

CELEBRATING JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564): "I PREACH OR TEACH DAILY...."



John Calvin (10 July 1509 - 27 May 1564): Theologian; reformer; attorney; teacher; author; humanist; polemicist. With the possible exception of Martin Luther, no man has had a greater impact on the theology of Protestant Churches than John Calvin.

Calvin was very much a part of the larger Protestant Reformation. He read widely, corresponded freely, and avidly discussed—in person and in print—how best to know and follow God.



The Reformation Wall in Geneva, Switzerland. From left to right: William Farel, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and John Knox.



Martin Luther. (1483-1546).

John Knox, Scottish clergyman and leader of the Protestant Reformation, who is considered the founder of the Presbyterian denomination, met John Calvin in Geneva and gained experience and knowledge of Reformed theology and polity from him.



John Knox (-1572)

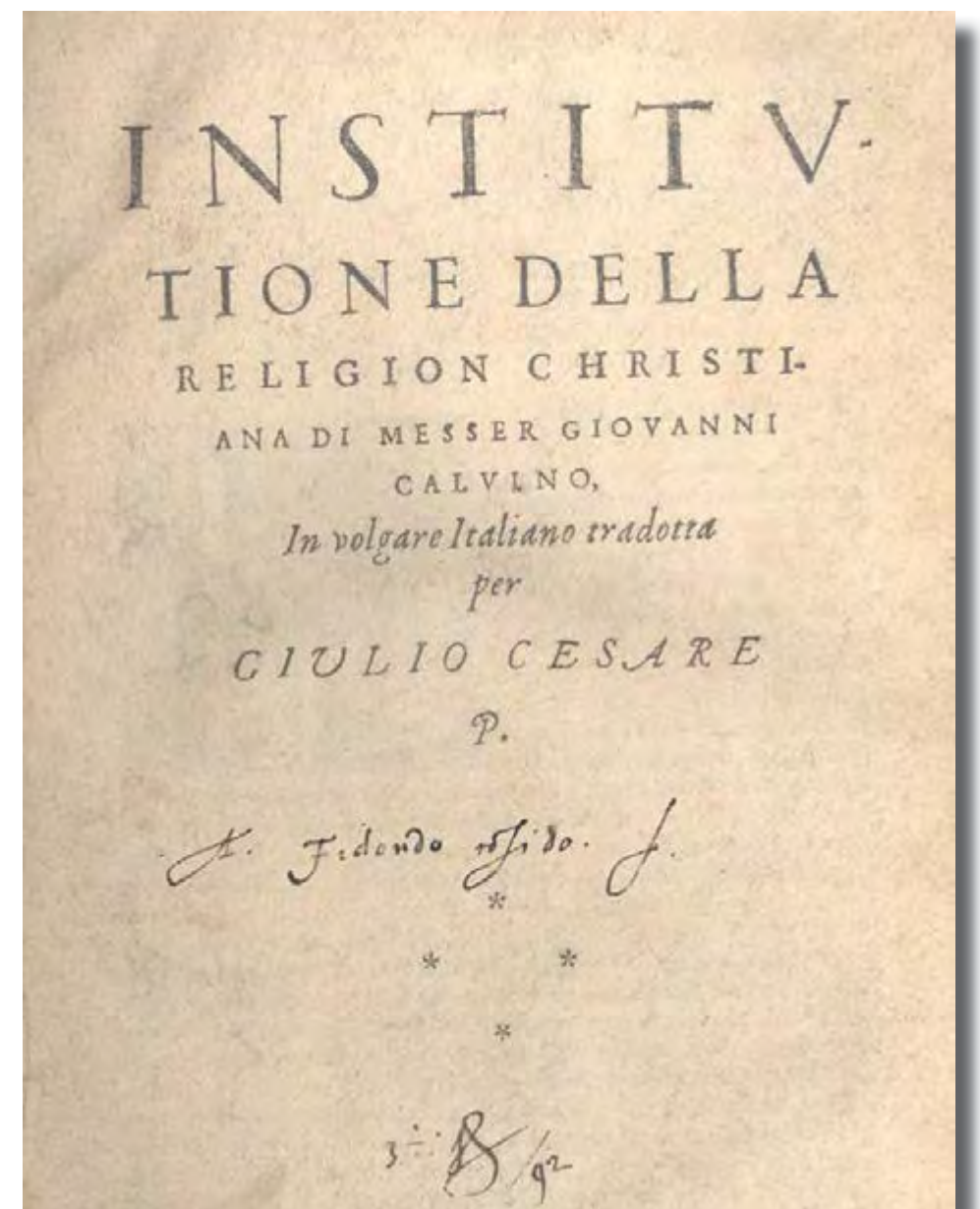


Philipp Melanchthon
From Theodore Beza. *Icones*. Geneva: I. Laonius, 1580.

