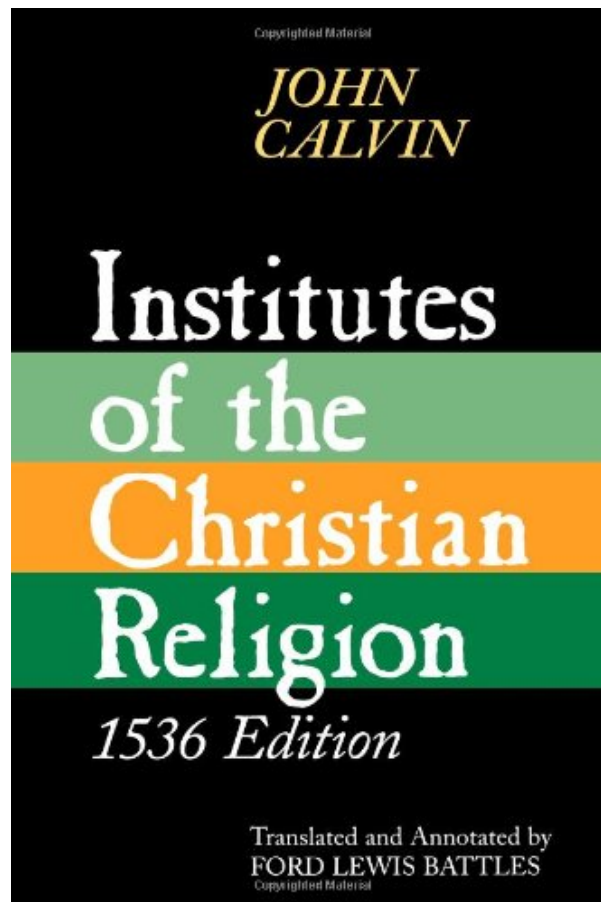


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RELIGION, 1536 EDITION BY MR. JOHN
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Language Notes

Text: English, Latin (translation)

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This revised edition of Battles's translation will interest general readers who wish to better understand the earliest expression of Calvin's theology, as well as scholars who wish to pursue further research.

About the Author

(1509-1564) One of the most influential reformers, his work was of significance throughout Europe and beyond. John Calvin was born in Noyon, France on July 10, 1509. His father was the secretary and attorney for the bishopric of Noyon. Calvin was a brilliant scholar and studied law in Paris, Orleans and Bourges. After what he called a "sudden conversion" at the age of 23, Calvin became a fervent Christian and scholar of the Scripture. Calvin did not immediately break with the Roman Catholic Church, but rather worked toward its reform. His pleas for reform soon brought upon him the hatred of the Catholic Church, and in time he was banished from Paris. Calvin fled to Switzerland, broke with the Catholic Church, and joined with the reformers. In 1536 he published his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which was a systematic presentation of the Protestant position. In 1559 he founded what later became the University of Geneva. Here he taught his beliefs to thousands of students who in turn carried "Calvinism" back to their homelands throughout Europe. John Calvin died in Geneva, Switzerland on May 27, 1564.

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John Calvin was just twenty-seven years old when the first edition of his Institutes was published in Basel in 1536. Calvin's "little book" — as he affectionately called it — grew in size throughout the rest of his life; eventually, this early, shorter version evolved into what is now known as the Institutes, the 1559 edition, which Calvin considered the authoritative form of his thought for posterity. / Renowned Calvin scholar Ford Lewis Battles translated the 1536 Institutes in 1975, after completing his masterful translation of the 1559 Institutes. This revised edition of Battles's translation will interest general readers who wish to better understand the earliest expression of Calvin's theology, as well as scholars who wish to pursue further research. In addition to Calvin's own classic text, the book's four appendices make available in English four significant Reformed texts, including a new translation of Calvin's preface to Olivétan's 1535 French Bible. Five indices include an index of biblical references and a comparative table of the 1536 and 1559 Institutes. Numerous citations in the endnotes from the writings of Calvin's predecessors and contemporaries help place the text in its historical context.

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Most helpful customer reviews

163 of 163 people found the following review helpful.

Classic theology - Classic literature

By Douglas VanderMeulen

John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion is a monumental work that stands among the greatest works of Christian theology and Western literature. It ranks with works such as St. Augustine's Confessions and City of God in value, insight and significance. The Institutes have molded the church's understanding of Christian doctrine for generations and has had untold influence in the development of Western thought in both the religious and civil arenas.

Calvin's Institutes represent his life work in teaching theology. They first appeared in 1536 and went through three significant revisions - each expanding and building upon the previous. This particular edition represents the final form and of which Calvin was very pleased.

Originally written to give basic understanding of Christian doctrine, they became one of the earliest systematic theologies of the Reformed tradition. Calvin's stated desire is to give the reader the necessary background to read and accurately handle the great doctrines and promises of the Bible.

Calvin sent a copy to the King Francis I to encourage him to stop persecuting the Christians who were embracing the gospel as taught by the Reformers. His basic argument was that if the king understood what these people believed he would stop killing them as heretics but rather see them as faithful adherents of historical Christianity. Calvin was no lover of novelty and throughout the Institutes copiously cites from the early church fathers and the long history of the Church's understanding of doctrine.

This two-volume work is broken down into four books that loosely follow the outline of the Apostle's Creed. Book 1 concerns knowledge of God. Book 2 is about Jesus Christ as redeemer. Book 3 is about the Holy Spirit's role in applying Christ's redeeming graces. Book 4 is about the church and practice.

