

CHAPTER 3

Calvin's Attitude Toward the Fathers and Medieval Interpretation

In order to understand Calvin's hermeneutics accurately, we first need to determine his attitude toward the Scriptural interpretation practised by the Fathers, the Roman Catholics, and the Jewish interpreters.

Calvin observed that they did not have the sound method of Scriptural interpretation. He, therefore, criticized them from the perspective of his hermeneutical ideal. By distinguishing his hermeneutical method from theirs, Calvin developed his own distinctive principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Although he respected the theology of Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose, Calvin often disagreed with their wrong hermeneutical methods. Especially in the commentaries on the Pauline Epistles he strongly criticized their Scriptural interpretation prevalent in the Roman Catholic church since Origen.

In this chapter I shall investigate how Calvin dealt with the interpretation of Scripture of others from the perspective of his own distinctive principles of *brevitas et facilitas* which he employed in his exegetical writings.

A. Origen

A learned interpreter, creative philosopher, master of the spiritual life, and active churchman, Origen, was born in Alexandria of Christian parents around 185. He received a thorough Christian education in the home of his parents, and studied in the Catechetical School under Clement. During the persecution of Septimius Severus (202) his father, Leonides, was beheaded.¹ Then Origen was prevented from meeting martyrdom only by a trick of his mother, who concealed his clothes in order to compel him to remain at home.² Later Origen took the place of his teacher, Clement, who had fled, as head of the Catechetical School. Origen's great work on Biblical criticism was the *Hexapla*, a study edition of the Old Testament, presenting in parallel columns the Hebrew text, a Greek transliteration, and translations of Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint, and Theodotion. Among his hermeneutical works are the *Scholia* on Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers,

¹ *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, trans. Christian Frederick Cruse and Isaac Boyle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 217.

² *Ibid.*, p. 218. Eusebius recorded as follows; "It was then, too, that the love of martyrdom so powerfully seized the soul of Origen, though yet an almost infant boy, that he advanced so close to encounter danger, and was eager to leap forward and rush upon the conflict. . . . But when he saw that there was no other course for him to pursue, as his great zeal was far beyond his years, he could not remain inactive, but sent to his father a most encouraging letter on martyrdom, in which he encouraged him, saying, 'take heed, (father) not to change thy mind on account of us.'"

commentaries on almost all the books of Scripture, and many homilies. One of the most significant theological works of Origen was the *De Principiis* (*On First Principle*), conceived as a systematic exposition of Christian doctrine in four books on God (the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit) and the heavenly beings, of man and the material world, of free will and its consequences, and of the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture.

Origen believed that the Scriptures themselves are divine, that is, are inspired by the Spirit of God.³ Origen also recognized that most of the narrative material in Scripture was historical, and that the literal meaning was useful for simple believers.⁴ But his method of Scriptural

³ Origen, *On First Principles*, 4.1, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973), p. 256.

⁴ Origen did not ignore the literal interpretation of the text entirely. On this issue, see Moisés Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?: The History of Interpretation in the light of Current Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house, 1987), pp. 58-63; Dan G. McCartney, "Literal and Allegorical Interpretation on Origen's *Contra Celsum*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 281-301.

For the studies of Origen's hermeneutics, see H. de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: L'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950); Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986); R. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM, 1959); S. Lauchli, "Die Frage nach der Objektivität der Exegese des Origenes," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 10 (1954): 165-197; Jean Daniélou, "Les sources bibliques de la mystique d'Origène," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 23 (1947): 126-141; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 167-178; M F. Wiles, "Origen as Biblical Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1. eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University

interpretation became allegorical due to Philo's strong influence.

Being under the influence of neoplatonism, Origen went on to accept the allegorical exegesis of Philo. Scripture was for him a mirror, which reflected the divinity sometimes darkly, sometimes brightly. A Key to the allegorization of Scripture was found in Proverbs 22, 20-21: 'Behold, I have ascribed it to thee three manner of ways, in thoughts and knowledge, that I might show thee the certainty, and the words of truth, to answer out of these to him who sent thee.'⁵

Origen also based his vision of the threefold meaning of Scripture on Paul's threefold division of human personality in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 'spirit, soul, and body'. He believed that the meaning of a passage of Scripture might have a bodily or literal sense, a soul or moral sense, and a spiritual or allegorical sense. He described this view as follows;

Each one must therefore portray the meaning of the divine writings in a threefold way upon his own soul; that is, so that the simple may be edified by what we may call the body of the Scriptures (for such is the name we may give to the common and literal interpretation); while those who have begun to make a little progress and are able to perceive something more than that may be edified by the soul of Scripture; and those who are perfect and

Press, 1989), pp. 454-489; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 187-203; David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church*, pp. 87-102; Charles J. Scalise, "Origen and the *Sensus Literalis*," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Peterson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), and "The *Sensus Literalis*: A Hermeneutical Key to Biblical Exegesis," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989): 45-65; John Rogerson, "The Old Testament," in *The Study and Use of the Bible*, vol. 2, *The History of Christian Theology*, ed Paul Avis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 31-35.

⁵ James George Kiecker, "The Hermeneutical Principles and Exegetical Methods of Nicholas of Lyra, O. F. M. (CA. 1270-1349)" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1978), p. 240.

like the men of whom the apostle says: 'We speak wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, which are coming to nought; but we speak God's wisdom hidden in a mystery, the wisdom which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory-such as these may be edified by that spiritual law, which has a 'shadow of the good things to come,' as if by the Spirit. Just as man, therefore, is said to consist of body, soul and spirit, so also does the Holy Scripture, which has been bestowed by the divine bounty for man's salvation.⁶

Origen emphasized the allegorical interpretation of Scripture in contrast to the Jews who understood the prophecies literally. "For the Jews, owing to their hardness of heart and their desire to appear wise in their own sight, have refused to believe in our Lord and Savior because they suppose that the prophecies that relate to him must be understood literally."⁷ He interpreted Scripture without a sufficient balance between the 'spiritual' meaning and the literal meaning, and developed the allegorical method of Scriptural interpretation to the extreme.