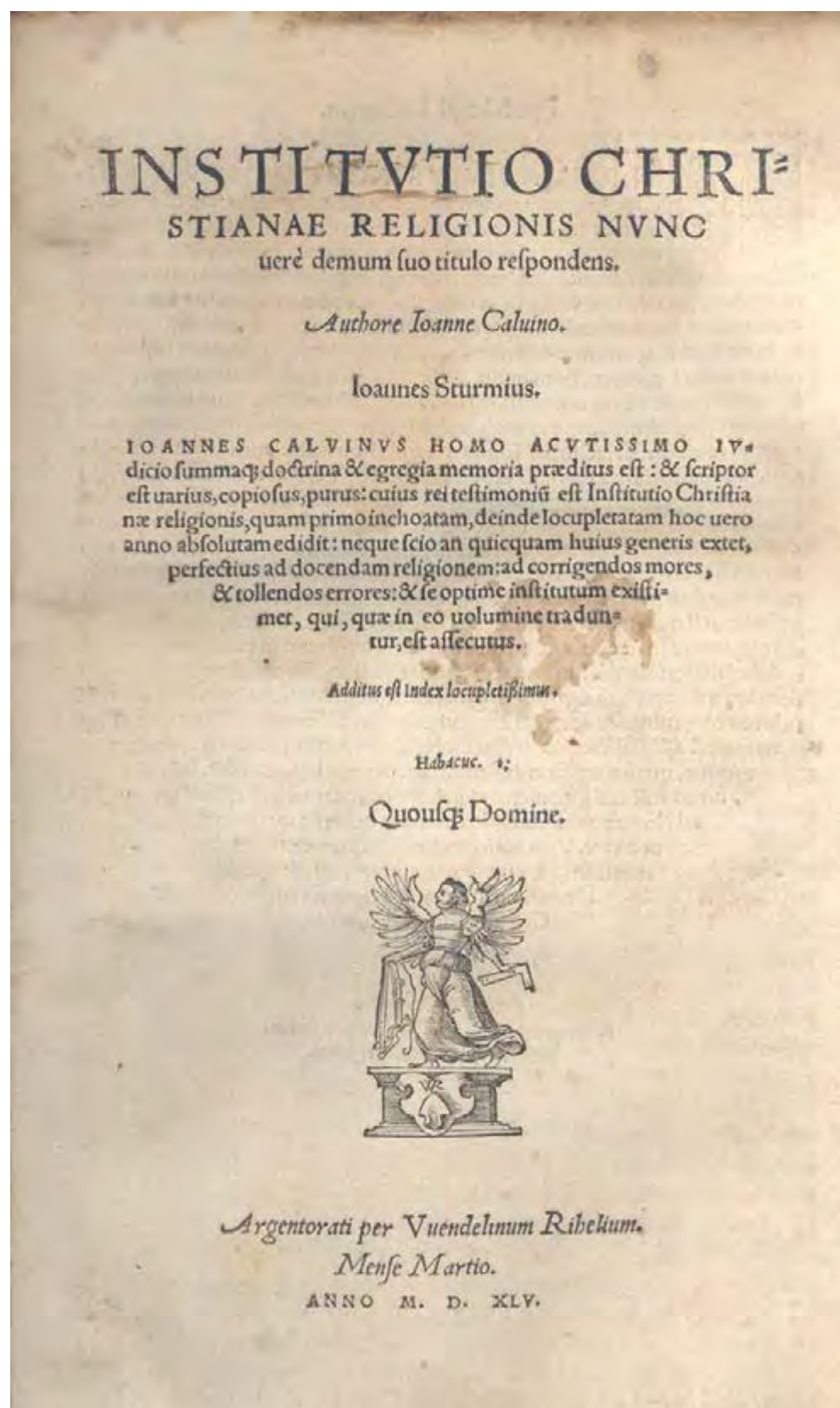
John Knox lived in Geneva as pastor of an English-exiles church and studied with Calvin. He described his Genevan experience as “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on the earth since the days of the apostles.” Knox brought not only Calvinist theology back to Scotland but a Calvinist’s purpose and drive for education “purely spoken and purely heard.”

Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), a colleague of Martin Luther’s at the University of Wittenberg, was one of the first reformers to publish a systematic treatise on the doctrines of the Reformation, his 1521 *Loci Communes*. Melanchthon’s style served as a model for Calvin. In fact, in the second edition of his *Institutes* (1539), Calvin specifically added chapters on subjects that first appeared in *Loci Communes*. Their friendship became particularly close after Luther’s death in 1546. They influenced each others’ ideas on many topics, including moral law and free will, but Calvin believed Melanchthon and Bucer went too far in offering concessions to opponents of the Reformation.

