

*The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition.* By Richard A. Muller. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. xii + 308 pp. \$65.00 (cloth).

In this collection of essays Richard Muller addresses a number of misreadings of Calvin that “accommodate” his thought to modern agendas. The broad thrust of Muller’s argument is that in order to properly understand Calvin one must read all of Calvin’s work—not just the *Institutes*—in its sixteenth-century context. He takes up this argument more specifically by analyzing the development of Calvin’s *Institutes* in relationship to his overarching theological program. Muller begins by showing that Calvin establishes an agenda in his prefaces that requires that the *Institutes* be read in conjunction with his exegetical works as one side of an expository and dogmatic project. For the majority of the book Muller turns to a close examination of the structure of the sixteenth-century editions of the *Institutes* and its development over time. His analysis leads him to conclude that despite Calvin’s harsh words for the scholastics (which Muller shows, on the basis of comparisons of Latin and French editions of the *Institutes*, to have been directed usually and specifically at the theologians of the Sorbonne), he was indebted to scholasticism. This was the case both for his method—which incorporated scholastic *disputationes*—and for his content—which grew to be more heavily influenced in later editions of the *Institutes*, as Calvin became better versed in the theology of the medievals.

Muller argues that the uncovering of these sorts of links between Calvin and his context is only inhibited by modern critical editions and translations of the *Institutes*. These have stripped Calvin’s text of its sixteenth-century apparatus and have melded the various stages of Calvin’s dogmatic endeavor into an anachronistic monolith. As a result, modern readers miss the delineation of *disputationes* that existed in those early editions, the developments that took place in Calvin’s thought over time, and the frame through which his theology was perceived by his early modern editors and readers. For example, the shift in genre that takes place in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*—where Calvin abandons a catechetical model in favor of a more humanistic model that revolves around the development of *loci* (broad and persuasive theological themes based on a classical scriptural text, or *locus*)—is invisible to the modern reader. And, if this alteration of rhetorical templates is hidden from the reader, then so too will be the fact (demonstrated by Muller) that this model was influenced by Philip Melancthon’s 1536 *Loci communes theologici* in its implementation of an ordering of *loci* based on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. In this shift of structure and intent the *Institutes* became Calvin’s perfect foil for his exegetical works. The commentaries were to be reserved for brief and simple exegesis; all topics that arose in the process of biblical exposition that required elaboration were to be treated in the *Institutes*. It is on the basis of this arrangement, then, that Muller can assert that “the *Institutes* must be read in a developmental relationship with Calvin’s exegetical and interpretive work” (p. 116).

This book will likely prove somewhat controversial, as Muller is not reticent to step on a few toes. He excoriates those who have labeled Calvin a humanist only or who have insisted somewhat anachronistically that Calvin was not a systematic theologian. However, one of the many virtues of this book is that Muller names names, providing a useful guide to scholarly debates on Calvin’s thought. Another strength of the book is its proposal of principles that can—and should—be applied in all historical theological studies. The premises

that Muller offers in his final chapter are portable, and ought to be taken to heart by any who seek to do truly ‘historical’ historical theology. This book will be of particular interest to the readers of this journal for its initial recovery of the thought of the continental theologian most influential in the foundational years of Anglicanism.

Muller’s scholarship is of the highest standard. His arguments are made forcefully and are supported with rich documentation. His handling of both primary sources—Latin and French—and European and North American Calvin scholarship is adept and broad ranging. One only wishes that the editors at Oxford were so thorough. This book is marred by a shameful number of typographical errors, some of which can cause the reader confusion. Further, the publisher’s decision to print Muller’s notes as endnotes rather than footnotes is a hindrance to effective and convenient reading of so thoroughly documented an argument. Nevertheless, these externals should not detract from the fact that this book is an important contribution to Calvin studies specifically and historical theology generally. For the reader who is interested in being introduced to Calvin’s program and good historical methodology, there can be no better place to start than this.

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