Origen as the founder of allegorical interpretation had a great influence on the hermeneutics of the Fathers and the Middle Ages. His 'threefold sense' was later transformed into the 'fourfold sense' of the Fathers. The allegorical interpretation of Origen influenced the method of interpretation of the Alexandrian school, Augustine, and Aquinas. This principle was used by many interpreters of the Middle Ages: Gregory Thaumaturgus, the martyr Pamphilus,

⁶ Origen, *On First Principles*, 4.2.4, pp. 275-6.

⁷ Origen, *On First Principles*, 4.2.1, p. 269.

Athanasius, Didymus the Blind, Pierius, Theognostus, Hierax of Leontoplois, Eusebius of Vercellae, Eusebius of Caesarea, Firmilian, and Victorinus of Pettau.⁸

How did Calvin criticize Origen's allegorical interpretation? Calvin's attitude toward allegorical interpretation clearly appears in his *Institutes* and commentaries. For example, in his *Institutes* Calvin rejected allegorical interpretation as follows:

First, suppose I do not want to accept their allegory. What pray, will they do? For no doubt the fathers divided this interpretation without regard to the true meaning of the Lord's words. Allegories ought not to go beyond the limits set by the rule of Scripture, let alone suffice as the foundation for any doctrines.⁹

Here Calvin did not deny allegorical interpretation based on the 'rule of Scripture', but rejected it in those cases where the true meaning of the text was twisted.

Calvin pointed out the weaknesses of Origen's allegorical

⁸ Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 201-2.

⁹ *Inst.* 2.5.19, p. 339. Cf. CO 2: 246. "*Primum, si nolim locum dare ipsorum allegoriae, quid obsecro facturi sunt? nam praeter germanum orationis Domini sensum a patribus excogitatum fuisse, nihil dubium est. Allegoriae ultra procedere non debent quam praeaeuntem habent scripturae regulam; tantum abest ut fundandis ullis dogmatis per se sufficiant.*" For the study of Calvin's attitude toward allegorical interpretation, see Michael Carl Armour, "Calvin's Hermeneutic and the History of Christian Exegesis," pp. 172-214. According to Armour, one of the reasons of Calvin's rejecting allegory was that it simply ignored the design of the Holy Spirit (*Ibid.*, p. 194). David L. Puckett, "John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament," pp. 106-7, also argues that allegorical exegesis, according to Calvin, was the antithesis of historical interpretation, and vitiated the simplicity of Scripture (*scripturae simplicitas*).

interpretation. First, Calvin criticized Origen for ignoring the literal sense of the text and 'torturing' Scripture.

But as the apostle declares that these things are allegorized, Origen, and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the outer bark of the letter, there lurk deeper mysteries, which cannot be extracted but by beating out allegories.¹⁰

For Origen the literal meaning of the text was 'too mean and poor'. It was not very important for him. He, therefore, used the allegorical method to find the deeper mysterious truths of Scripture. It was wrong for Origen to think that the deeper mysterious sense of a passage was better than the simple and literal sense. Calvin indicated that Origen forced or twisted the simple text of Scripture. Calvin wanted an interpreter to explain the text literally without twisting it. I name this the avoidance of forced interpretation, one of the most important elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas* because it emphasizes the clear and simple meaning of the text. He, therefore, clearly rejected the allegorical interpretation with his principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin also pointed out that Origen's allegorical interpretation went away from the true sense of the text of Scripture. For Calvin the true meaning of the text was to reveal the intention of an author (*mentem scriptoris*).

Therefore Origen's allegorical interpretation which did not

¹⁰ *Comm. on Gal.* 4:22, p. 135.

show the true sense of the text of Scripture formed a striking contrast to Calvin's method revealing the mind of the author by employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

Secondly, Calvin blamed Origen for insisting on the various meanings of one passage.

Scripture, they say, is fertile, and thus produces a variety of meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning.¹¹

For Calvin the rich wisdom of Scripture did not mean that a text had various senses. Calvin pointed out that Origen's threefold meaning of the text did not have the basis of the historical-grammatical method. In stead of insisting on the various meanings of the text, Calvin showed that the true sense of the text was the natural and obvious meaning. The principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, according to Calvin, were to present his readers the natural and clear meaning of the text.

Thirdly, Calvin argued that the starting point of Origen's allegorical interpretation applied the terms letter and spirit in 2 Cor. 3:6 incorrectly to the principles of Scriptural interpretation. In the interpretation of the passage "for the letter killeth" in 2 Cor. 3:6, Calvin

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 135-6. For studies on Calvin's rejection of allegorical interpretation, see also *Inst.* 3.4.5; *Comm. on Gen.* 2:8, *Comm. on Isa.* 33:18, *Comm. on Jer.* 31:24, *Comm. on Da.* 8: 20-25; 10:6.

criticized Origen for developing his allegorical principle.

"The terms letter and spirit, therefore, do not refer to the exposition of the word, but to its influence and fruit."¹²

Here Calvin maintained that the key point of Origen's principle of allegorical interpretation originated from a mistaken interpretation of Scripture. Grasping the wrong point of Origen's hermeneutical method, and confirming that the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* were based on Scripture itself, Calvin clearly could employ these ideals in interpreting the text of Scripture. In fact, Calvin was the first interpreter who broke with the old method of the pre-Reformation interpreting the text by means of a sharp contrast between letter and spirit. Calvin, therefore, rejected Origen's allegorical interpretation, for, according to him, this method perverted the true sense of Scripture¹³ and did not show its natural and clear meaning.