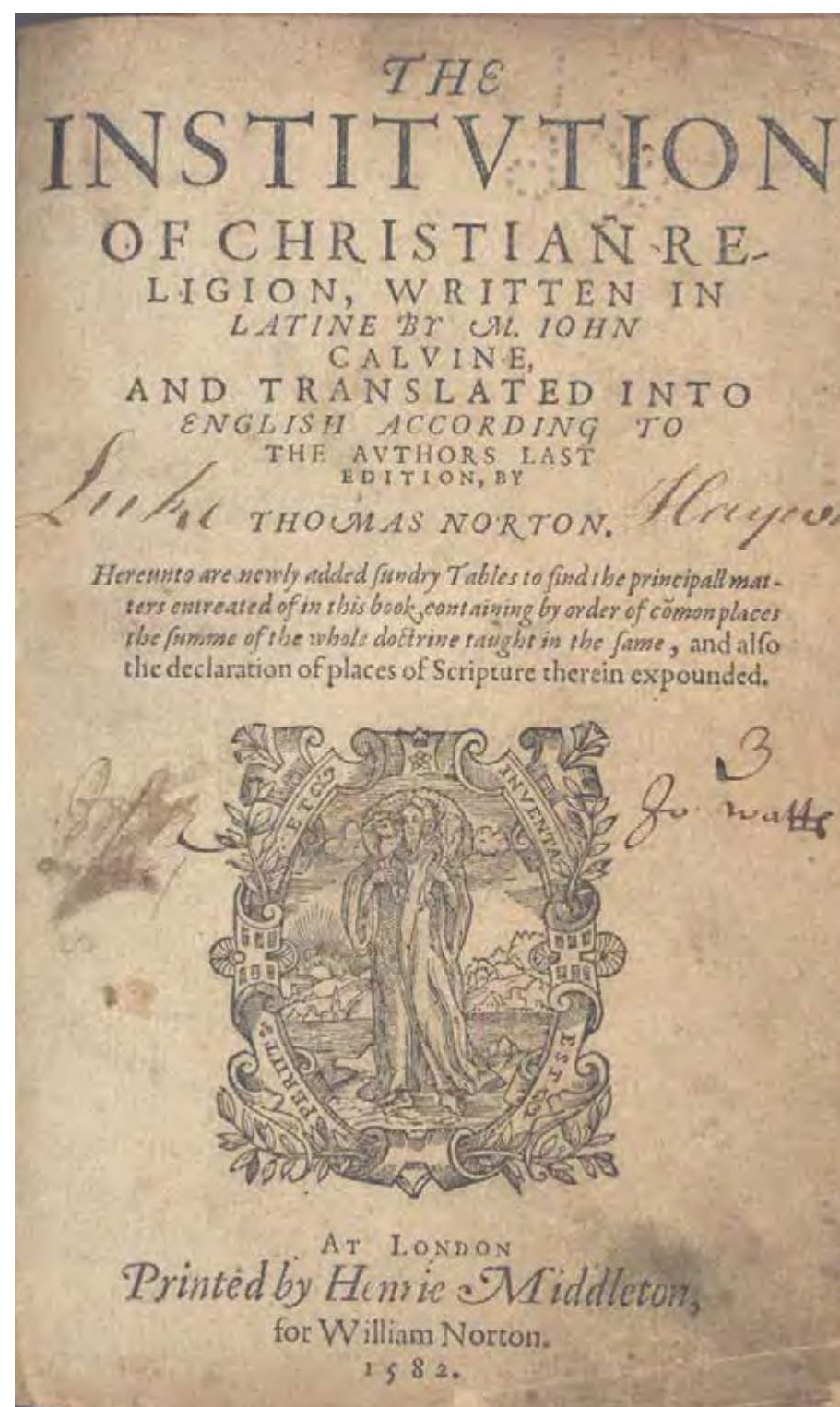
First published in 1536, the Institutes are the basis of Calvin's theology and thoughts on the Christian faith. The original work was short introduction to reformed thinking for the people, and addressed law, the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, false sacraments, and Christian liturgy.



Institutione della religion Christiana di Messer Giovanni Calvino; in volgare Italiano per Giulio Cesaro, trans. Geneva: Burgese, Dauodeo, Iacchi, 1557.



Institutio Christianae Religionis Nunc uere demum suo titulo Respondens. Strasbourg: Vuendelinus Rihelius, March 1545.



The Institution of Christian Religion, written in Latine by M. Iohn Calvine, and translated into English according to the author's last edition, by Thomas Norton. London: Henrie Middleton for William Norton, 1582.

Calvin would continue to expand and refine the Institutes until the work became a treatise for students of theology. The final edition, published in Latin in 1559, consisted of 4 books and 104 chapters.

Calvin was the son of Gérard Cauvin of Noyon, France, a notary and registrar to the ecclesiastical court, and Jeanne le Franc, daughter of an innkeeper. Supported with a church scholarship, fourteen-year-old Calvin left home in 1523 and traveled south to Paris to study at the Collège de Montaigu, a theological school, and then the University of Paris. There Calvin studied the Roman writers, philosophy and logic and was exposed to theological conservatism, humanism, and a movement calling for the reformation of the church, and prepared for a career in law.



Theodore Beza (1519-1605)

After completing his studies, Calvin settled in Paris and experienced what he described as a “sudden conversion” which caused him to work with church reform activists.

Controversy caused Calvin to flee Paris and relocate to Basel, where he wrote his six-chapter distillation of evangelical faith:

The Institutes of the Christian Religion.

View of Noyon From Emil Doumergue. *Jean Calvin: Les homes et les choses de son temps*. Vol. 1. Lausanne: George Bridel & Cie, 1899.



“His stature was of middle size; his complexion dark and pale; his eyes brilliant even in death, expressed the acuteness of his understanding” wrote Calvin’s classmate, successor, friend, and biographer Theodore Beza.



Calvin standing in library
From *Ioannis Calvini Noviodvnensis Opera Omnia; In Novem Tomos Digesta...*
Vol. 1 Amsterdam: Joannis Jacobi Schipperii, 1671.

In 1536, Calvin extended what was intended to be an overnight stop in Geneva after a conversation with William Farel (1489-1565) “...God would curse my retirement and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give my assistance, when the necessity was so urgent.”



William Farel
From
Theodore
Beza. *Icones*.
Geneva: I.
Laonius,
1580.

Farel, a French exile who had been the leading Reformation preacher in Geneva since 1532, persuaded Calvin to remain in the newly-independent canton and take on two new roles, that of a public minister and church builder. The Geneva magistrates ultimately resisted Farel's and Calvin's push for a reformed church free from state control, and the city council ordered them to leave in 1538. At Martin Bucer's invitation, Calvin moved on to preach to a congregation of French refugees and continue his studies in reforming Strasbourg. Farel and Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541.

