

detailed analysis, McKim's volume not only offers insight into Calvin as a biblical interpreter, but may also challenge the reader in their own exegesis and hermeneutics.

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*A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, Anthony N. S. Lane, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing Group, 2009, pp. 174, ISBN 978-0801037313. £9.99

*A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (eds.), Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2008, pp. 528, ISBN 978-1596380912. £24.21

In many respects, 2009 has been Calvin's year. His modern-day inheritors have descended on Switzerland in droves, marking his 500<sup>th</sup> birthday with conferences, honorary lectures, and sermons. Such a renewed focus on any theologian invariably leads to increased literary output, and "Calvin 500" is no exception. Noting the recent publication of various Calvin-related books, this short review article selects two on the specific topic of the *Institutes*, and probes the extent to which they enrich the wider sphere of Calvin studies.

At the outset, it is acknowledged that despite the similarity in titles, the works in question are significantly different in composition and purpose. The product of a single author, Anthony Lane's book is reasonably short (174 pages) and functions as a Calvin reader, offering guidance as it follows the contours of the *Institutes*. By contrast, David Hall and Peter Lillback's volume (479 pages) is an edited collection of essays covering the content of the *Institutes*.

### **A Reader's Guide to Calvin's *Institutes***

Anthony Lane's book wastes little time in setting out its stall: this is not a stand-alone book. Indeed, his intention is that his *Reader's*

*Guide* and the *Institutes* (specifically the McNeill-Battles translation) should exist in symbiosis. This is apparent from Lane's style. Save for the introductory sections (a concise Calvin biography, an account of the various editions of the *Institutes*, and so on), Lane writes in short, snappy bullet points which take their lead directly from Calvin's own progression of thought. As such, this short book is only readable alongside Calvin's own (considerably longer) four books. In that sense it is quite different to T. H. L. Parker's classic, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*. Written in a more straightforward prose, one can read Parker without reading Calvin; the same cannot be said of Lane. However, it is to Lane's credit that he draws the reader to pay close attention to the text.

Strangely, Lane should be praised for producing a book that is, on its own, somewhat unreadable.

Lane is further to be respected for highlighting the relative carelessness of the McNeill-Battles translation when it comes to Calvin's references. The casual Calvin reader may well assume that the biblical, patristic or medieval references in the text were recorded by Calvin himself; however, this is not the case. Lane cites the example of numerous references to Thomas Aquinas, of which only four are written in the original text. In this regard, Lane facilitates a more nuanced reading of Calvin.

Lane writes with an admirable brevity. Providing useful summaries of expansive sixteenth-century texts is no mean feat, but he accomplishes this skilfully. Indeed, Lane's book opens up the *Institutes* to the reader, and for that he deserves credit.

In addition, the writer is commendably sensitive to Calvin's historical context. This much is clear from the introductory biography and the various historical references throughout the book. No doubt reflecting the author's intent to provide an accurate, brief companion to the *Institutes*, the historical material is helpful as an entry point to an historical-theological study. Those wishing to begin such a study of Calvin's doctrinal development could do worse than read Lane.

Is Lane's book radically more useful than, for example, T. H. L. Parker's *Introduction*? Clearly the two books have similar purposes. Both are laudable examples of Calvin's *brevitas* ideal. In the structuring of his work, Lane has also embodied another of Calvin's humanist

principles: that the original text must be read. In that sense, Lane's work is better formulated to encourage reading of Calvin himself.

### **A Theological Guide to Calvin's *Institutes*: Essays and Analysis**

David Hall and Peter Lillback's work is of a different nature. A collection of essays on the *Institutes*, it draws together the analyses of various Calvin scholars (Douglas Kelly, Michael Horton, Richard Gaffin, Derek Thomas, *et al.*) in a broad sweep covering the progressive themes of the *Institutes*' four books. The essays, nineteen in total (plus a very helpful Calvin bibliography), are too many for detailed individual review. However, two general points of reflection may be stated.

Firstly, in one sense the collection is admirably broad, bringing together the extended writings of twenty-one authors in a large volume of coherent essays. Lillback and Hall, as editors, deserve praise in this regard. They have assembled a strong cast who have contributed some very useful essays. R. Scott Clark's handling of election and predestination is a fair and helpful exploration of the actual, rather than the stereotyped, position maintained by Calvin. Richard Gaffin writes well on union with Christ, one of the most important themes in Calvin's theology. Douglas Kelly's essay on Calvin on the Trinity, which demonstrates the clear influence of Scotland's own T. F. Torrance, is magisterial. Indeed, the overall standard of the essays is excellent. In that sense, this book helpfully fills a niche in the market, offering a sustained, high-level engagement which (broadly) covers the *Institutes*.

However, the collection is also frustratingly narrow. Although not all the contributors are North American, all currently work in North America. At one level the nationality of an author is, to use Calvin's favoured term, *adiaphora*. However, one cannot help but observe the notable absence of contributions by Calvin scholars in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the Huguenot community in Calvin's own France, South Africa (which inherited various strains of Calvinism: Dutch, Scottish and French) or South Korea (where Calvin's current influence is considerable). Perhaps this is simply a

reflection of Calvinism's relative strength in North America coupled with the subtle influences of market forces.

That said, this is not a substantive judgement on the book. It is, rather, a lamentation for what might have been. Nonetheless, Lillback and Hall have compiled a most worthwhile contribution to the burgeoning field of Calvin studies. Where Lane's book must be read alongside the *Institutes*, this work is perhaps most fruitfully read after such a reading. To the interested theology student, minister or layperson, it offers substantial reflections on Calvin.

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