B. Ambrose

Ambrose (340-397) also became an allegorical interpreter by using the method of Origen and Philo.¹⁴ For example, he

¹² *Comm. on 2 Cor.* 3:6, p. 175.

¹³ Cf. *Comm. on Gen.* 6:14, 21:12.

¹⁴ For the studies of the interpretation of Ambrose, see Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), p. 655; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 205-6. Bertrand de Margerie,

employed the allegorical interpretation of Philo in his other commentary on Genesis and used Origen for his commentary on Luke.¹⁵

Calvin followed Ambrose in some interpretations. In explaining the concept of righteousness, for example, Calvin accepted Ambrose's correct interpretation.

For this reason, it seems to me that Ambrose beautifully stated an example of this righteousness in the blessing of Jacob: noting that, as he did not of himself deserve the right of the first-born, concealed in his brother's clothing and wearing his brother's coat, which gave out an agreeable odor (Gen. 27:27), he received himself with his father, so that to his own benefit he received the blessing while impersonating another. And we in like manner hide under the precious purity of our first-born brother, Christ, so that we may be attested righteous in God's sight. Here are the words of Ambrose: "That Isaac smelled the odor of the garments perhaps means that we are justified not by works but by faith, since the weakness of the flesh is a hindrance to works, but the brightness of faith, which merits the pardon of sins, overshadows the error of deeds."¹⁶

Calvin, however, pointed out some problems in the interpretation of Ambrose. First, Calvin thought that the interpretation of Ambrose was exceedingly forced. For example, Calvin criticized Ambrose's interpretation of 1 Cor. 9:5 "Have

Les premiers grands exégètes Latins, vol. 2, Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1983), pp. 99-143; Milien Lamirande, "Enfance et développement spirituel: le commentaire de Saint Ambroise sur Saint Luc," *Science et Esprit* 35 (1983): 103-116.

¹⁵ Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978). p. 20. "St. Ambrose made Philo Judaeus the basis of his commentary on Genesis. . . . but he added allegories and he used Origen for his commentary on St. Luke."

¹⁶ *Inst.* 3.11.23, pp. 753-4.

we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Calvin said,

One thing farther must here be noticed, that the Apostles had no horror of marriage, which the Papal clergy so much abominate, as unbecoming the sanctity of their order. . . . For as to the explanation given by Ambrose, as referring to other persons' wives, who followed the Apostles for the purpose of hearing their doctrine, it is exceedingly forced.¹⁷

In the interpretation in 2 Cor. 2:5 "But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part; that I may not overcharge you all." Calvin mentioned that Ambrose's interpretation was ingenious: "I am aware, that Ambrose understands it as meaning - part of the saints, inasmuch as the Church of the Corinthians was divided but that is more ingenious than solid."¹⁸ From the perspective of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin rejected the forced interpretation of Ambrose. According to Calvin, in order to justify doctrine many interpreters forced and twisted the real sense of the text of Scripture. Calvin tried to find out the genuine meaning of the text. Secondly, Calvin did not agree with Ambrose because Ambrose's interpretation was, in his view, not suitable to the intention of the author of Scripture. For example, in the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5:22 "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Calvin demonstrated that his interpretation was closer to

¹⁷ *Comm. on 1 Cor. 9:5*, p. 293.

¹⁸ *Comm. on 2 Cor. 2:5*, p. 149.

Paul's intention than Ambrose's: "At the same time, neither of them (Chrysostom and Ambrose) explains Paul's meaning, and perhaps have not altogether hit upon what he intends. I shall state briefly my view of it."¹⁹ Calvin showed the suitability of the text, one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, by means of the intention of the author, the historical situation, the grammatical construction, and the context of the present passage. Calvin, however, was not always against the interpretation of Ambrose and sometimes agreed with him if his view was suitable.²⁰

C. Jerome

Jerome (345-420) used the allegorical interpretation of his early days under the influence of Origen. But later he came to stress the historical interpretation of the Old Testament narratives and prophecies in his commentaries on Jeremiah. He added the deeper, spiritual sense of a passage to the literal meaning.²¹ Later he distanced himself somewhat

¹⁹ *Comm. on 1 Th.* 5:22, p. 302.

²⁰ *Comm. on 2 Cor.* 4:6, pp. 199-200.

²¹ Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. 96. For the studies of Jerome's hermeneutics, see Bertrand de Margerie, *Les premiers grands Latins*, pp. 145-179; David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church*, pp. 129-136. Witt Semple, "St. Jerome as Biblical Translator," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 48 (1965-66): 228-9; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp.

from this allegorical interpretation of Scripture. In spite of this, he could not entirely give up allegorical interpretation in his writings.²² Calvin pointed out some problems in Jerome's interpretation. First, Calvin did not agree with Jerome when his interpretation was not simple and did not show the intention of the author. In his exposition of Gal. 2:6 "whatever they were", Calvin said,

Chrysostom and Jerome take a harsher view of the words as an indirect threatening of the most distinguished apostles. "Whatsoever they may be, if they swerve from duty, they shall not escape the judgement of God: neither the dignity of their office, nor the estimation of men, shall protect them." But another interpretation appears to me more simple, and more agreeable to Paul's design.²³

Here Calvin criticized Jerome who did not show the mind of the author and the simple sense of the text. Calvin suggested that his readers employ the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* revealing the intention of the author and the simple meaning of the text. Secondly, Calvin pointed out that Jerome's interpretation was not sufficiently grounded on grammatical methods. For example, on the Greek participle *kategnosmenos* (worthy of blame) Calvin clearly explained:

It was customary with the Greeks to give to their participles the signification of nouns, which, every person must see, is applicable to this passage. This will enable us to perceive the absurdity of the interpretation

222-34. John Rogerson, "The Old Testament," pp. 41-46.