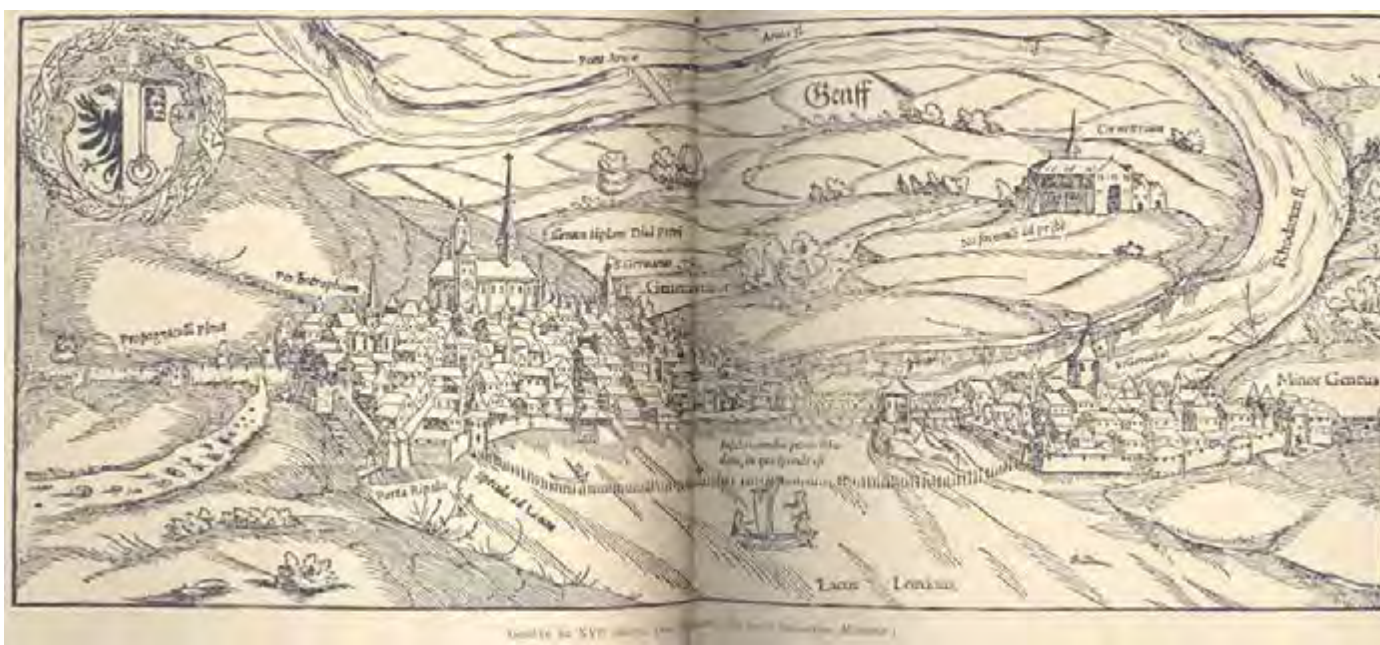
At Farel's urging, Calvin married Idelette de Bure, a widow with two children and member of his Strasbourg congregation. They had a son who died in infancy. Idelette, his “most amiable partner” and “faithful helper,” died in 1549; Calvin was married for nine years, widowed for for fifteen.



Martin Bucer (1491-1551), the leading Protestant reformer in southern Germany, and Calvin held many similar views, but Calvin did not hesitate to criticize the older Bucer when he disagreed with him. In this supportive but combative environment, Calvin worked on the second edition of his *Institutes* and further refined his views on reformed liturgy and church organization.

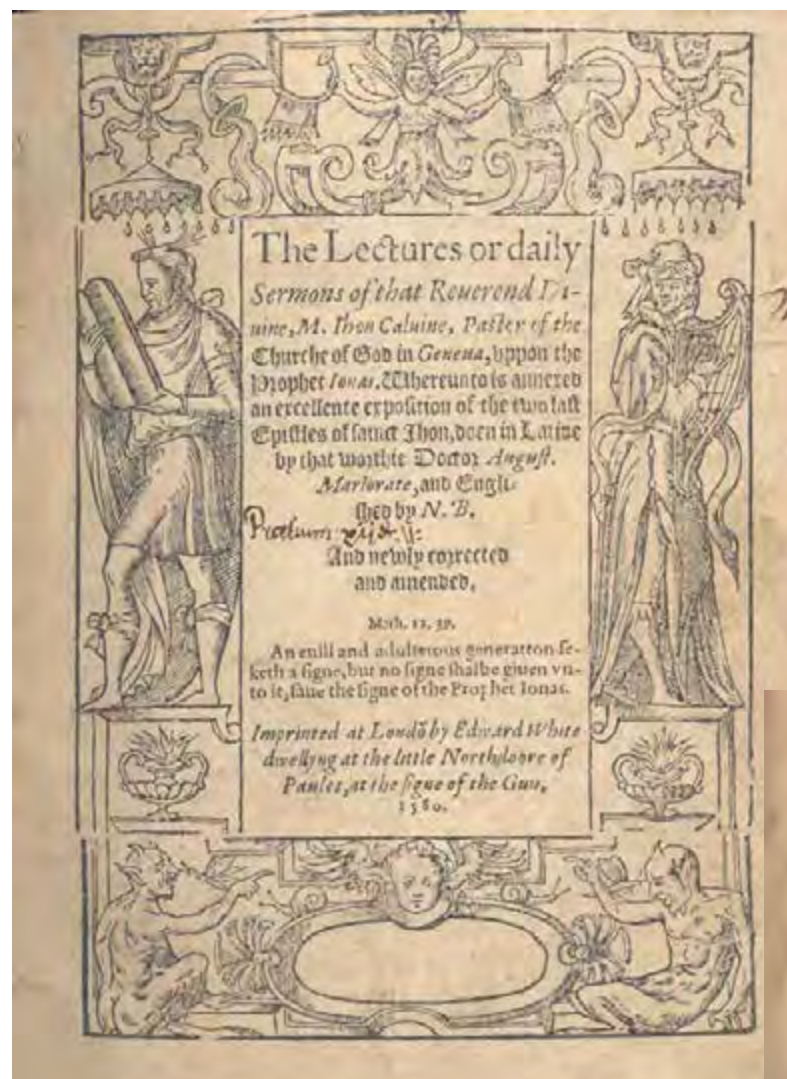
From Theodore Beza. *Icones*. Geneva: I.
Laonius, 1580.