This particular edition, translated by Battles and edited by McNeil is more expensive than the one produce by Beverage, but it is worth every extra dollar you spend. While the church is indebted to Beverage for his labor of love in getting many works by Calvin translated into English, his command of both French and Latin were not as strong as Battles. They were originally produced in both Latin and French and Battles' work demonstrates his competency in dealing with both languages. Also, Battles' mastery of Calvin's other writings is reflected in his voluminous footnotes, many of them very helpful to the reader for clarifying, further reading and cross-referencing. In addition, the indexes in the Battles edition are invaluable not only for searching the Institutes for topics but for gleaming Calvin's understanding of the church fathers.

Agree or disagree with Calvin, these are a necessary read for anyone who desires an understanding of the development of Western thought, literature and theology. They are not only great theology; they represent excellent writing and development of an argument. They are also highly pastoral and devotional. They are not like reading a modern systematic theology. Calvin understood doctrine to be more than theory, but something to mold our understanding of God, ourselves and the world in which we live. Carefully working through the Institutes is a journey worth taking!

Soli Deo Gloria!

171 of 179 people found the following review helpful.

On the translations

By dude

John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion is a classic. And the two most frequently suggested English translations seem to be the older Henry Beveridge translation and the newer John McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles translation. But it's hard for a layperson like me to know which English translation is "best." So for what it's worth, if anything, I thought the following quotations from Christian scholars might be helpful to some people:

1. Here's what Reformed Christian scholar and theological philosopher Paul Helm (who himself has studied and contributed several works on John Calvin) says:

"Incidentally, if you have the need of a translation of the Institutes, then the reissue of the Beveridge translation (newly published by Hendrickson) may be just the thing. It has new indexes, and has been 'gently edited', which means, I hope, only the removal of typos and other detritus. (I have not yet had the chance to check). Beveridge is superior to Battles in sticking closer to the original Latin, and having less intrusive editorial paraphernalia."

2. Here's another Calvin scholar, Richard A. Muller, on the two translations (from the preface of *The Unaccommodated Calvin*):

"I have also consulted the older translations of the Institutes, namely those of Norton, Allen and Beveridge, in view of both the accuracy of those translation and the relationship in which they stand to the older or 'precritical' text tradition of Calvin's original. Both in its apparatus and in its editorial approach to the text, the McNeill-Battles translation suffers from the mentality of the text-critic who hides the original ambience of the text even as he attempts to reveal all its secrets to the modern reader."

3. The following is from J.I. Packer in the foreword to *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*:

"No English translation fully matches Calvin's Latin; that of the Elizabethan, Thomas Norton, perhaps gets closest; Beveridge gives us Calvin's feistiness but not always his precision; Battles gives us the precision but not always the punchiness, and fleetness of foot; Allen is smooth and clear, but low-key."

4. Finally, the following is from David Calhoun:

"Let me just say a few words about English translations. The first was Thomas Norton back in the sixteenth century. Calvin was very fortunate with his first English translator. Norton did an exceptionally good job. Very soon after the completion of the Institutes in 1559, which was written in Latin, it was translated by Calvin into French and then quite soon into English. John Allen was the second translator. John Allen and Henry Beveridge were both nineteenth-century translators. The Beveridge translation is still in print. It was until fairly recently anyway. Those are not bad but not very good either. Ford Lewis Battles' 1960 translation is the one that we are using. Even though it has been criticized some, it is by far the most superior translation that we have at present."

Once again, I hope this might be helpful to some people.

100 of 104 people found the following review helpful.

unlike so much else you've ever read

By Dave K

Why you should read this book:

1. It's not too heavy (though it does make you think a lot). I have read a couple of puritan books of the 17th century and they are filled with great stuff but because you read them in the original English it's hard going, but this book translated from the Latin is much more readable. Although the book is v. long it is not as hard as you think it is - trust me.

2. It is nice to read a good theologian not setting out purely with the aim of defending the doctrines his own denomination has been teaching for centuries. Although he is influenced by tradition he is not as obsessed by it as some Protestants today. He does suffer slightly sometimes, i.e. has some wrong ideas about minor points (e.g. the ancient church on confirmation), because he is not just re-plowing a furrow that has been furrowed a thousand times, but these slips are usually picked up in the notes. It's so refreshing.

3. He really, really cares about the truth. Yes he does sometimes call his opponents "dogs" and "swine" which is less acceptable now than it once was, but he calls them that because he is angry because he sees heretics catching Christians in their nets, are you not upset when you see that?

Earlier reviewers have called him a tyrant because he used his limited power (he wasn't even a citizen of Geneva) to try to stop people sinning as much. Sometimes he went a bit overboard but at least he cared.

4. He uses the church fathers a lot more than anyone else I've ever read. He had read so much compared to now. I have heard that he worked very hard, 4hrs sleep, into an early grave etc, and it's not hard to see what he did. He was a full time pastor and yet had read all these books. Scripture is infinitely better than the fathers, but Calvin was concerned about the Catholics and he uses Augustine etc to show the Catholics of then and now that their beloved fathers would have hated the RC church post-500ish. You won't get that much elsewhere.

5. His chapters on providence and man's sinfulness. People think this book is all about predestination to salvation, but it doesn't really have a central theme like that. But essential to your understanding of election is God's providence and our depravity and Calvin gives these the right weight and makes so much so clear. However overriding all his writing on election and everything else is that we should try to understand as much as the bible tells us but go no further. He was, it seems to me (

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