²² A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 33.

²³ *Comm. on Gal. 2:6*, p. 54. Cf. *Comm. on Isa. 28:19*, *Comm. on Jer. 1:17*, *3:12*, *13:27*, *Comm. on 1 Cor. 7:33*, *16:21*, *Comm. on Gal. 2:26*.

given by Jerome and Chrysostom, who represent the whole transaction as a feigned debate, which the apostles had previously arranged to take place in presence of the people. They are not even supported by the phrase, "I withstood him to the face," *kata prosopon*, which means that "to the face," or "being present," Peter was chastised and struck dumb.²⁴

Thirdly, Calvin argued that Jerome's interpretation was, in many cases, not agreeable to the context of a passage.²⁵ In the interpretation of Lamentations 5:13 "They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood." Calvin stated;

The Prophet now says, that *young men had been delivered to the mill*, or to the grinding-house; and we know that of all servile works this was the lowest; for as they used asses to grind, so also they used slaves. The meaning is, that the Jews were shamefully treated, and were reduced to the most abject condition. I know not how came Jerome to give this version, that they were basely used for lust; for *thechen*, means to grind or to tear. He thought that it means here something base, which could not be named, as though the enemies had shamefully abused the young men; we may gather from the second clause of the verse that such an idea does not accord with the passage.²⁶

Here Calvin stressed the suitability of the context, one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Fourthly, Calvin pointed out that Jerome's interpretation was often 'forced and strained'. With reference to Jer. 2:31 Calvin wrote: "Hence Jerome says, that they were said to be your, and not my prophets; as though God thus denied that he had given them any

²⁴ *Comm. on Gal. 2:11*, p. 62. Cf. *Comm. on Isa. 6:4*, 6:13, 8:7.

²⁵ *Comm. on 2 Ti. 4:5*, p. 258.

²⁶ *Comm. on La. 5:13*, pp. 505-6.

commission. But this view is forced and strained."²⁷

Criticizing Jerome's twisting the true meaning of the text, Calvin showed antiforce, one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

D. Augustine

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) had a great influence upon the interpretation of the Middle Ages.²⁸ Trigg says, "In the exegesis of Scripture, as in so much else, Augustine summed up the achievements of the Latin Patristic tradition and passed

²⁷ *Comm. on Jer.* 2:31. p. 134. Cf. *Comm. on Jer.* 3:12, *Comm. on Mt.* 25:1; *Comm. on Jn.* 4:1.

²⁸ For the studies of Augustine's hermeneutics, see J. R. Smith, "Augustine as an Exegete," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 61 (1904): 318-44; Maurice Pontet, *L'Exégétique de S. Augustin prédicateur*, *Théologie* 7 (Paris: Aubier, 1945); Gerald Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 541-563; Robert W. Bernard, "The Rhetoric of God in the Figurative Exegesis of Augustine," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 88-99; Bernard de Margerie, *Saint Augustine*, vol. 3, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1983); David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church*, pp. 136-46; Gerald Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 541-563; Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*, pp. 22-43; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 234-239; Henry Chadwick, "Augustine," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 65-69; Elaine Pagels, "The Politics of Paradise: Augustine's Exegesis of Genesis 1-3 versus that of John Chrysostom," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 67-99; John Rogerson, "The Old Testament," pp. 47-53.

it on to the Medieval church."²⁹

Augustine accepted the fourfold sense of the text which would be adopted later by medieval interpreters. Caplan explains the method of the four senses of Biblical interpretation succinctly:

Senses are multiplied in four ways: (1) according to the *sensus historicus* or *literalis*, by a simple explanation of the words; (2) according to the *sensus tropologicus*, which looks to instruction or to the correction of morals; (3) according to *allegoricus*. Exposition by this sense is exposition by a 'sense other than the literal'; (4) the *sensus anagogicus*, used mystically or openly, 'the minds of the listeners are to be stirred and exhorted to the contemplation of heavenly things.'³⁰

Although he did not ignore the literal meaning of the text, Augustine tended to stress the spiritual and allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Ambrose had a significant influence upon Augustine's method of allegorical interpretation. Augustine suggested that an interpreter should "use what is morally worthy of God as a criterion, a principle of exegesis he derives from the need for charity."³¹ He also insisted that the interpretation of Scripture be consistent with the church's rule of faith. Following the rule of faith, Augustine emphasized the doctrinal interpretation of Scripture.

²⁹ Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 43.

³⁰ Harry Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching," *Speculum* 4 (1929): 283.

³¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 3.12.18, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 90.

Calvin stood firmly in the theological method and tradition of Augustine. But in his commentaries Calvin did not follow Augustine's interpretation of Scripture.³² That Calvin did not accept Augustine's wrong interpretation does not mean that Augustine's method did not include a literal interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin's attitude toward Augustine's interpretation³³ was ambiguous because Calvin generally followed Augustine's theological doctrine of Christianity, but rejected Augustine's wrong interpretation of the text. Using the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin rejected Augustine's prolix interpretation of Scripture. Here Calvin showed how he formed brevity, one of principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. This principle was to interpret the text in as brief a manner as possible. In a letter to Farel in 1549 he said, "You know how reverently I feel toward Augustine, yet I do not conceal that his prolixity is displeasing to me. Still it may be that my brevity is too concise."³⁴ Calvin stated that Augustine's interpretation did not show the intention of the author

³² For the study of the relationship of Augustine to Calvin in the interpretation of Scripture, see Georges Besse, "Saint Augustin dans les oeuvres exégétiques de Jean Calvin: Recherches sur l'autorité reconnue à saint Augustin par Calvin en matière d'exégèse," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 5-6 (1959-1960): 161-172.