When Calvin wrote from Strasbourg to William Farel, “I preach or teach daily,” he did not exaggerate. He delivered sermons three and four days every week. Additionally, three days a week he taught a critical examination of scriptures, first privately and then for the city. When he returned to Geneva, his “preach or teach” duties increased: he was preaching daily every other week as well as twice on Sundays for periods of time.



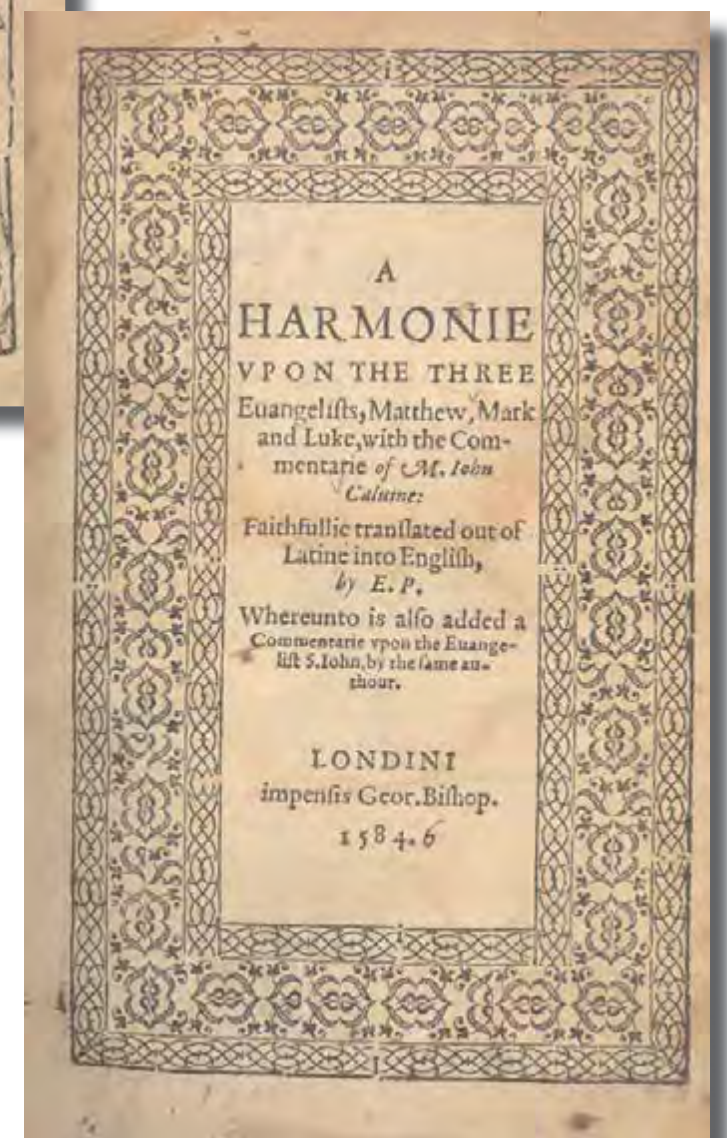
Geneva, 16th century

From Emil Doumergue. *Jean Calvin: Les homes et les choses de son temps*. Vol. 2. Lausanne: George Bridel & Cie, 1899.



The Lectures of Daily Sermons of that Divine, M. Iohn Caluine, Pastor of the Church of God in Geneva, upon the Prophet Ionas...
London: Edward White, 1580.

