other bodies') (6.713-714) Aeneas questions why this might be the case.[59] Anchises answers with the section quoted by Calvin. To Calvin, the statement at line 726 is the most problematic: "*spiritus intus alit,*" ('the spirit nourishes within'). "As if the universe, which was founded as a spectacle of God's glory, were its own creator!"[60] Calvin cites an earlier work of Virgil, the *Georgics*, which sounds similarly pantheistic to that from the *Aeneid.*[61] To Calvin, this is more repugnant than the ideas of the materialist "filthy

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[57] Calvin. 1.5.5

[58] For examples of authors who highlighted this theme in Virgil, see Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil in the Renaissance*, 149-190.

[59] "*animae, quibus altera fato / corpora debenture*;*"* All quotations of Virgil can be found in LCL 63; those specifically from the *Aeneid* can be found at LCL 63:582 Virgil, trans. G. P. Goold, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid, Books 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Revised edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[60] Calvin, 1.5.5

[61] "*Deum namque ire per omnia*" ("For indeed God pervades through all things" *Georgics* 4.221), LCL 63:234

dog Lucretius."[62] It makes "a shadow deity to drive away the true God, whom we should fear and adore."[63] To Calvin, these writers had failed to understand both the human soul and the God who made it. Note that Calvin treats Virgil and the other ancient authors as real interlocutors—they are not mere authorities, but representatives of ideas more or less current in his own day. It also serves as an exemplum for a proper apologetic argument, to Calvin; considered in light of the author's preface, this argument, new to the 1559 edition, is designed as a form of humanistic pedagogy, intent on helping new Reformed ministers present their arguments effectively and passionately.[64]

In all, the 1559 *Institutes* demonstrate Calvin's commitment to key humanistic ideals of rhetorical style, philological interest, and pedagogy. While a reading of the document without an understanding of these emphases may well result in an increased understanding of Reformed systematic theology, it cannot help with a view to the context of Calvin's thought or its immediate usefulness in the years following its publication.

IV. Conclusion

Calvin is a complicated figure; to oversimplify him is to misunderstand him. He certainly was no mere humanist. He was not, though, merely a pastor or reformer either. He was a man torn between the ideals of his own day. Decrying ambition, he pursued it. Even after rejecting certain ideals so often associated with humanism—a high view of humanity and the will, for example—he nevertheless engaged in the rigorous historical, philological, and literary pursuits which defined this movement. Many years into a reform project principally based on the Bible, Calvin considered

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[62] Calvin, 1.5.5

[63] Calvin, 1.5.5

[64] The pedagogical purpose can be seen well when compared to a contemporaneous development: the establishment of the Geneva Academy, which held to humanist educational standards. Gordon, *Calvin,* 299-303; Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 314.

scolding his audience in the manner of a Stoic. In his final work of systematic theology, intended to root his readers in order that they could properly read and interpret the Bible itself, Calvin "employs humanism to combat humanism,"[65] encourages already educated readers to pursue further education, if need be, in pagan thought—for the sake of one's arguments, and not one's soul. As a result, it is best to say that Calvin the humanist's greatest legacy is in fact Calvin the reformer. While Calvin certainly was a part of the bleeding edge of the Reform movement, neither his ideas nor his style arose in a vacuum. Because he was rooted in the joint streams of Protestant love for the Bible and humanist passion for erudition, Calvin was able to develop into the sophisticated voice of the Reformation, from his own day and even into the modern era.

[65] Wendel, *Calvin; the Origins and Development of His Religious Thought,* 44.

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