³³ In his commentaries Calvin directly mentioned Augustine around 100 times.

³⁴ "To Farel, September 1, 1549," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 2, p. 247.

clearly. *...the interpreter limited the scope of*

He (Paul) says further, that the Spirit is given, that is bestowed through the gratuitous goodness of God, and not conferred for our merits; according to what Augustine has well observed, who, though he is mistaken in his view of the love of God, gives this explanation, - that we courageously bear adversities, and are thus confirmed in our hope, because we, having been regenerated by the Spirit, do love God. It is indeed a pious sentiment, but not what Paul means: for love is not to be taken here in an active but a passive sense. And certain it is, that no other thing is taught by Paul than that the true fountain of all love is, when the faithful are not slightly touched with this conviction, but have their souls thoroughly imbued with it.³⁵

Since Calvin believed that the chief task of an interpreter was to reveal the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*), he seldom followed Augustine's interpretation without showing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin correctly criticized Augustine: "Augustine's interpretation of the word *proe-grape* ("hath been set forth") is harsh, and inconsistent with Paul's design."³⁶ He also pointed out that the problem with Augustine's interpretation was that his explanations were not related to the text.

For though what Augustine says is true, that even the sins of the saints are, through the guiding providence of God, so far from doing harm to them, that, on the contrary, they serve to advance their salvation; yet this belongs not to this passage, the subject of which is the cross.³⁷

Here Calvin employed respect for the context, one of the most significant elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*.

³⁵ *Comm. on Rom*, 5:7, pp. 193-4.

³⁶ *Comm. on Gal*. 3:1, p. 79.

³⁷ *Comm. on Rom*. 8:28, p. 315.

This principle was that an interpreter limited the scope of his interpretation on the issues related to the passage of Scripture, and tried not to depart from the central message of the text and to wander outside the key point of the subject. Calvin's criticism above did not mean that Augustine had disregarded for the context in interpreting the meaning of the text. What Calvin pointed out was that the exceedingly doctrinal interpretation of Scripture made an interpreter not to see what the passage itself said. Calvin agreed with Augustine on doctrine, but disagreed with him on the wrong interpretation of the Biblical text. In the interpretation of Gen. 22:12, for example, "Now I know that thou fearest God" Calvin remarked that Augustine's interpretation was forced. "The exposition of Augustine, 'I have caused thee to know,' is forced."³⁸ Calvin indicated that the problem with Augustine's interpretation was related to the fact that he did not examine the Greek manuscripts.³⁹

The prolix, doctrinal, forced interpretation of Augustine motivated Calvin to employ the principle of brevity. Through criticizing the problems of Augustine's interpretation, Calvin took the opportunity to formulate his own distinctive principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

E. The Roman Catholics

³⁸ *Comm. on Gen. 22:12*, p. 570.

³⁹ *Comm. on Jn. 12:32*, p. 37.

Before dealing with the interpretation of Scripture of the Roman Catholics we need to take into account the general background to the biblical interpretation of the Middle Ages. The Medieval Ages' interpretation was rooted in the tradition of the Fathers, which it developed in its own characteristic way.⁴⁰ During the Middle Ages, the interpreters interpreted Scripture mainly with the use of the *gloss* and the *scholium* (or *scholion*) and the fourfold sense in accordance with the tradition of the Fathers. Generally the *gloss* was the most characteristic device of the Medieval interpreters.⁴¹ It consisted of brief commentaries on words, phrases or sentences.⁴² The *scholium* was a longer theological interpretation of certain parts of the text which an interpreter considered important. During that era the use of the *gloss* and the *scholium* functioned as a canon for interpreting Scripture. Also, most of the interpreters during

⁴⁰ For the studies of Middle Ages' hermeneutics, see Walter J. Burghardt, "On Early Christian Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 11 (1950): 78-116; Robert E. McNally, *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1986), p. 29, and "Medieval Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 445-454; Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 4 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959); Ceslaus Spicq, *Esquisse d'une histoire de l'exégèse Latine au Moyen Age* (Paris: Z.J. Vrin, 1944); Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood, *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Medieval Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 435-441; James M. Vosté, "Medieval Exegesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 10 (1948): 229-246.

⁴¹ Wilhem Pauck, ed., *Luther: Lectures on Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. xxv.

⁴² Ibid.

the Middle Ages took the fourfold sense of Scripture as their hermeneutical starting point.⁴³ During the late Middle Ages Andrew of Victor, Nicholas of Lyra, and Thomas Aquinas⁴⁴ stressed the literal sense of Scripture more than other interpreters of their day. But the fourfold sense of Scripture was still largely accepted by the Medieval interpreters. Especially Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349) began to reject the allegorical interpretation and the tradition of the Fathers. Adopting the method of Thomas Aquinas' hermeneutics, Lyra developed his own method for the interpretation of Scripture. He placed considerable emphasis upon the literal sense of

⁴³ For example, Jerusalem may be interpreted to have the fourfold sense as follow:

"Literal: the *physical city* of Jerusalem

Allegorical: the *church*

Tropological: the *human soul*

Anagogical: the *heavenly Jerusalem/life hereafter*." See F. E. Deist and J. J. Burden, *An ABC of Biblical Exegesis* (Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1983), p. 79.

⁴⁴ For the studies on Thomas Aquinas' interpretation, see M. Dubois, "Mystical and Realistic Elements in the exegesis and Hermeneutics of Thomas Aquinas," *Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries*, eds. Benjamin Uffenheimer and Henning Graf Reventlow (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 39-54; Hugh Pope, "St. Thomas as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture," in *St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Aelred Whitacre (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1925), pp. 111-44; Maximino Arias Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget: Die Prinzipien Seiner Schriftdeutung und Seine Lehre von schriftsinnen* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1971); Per Erik Person, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957); Gerhard Ebeling, "Hermeneutik Locus of the Doctrine of God in Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas," *Journal for Theology and the Church* 3 (1967): 70-111; T. F. Torrance, "Scientific Hermeneutics According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962): 259-289.