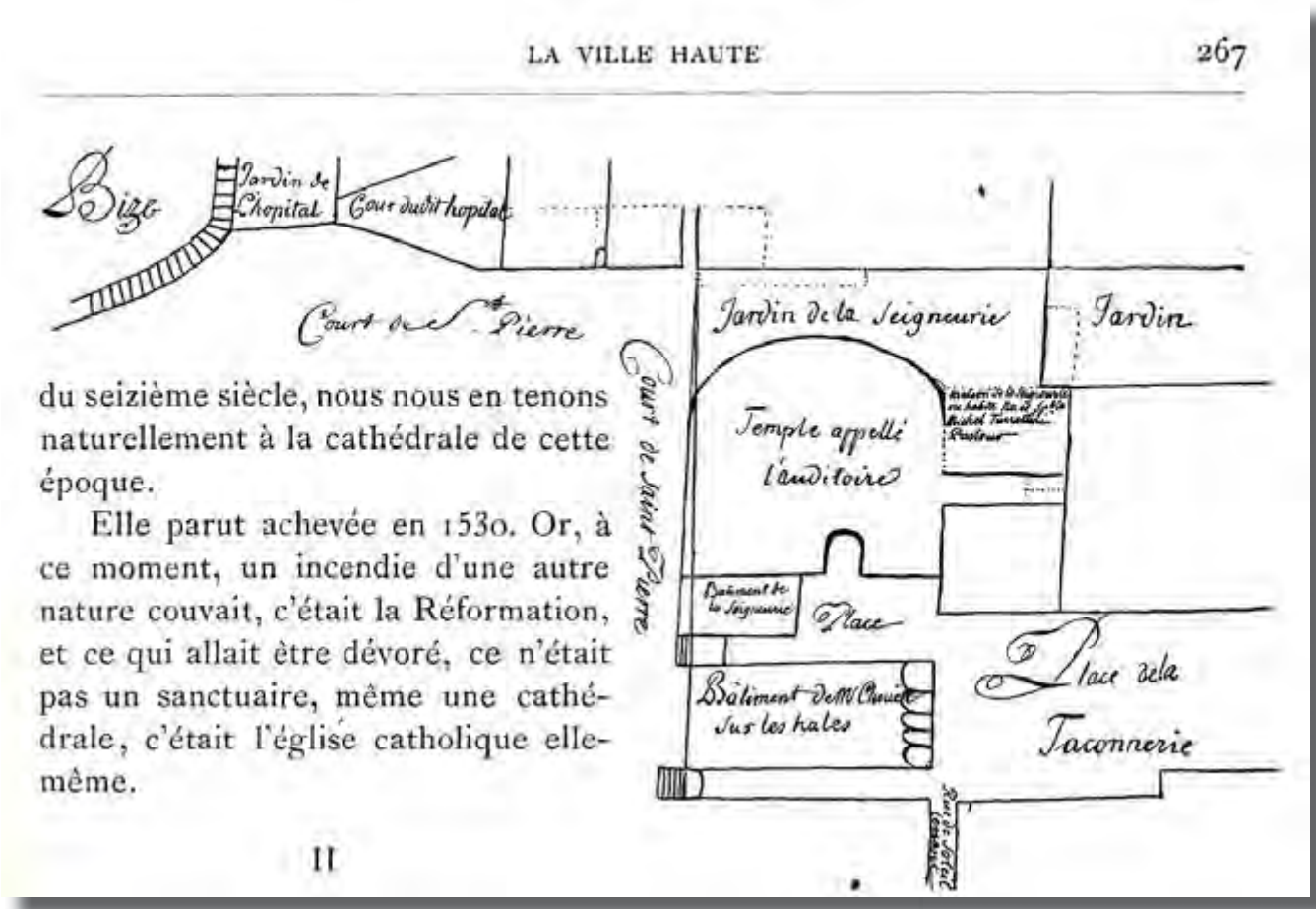
A Harmonie upon the Three Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with the Commentarie of M. John Calvin; faithfully translated out of Latine into English by E.P. London: Geog. Bishop, 1584.



Calvin prepared and wrote commentaries on each book of the New Testament (except Revelation) and most books of the Old Testament, publishing these in Lat-

in and French. versions of Institutes also both in Latin and French. He revised and republished increasingly extensive versions of Institutes also both in Latin and French. He maintained an active correspondence leaving more than two thousand letters across Europe. His personal library was a rich one leaning to theology and humanism. Friends' letters note, with some frequency, the books and pamphlets they forwarded to him. Even as Calvin sold his books to support himself during his meager years, he collected as many as 350 volumes which he left to the Geneva Academy in his will.

Intolerance had often been the rule in medieval European life. Fred Graham notes in *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact*, “Love one’s neighbor was preached (if often broken) by the church in the middle ages, and preached (if often broken) by the pastors in Geneva (163).” However, Calvin’s theology held that the reconstituted human life must be a life in a loving community. In Geneva, Calvin and his supporters advocated for a godly polity and society. They arranged for medical care of the sick in the Hospital of Geneva, which was partially funded by free-will donations to the Bourse Francaise beyond what the city provided.



The hospital gardens adjacent to the Church of St. Pierre in Geneva, where Calvin often preached. Archives, anciens plans [Geneva]. From Emile Doumergue. *Jean Calvin, Les Hommes et les Choses des Son Temps*. Vol. 3. Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1905, 265.

Table 1
Selected Expenditures from the Extraordinary Accounts
of the Bourse Francaise:
August 1559–November 1562²⁵

All the extraordinary expenditure since the first of August 1559	
To two wives of absent ministers,	5 f
For a dozen and a half of New Testaments from Monsieur Maccard,	4 f 6 s
To three poor people at Monsieur de Normandie's,	3 f 1 s
Rendered to Monsieur de Normandie,	12 f
Rendered to Monsieur de Normandie again,	7 f 4 s
Rendered to Monsieur de Normandie,	36 f 6 d
The extraordinary expenditure for the poor in the month of September 1559	
To Denis for the binding of two dozen catechisms in leather,	4 f
To himself for fifteen New Testaments, part in leather, part in parchment,	5 f
Rendered as much to Monsieur de Normandie as to Monsieur de Saint Germain by the hands of Monsieur de la Touche,	33 f 2 s
To a poor Burgundian boy to convey him to Basel by the order of the Company,	15 s
To a young man in order to go to Lyons by the order of the Company,	20 s
Rendered to Monsieur de Normandie,	32 f 8 s
Extraordinary expenditure for the poor in the month of October 1559	
Likewise I repaid Monsieur de Normandie 19 ecus pistoles that he had advanced for a minister who had been sent to Gascony for which there is the signature of Antesignanus [Pierre Davantes] as a guarantee. The said 19 ecus pistoles worth	95 f
To Master François, having come from Lausanne, to render to Master Pierre Viret,	10 f
Likewise for the rent of a house for the wives of some of the ministers sent into France that belongs to the Prevost of Cluny,	52 f 1 s
Rendered to Monsieur de Normandie that he had advanced for several days,	21 f 8 s
More to himself again for another party,	29 f 2 s