Scripture, and especially influenced Luther's hermeneutics.⁴⁵

Calvin strongly criticized the Roman Catholic church on the interpretation of Scripture and began to point out the weaknesses in the Roman Catholic view of Scripture.⁴⁶ Calvin criticized that the Roman Catholic church did not accept the clarity of Scripture. "Wherefore it is detestable blasphemy against God in that the Papists say, that the Scripture is dark and doubtful. For to what end should God have spoken, unless the plain and invincible truth should show itself in his words?"⁴⁷ The theological basis of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas* employed by Calvin derived from the fact that Scripture itself was clear. But the Roman Catholic interpreters did not accept the Reformers' view that the fundamental clarity of Scripture offered a hermeneutical principle of Scripture.⁴⁸ Calvin also rejected the Roman Catholic view that an interpretation of Scripture adopted by a vote of council was true and certain.⁴⁹ He attacked the 'Romanists' for teaching that the power of interpreting

⁴⁵ James George Kiecker, "The Hermeneutical Principles and Exegetical Methods of Nicholas of Lyra, O. F. M. (CA. 1270-1349)," pp. 274-282. Here he argues that in his *Commentary on Song of Songs* Luther's basic approach was strikingly similar to the interpretation of Lyra.

⁴⁶ According to my investigation, Calvin criticized the Roman Catholic church's interpretation around 160 times in his *Institutes* and commentaries.

⁴⁷ *Comm. on Ac.* 18:28, p. 205.

⁴⁸ For this issue, see chapter 6.

⁴⁹ *Inst.* 4.9.13, p. 1177.

Scripture belonged to councils, and without appeal.⁵⁰ He criticized their view that the authority of Scripture was grounded in the approval of the church.⁵¹ In contrast to the Roman Catholic view, Calvin stressed the intention of the author and the Holy Spirit. By using the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, he tried to reveal the mind of the author inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Calvin pointed out several problems in the Roman Catholic interpretation of Scripture. He maintained that the Roman Catholic church perverted the text for the purpose of establishing their doctrines. "Papists pervert this passage, for the purpose of establishing the doctrine which they have contrived, without any authority from Scripture."⁵² According to him, the 'Papists' forced the text into serving their doctrine of meritorious works.⁵³ In the interpretation of Gen. 22:15 "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham" Calvin argued that the Papists boldly seized this passage in order to prove that works were deserving of all the good things which God conferred upon us.⁵⁴ Calvin correctly pointed out that the Papists' dependence upon the translation of the Vulgate made them torture the text. "Eddaddeh is translated by the Vulgate,

⁵⁰ *Inst.* 4.9.14, p. 1177.

⁵¹ *Inst.* 4.9.14, p. 1178.

⁵² *Comm.* on 1 Cor. 13:8, p. 425.

⁵³ *Comm.* on 2 Cor. 4:17, pp. 213-4.

⁵⁴ *Comm.* on Gen. 22:15, p. 572.

'I will call to remembrance,' on which account this passage has been tortured by Papists to support auricular confession, but so absurdly that even old wives can laugh at it."⁵⁵ Against the Roman Catholic interpreters' forcing the true sense of the text for establishing their own doctrine, Calvin stressed simplicity and avoided forced interpretation.

In the interpretation of Luke 22:19 "This is my body for you" Calvin interpreted symbolically. Calvin said, "the Lord appoints to us for a spiritual use an earthly and corruptible sign; which cannot take place, unless his command and promise are distinctly heard for the edification of faith."⁵⁶ But Calvin rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation of the 'Papists'. He criticized their interpretation of texts.⁵⁷ On the interpretation of Jn. 21:15 "Jesus saith to Simon Peter", Calvin argued that the Church of Rome 'tortured' this passage to support the 'tyranny of their Popery'.⁵⁸ Thus the Papists maintained that Peter held the highest rank, because he alone was specially addressed, granting that some special honour was conferred on him. Calvin pointed out that their view twisted the true meaning of the text in order to establish the primacy of the Pope.⁵⁹ Calvin thought that the true sense of the text

⁵⁵ *Comm. on Isa.* 38:15, pp. 173-4.

⁵⁶ *Comm. on Lk.* 22:19, p. 206.

⁵⁷ *Comm. on Lk.* 22:19, p. 208.

⁵⁸ *Comm. on Jn.* 21:15, p. 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* on Jn. 21:22, p. 31.

could not be found by means of the method employed by the Roman Catholic interpreters.

Calvin maintained that the interpretation followed by the Church of Rome did not relate to the contexts of passages. In order to justify the doctrine of the Roman Catholic church, so Calvin explained, the 'Papists' interpreted the passages with its traditions and dogmas. Thus this interpretation made the Church of Rome disregard the context of the text. For example, in the commentary of Gal. 2:15 "by the works of the law", Calvin remarked.

As the Papists of the present day are uneasy when we extort from them the acknowledgement that men are justified by faith alone, they reluctantly admit that "the works of the law" include those of a moral nature. Many of them, however, by quoting Jerome's gloss, imagine that they have made a good defence; but the context will show that the words relate also to the moral law.⁶⁰

Here Calvin argued that an interpreter should employ the principle of suitability by considering the context of a passage. Calvin maintained that the interpretation of the 'Papists' did not reveal the intention of the author because they endeavored to establish 'the merit and righteousness of good works'.⁶¹ By employing the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, Calvin did his best to discover the intention of the author (*mentem scriptoris*).

F. The Jews

⁶⁰ *Comm. on Gal. 2:15*, pp. 68-9.