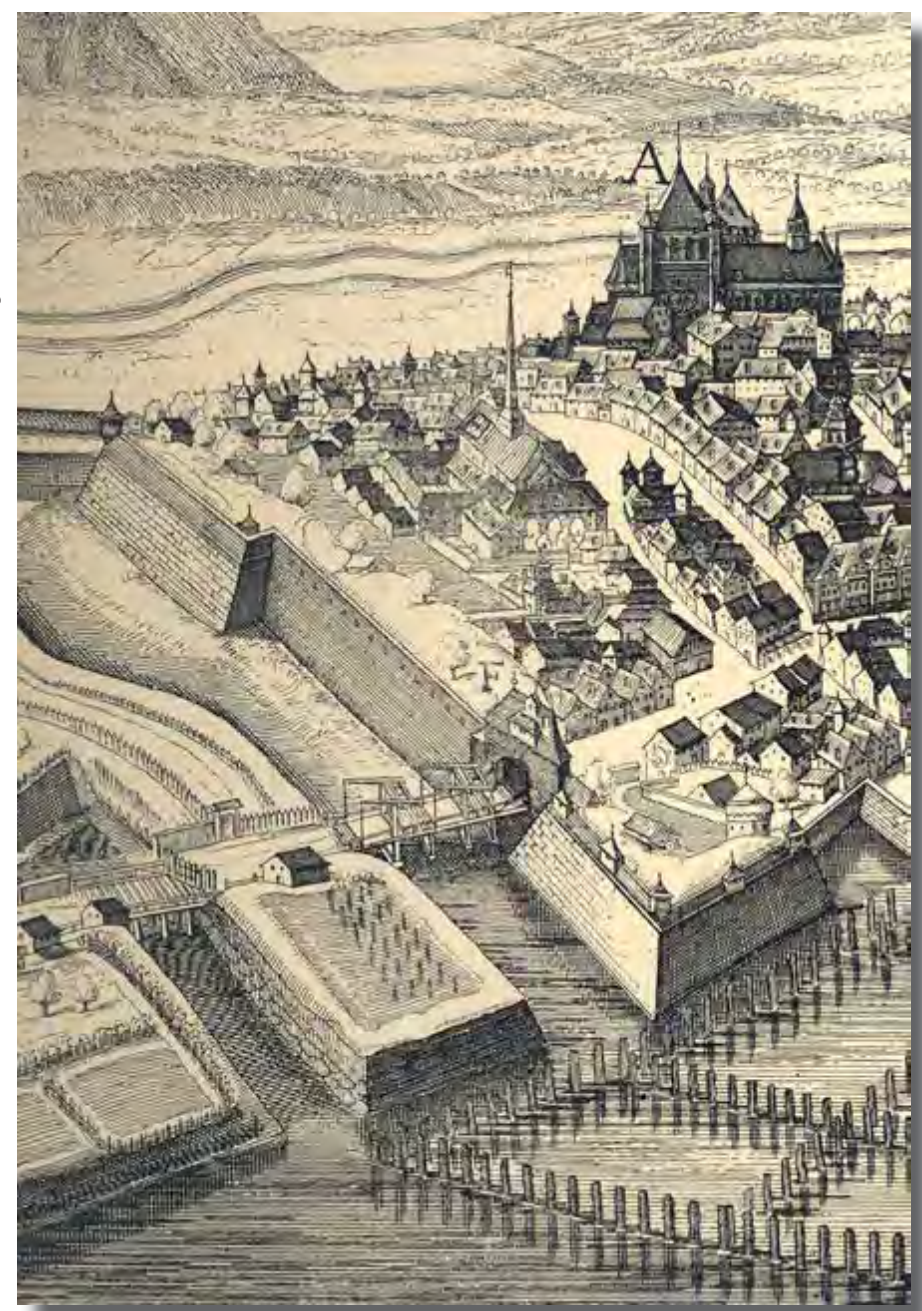
Table illustrating selected expenditures from the accounts of the Bourse Francaise, 1559. From Jeannine Olson. *Calvin and Social Welfare*. London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1989, 58.

The main social instrument of reformed polity in Geneva was a welfare system that Calvin helped to establish, the Bourse Francaise (fund for poor foreigners). Church donations financed the Bourse to serve refugees who came to Geneva to live in a reformed city. Many reformers of Calvin’s era desired to alleviate poverty, and they established a Bourse office in Geneva across the street from the hospital.

Teaching was a constant for Calvin. Pastors from Reformed Geneva's three parishes had a practice of gathering weekly to hear a member's exposition of scripture. The gatherings functioned as continuing education for the ministers. Calvin's Ecclesiastical Ordinances called for laypeople to meet with this gathering and participate in the commentary.

Calvin developed the Ecclesiastical Ordinances at the city council's request, offering a church structure to address the teaching, education, health, and welfare of its members by assigning defined responsibilities to pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons which bound the officers to the community.

Geneva, 16th century
From Emil Doumergue. *Jean Calvin: Les homes et les choses de son temps*. Vol. 2. Lausanne: George Bridel & Cie, 1899.



View of the city of Geneva, Switzerland, with figure E being the hospital
P. Chouet, 1655, in Emile Doumergue. Jean Calvin, Les Hommes et les Choses des Son Temps, Vol. 3. Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1905, 35.

Calvin worked to found the Geneva Academy. The year before its opening in 1559, Calvin

brought in his classmate, his future successor and biographer, Theodore Beza, as the Academy's rector (administrator) and Greek professor. His former teacher Mathurin Cordier, at eighty-two years old, arrived to teach Latin. Starting with 162 students, within five years the institutions enrolled 1,300 students (scola private) and academy (scola publica).