⁶¹ *Comm. on Da. 6:22*, p. 381.

From Philo in Alexandria (c. 25 BC-40 AD) to Rabbi Solomon and David Kimchi in the Middle Ages, the Jewish interpreters had a great influence upon many Christian interpreters in the understanding of the Old Testament. However many Protestant interpreters, with their emphasis upon the continuity and the authority of both the Old and New Testaments, were in conflict with them. For example, one of the major arguments was to deal with the proper interpretation of the fulfillment of prophecy in the Old Testament.

I now turn to investigate Calvin's attitude toward the Jews and his assessment of the Jewish hermeneutics. Calvin's general view of the Jewish interpreters was negative. Calvin attacked them often in his Old Testament commentaries.

Calvin frequently used rabbinic commentaries and mentioned the Jewish interpretation.⁶² But Calvin referred to them not by name but collectively.⁶³ He called them 'the Rabbins',⁶⁴ or 'the Hebrews',⁶⁵ or 'the Hebrew interpreters'.⁶⁶ Calvin referred to many Jewish authors in

⁶² In his commentaries on the Old Testament, Calvin mentioned the Jewish interpretation approximately 90 times. Especially in his *Commentary on Psalms*, Calvin criticized the Hebrew interpreters in many places.

⁶³ *Comm. on Da. 9:24.*

⁶⁴ *Comm. on Da. 9:24, Comm. on Ps. 119:1.*

⁶⁵ *Comm. on Ps. 17:10, 119:1.*

⁶⁶ *Comm. on Hab. 3:13.*

this fashion: the Targum of Jonathan,⁶⁷ the Chaldee Paraphrast (the Chaldean Targum),⁶⁸ Zaadias (Saadia Gaon),⁶⁹ Rabbi Barbinel (Isaac Abarbanel),⁷⁰ and David Kimchi.⁷¹

Calvin recognized Jewish commentaries as being useful for the understanding of Hebrew grammar and words.⁷² But Calvin's

⁶⁷ *Comm. on Isa.* 38:2, p. 153. "Jonathan renders it, 'Give up thy house to another'; but the construction conveys a different meaning."

⁶⁸ *Comm. on Isa.* 11:5, p. 382. "The Chaldee Paraphrast explains it thus; 'and the righteous shall be round about him, believing worshippers shall approach him.' But I adopt a more simple interpretation, as if he had said, 'he shall not appear like kings, clothed with purple and a crown, or girded with a belt; righteousness and truth shall shine forth in him.'"

⁶⁹ *Comm. on Isa.* 40:31, p. 239.

⁷⁰ *Comm. on Da.* 2:44, p. 183. He was a strong opponent of the Christian interpretation on Daniel.

⁷¹ *Comm. on Ps.* 112:5, p. 326. Calvin regarded him as the most correct expositor among the Rabbins. In his *Comm. on Gen.* 3:1, pp. 146-7. Calvin criticized him because his interpretation was forced. In his interpretation of Ps. 112:5 Calvin mentioned that more correct was the interpretation of the Chaldean Paraphrast.

⁷² On this issue, see David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, pp. 1-7. Calvin's using Jewish commentaries for the understanding of Hebrew grammar and words caused a misunderstanding of the Lutheran theologians of 16th century. This misunderstanding originated from the ignorance of Calvin's hermeneutical principles. For example, Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603) who "worked energetically to eradicate crypto-Calvinist theological tendencies" strongly criticized the commentaries of Calvin. See William R. Russell, "Aegidius Hunnius" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 2, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 276; Ken Schurb, "Sixteenth-Century Lutheran-Calvinist Conflict on the *Protevangelium*," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54 (1990): 25-47.

general attitude toward the Jewish interpreters was critical.⁷³

Calvin demonstrated that the Jewish interpreters twisted the true meaning of the text. Calvin believed that all of Scripture did bear a witness to Christ Jesus as its goal. In John 5:39 Jesus said that the Scriptures testified about him. But in Calvin's view, the Jewish interpreters 'tortured' the proper christological meaning of texts because of their unbelief and wilful refusal to recognize Jesus as the Christ. "We must not be surprised at the shameful ignorance of these Rabbins, and at their blundering at the very rudiments, since they do not acknowledge the necessity for a Mediator."⁷⁴ The problems of the Jewish hermeneutics resulted, in his view, from their failure to acknowledge the christological orientation of Scripture.⁷⁵ Calvin maintained that they purposely wanted to pervert the text relating to Christ.

The rabbis confound the two monarchies, through their desire to comprehend under the second what they call the kingdom of the Greeks; but they display the grossest ignorance and dishonesty. For they do not err through simple ignorance, but they purposely desire to overthrow what Scripture here states clearly concerning the advent

⁷³ For the study of Calvin's attitude toward the Jewish interpreters, see David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, pp. 52-81.

⁷⁴ *Comm. on Da. 7:27*, p. 77.

⁷⁵ K. Exalto, "Calvijn over de vervulling van de oud-testamentische beloften," in *Reformatorische Stemmen verleden en heden: Bundel uitgegeven ter gelegenheid van het vijftigjarig bestaan van de Willem de Zwijgerstichting*, ed. D. H. Borgers, etc. (Apeldoorn: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1989), pp. 115-117.

of Christ. Hence they are not ashamed to mingle and confuse history, and to pronounce carelessly on subjects unknown to them.⁷⁶

In the interpretation of texts on the coming of the Messiah, Calvin attempted to show that the Jewish interpreters purposely denied the christological sense of the text. In the interpretation of Hos. 6:2 "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight", Calvin stated, "This place the Hebrew writers pervert, for they think that they are yet to be redeemed by the coming of the Messiah; and they imagine that this will be the third day. . . . Notwithstanding, this place is usually referred to Christ."⁷⁷ Calvin observed that the Jews did not treat this prophecy as relating to the final day of Christ's advent.⁷⁸ Calvin's opinion was that the Jewish interpreters perverted the true exposition and tortured the Prophets' meaning. In the interpretation of Isa. 7:14 "Behold, a virgin shall conceive", Calvin mentioned that the Jews rejected the christological meaning of the passage.