The students learned public speaking, mathematics, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Older students studied theology and law, philosophy and logic, reading the Old Testament and Greek philosophy as their Hebrew and Greek improved.

Michael Servetus, a medical student and mathematician, wrote *The Restitution of Christianity*, in early 1553. Servetus' non-orthodox interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity (he saw no reference to the Trinity in the Bible and therefore believed that God was one) angered both Roman Catholic and Reformed bodies. Condemned to death (in absentia) by the French Catholic inquisition, Servetus fled to Geneva, where the Council condemned him to death and burned him at the stake in October 1553. In early 1554, Calvin published *Defensio Orthodoxae Fidei* (*Defense of the True Faith*), refuting Servetus' position.

Theodore Beza, in his biography of his friend, described Calvin's frequent statement "How long, O Lord!"... when he spoke of the calamities of his brethren, with whose sufferings he was both day and night more afflicted than with any of his own." Suffering from respiratory and intestinal disorders, Calvin had poor health. At age 55, his health deteriorated further. He died on May 27, 1564. In accordance with his wishes, his grave was left unmarked.

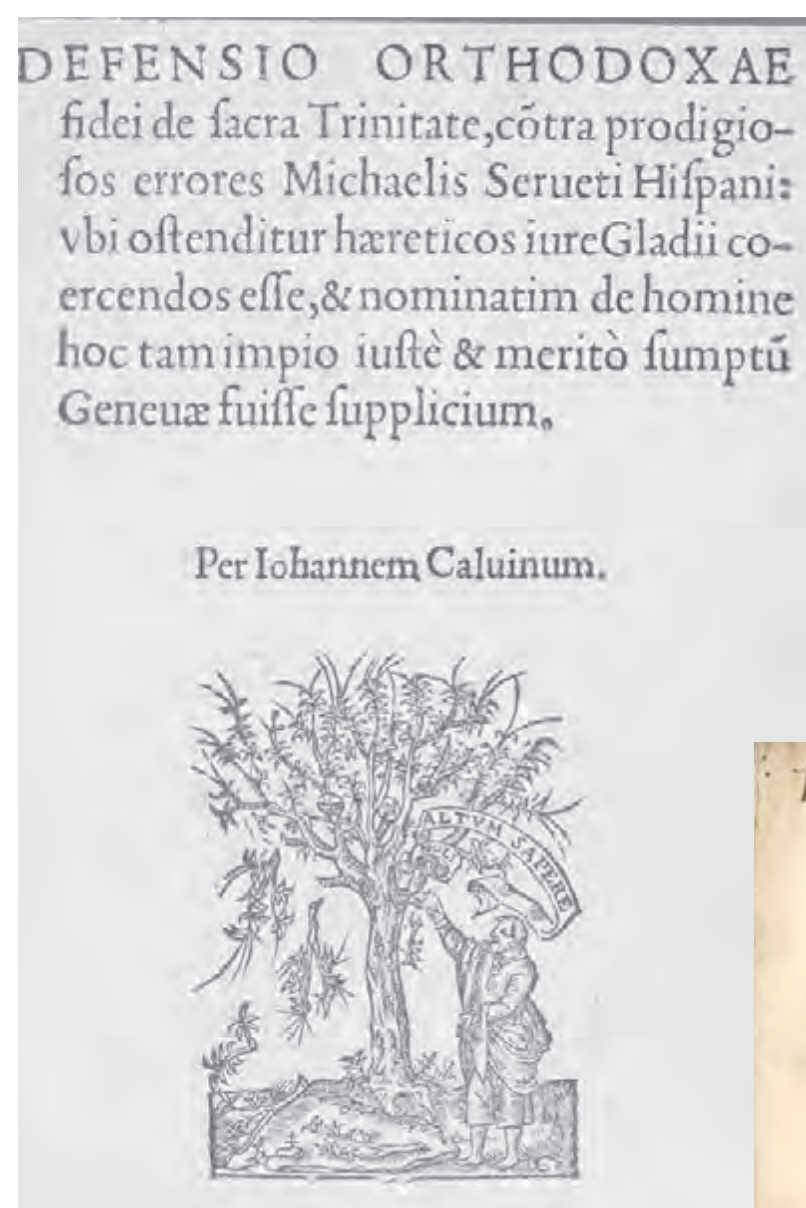


J. Calvin (1509-1564).

Exhibit prepared by the staff of the Presbyterian Historical Society, based on material in the society's holding

In Calvin's day, shortly after the invention of the printing press, polemic writings were widely used to take discussions of the issues to a wider audience—both to refute arguments and to rally the faithful. Fellow believers turned to Calvin to produce refutations due to his skill as a polemicist.

He attacked the Catholic church, including the imperial diets of Regensburg, the Council of Trent, Paul III's Consilium, the Sorbonne articles of faith, the Augsburg Interim; other reforming movements such as the Anabaptists, "Nicodemites," and anti-Trinitarians; and, in later years, individuals including Albert Pighilius on free will, Joachim Westphal, and Michael Servetus.



John Calvin. *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate*.... [Geneva]: Robert Stephen, 1554.

First published in 1544 in French, *De vitandis superstitionibus* includes commentaries by Calvin, Bucer, Melancthon, and Peter Martyr on the "Nicodemites," Calvin's term for French Protestants who outwardly conformed to the Catholic Church and excused their conduct by citing the example of Nicodemus, the Jewish Rabbi, who came to Jesus by night.

De vitandis superstitionibus, quae cum sincera fidei confessione pugnant. [Geneva]: John Gerard, 1550.