This passage is obscure; but the blame lies partly on the Jews, who by much cavilling, have laboured, as far as lay in their power, to pervert the true exposition. They are hard pressed by this passage; for it contains an illustrious prediction concerning the Messiah, who is here called Immanuel; and therefore they have laboured, by all possible means, to torture the Prophet's meaning

⁷⁶ *Comm. on Da. 2:39*, p. 174.

⁷⁷ *Comm. on Hos. 6:2*, p. 217.

⁷⁸ *Comm. on Da. 7:27*, p. 72.

to another sense.⁷⁹

Calvin argued that the Jewish commentators twisted the true meaning of the text 'in order to ascribe to the glory of their own nation and to boast their own privileges'.⁸⁰ Their 'boasting privileges' appeared in their forced interpretation of Jos. 2:1 "They came into a harlot's house". Here the Jewish interpreters considered the name harlot to mean one who kept an inn. Concerning this interpretation, Calvin argued that the Rabbis presumptuously wrested Scripture and gave it a different turn for the honour of their nation.⁸¹

Calvin indicated that the Jewish interpreters perverted the simple meaning of the text and obscured the plain truth of Scripture.⁸² In doing so their interpretation was suited to their own interests.⁸³ They perverted and obscured the meaning of the text by 'the most chilling comments'.⁸⁴ Here Calvin employed the principle of the avoidance of forced interpretation, one of the most important elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. The Jewish interpreters did not show the simple and true sense of the text of Scripture because they did not have the correct view of Messiah.

⁷⁹ *Comm. on Isa.* 7:14, p. 244.

⁸⁰ *Comm. on Da.* 2:44, p. 181.

⁸¹ *Comm. on Jos.* 2:1, p. 43.

⁸² *Comm. on Ps.* 109:8, p. 278.

⁸³ *Comm. on Ps.* 27:9, p. 459.

⁸⁴ *Comm. on Ps.* 29:1, p. 475.

Calvin often pointed out that many of the Jewish expositors did not reveal the real intention of the author.⁸⁵ An example can be found in his *Commentary on Isaiah* 54:2. "They who think that the Church is compared in this passage to a synagogue are, in my opinion, mistaken, and only succeed in increasing the obstinacy of the Jews, who perceive that the Prophet's meaning is tortured."⁸⁶ For Calvin the chief one of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*, however, was to reveal the intention of the author. But they ignored the significant purpose of the interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin maintained that the Rabbis invented 'an absurd fable': "The Jews have, according to their manner, invented a foolish fable."⁸⁷ They exercised their wit in fabulous glosses which had no historical foundation.⁸⁸ Calvin denied the strange story invented by the Jewish interpreters to explain Jer. 17:11 "As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool". He wrote: "The Rabbis, according to their practice, have devised fables; for they imagine that the partridge steals all the eggs of other birds which she can find, and gathers them in one heap, and then that the pullets, when

⁸⁵ *Comm. on Ps.* 15:4, p. 211.

⁸⁶ *Comm. on Isa.* 54:2, p. 135.

⁸⁷ *Comm. on Gen.* 4:23, p. 219.

⁸⁸ *Comm. on Am.* 2:1, p. 172.

hatched, fly away, as by certain hidden instinct, they understand that it is not their mother."⁸⁹ Jewish pride, in Calvin's view, was exposed in the lack of humility with which the Jewish interpreters approached the text: They used their own conjectures in the interpretation of Scripture. In the interpretation of Ps. 136:13 "Who divided the Red Sea" Calvin argued that their conjectures were literally diabolic:

The Psalmist speaks of divisions in the plural number, which has led some Jewish authors to conjecture that there must have been more passages - an instance of their solemn trifling in things of which they know nothing and of their method of corrupting the Scriptures entirely with vain fancies. We may well laugh at such fooleries, yet we are to hold them at the same time in detestation; for there can be no doubt that the rabbinical writers were led to this by Satan, as an artful way of discrediting the Scriptures. Moses plainly and explicitly asserts that the heaps of waters stood up on both sides, from which we infer that the space between was one and undivided.⁹⁰

Here Calvin showed the principle of the avoidance of conjecture, one of the most significant elements of the ideal of *brevitas et facilitas*. This principle was to remove wrong speculations and to seek the simple meaning of the text. Calvin pointed out that their interpretation was not simple and natural. "The rabbins give this explanation - that the Prophet says that he himself was God's herald, and thus recites his words; but this is forced and unnatural."⁹¹ He also said, "Some Jewish interpreters understand it of the laws

⁸⁹ *Comm. on Jer. 17:11*, p. 358.

⁹⁰ *Comm. on Ps. 136:13*, p. 186.

⁹¹ *Comm. on Zec. 2:8*, p. 68.

of the heathen. . . . I therefore keep by the more simple explanation."⁹² From the principle of the avoidance of forced interpretation, Calvin criticized the Jewish interpretation.

It is clear that Calvin's attitude toward the Jewish interpreters was extremely critical and negative. Although Calvin referred to their grammatical commentaries and etymological skills, he strongly maintained that their interpretation of the Old Testament was a failure because they did not recognize Jesus as the Christ and the Messiah. Calvin's precise insight to judge the wrong interpretation of the Jewish interpreters was closely related to the employment of the principles of *brevitas et facilitas*.

⁹² *Comm. on Ps. 119:109*, p. 488.