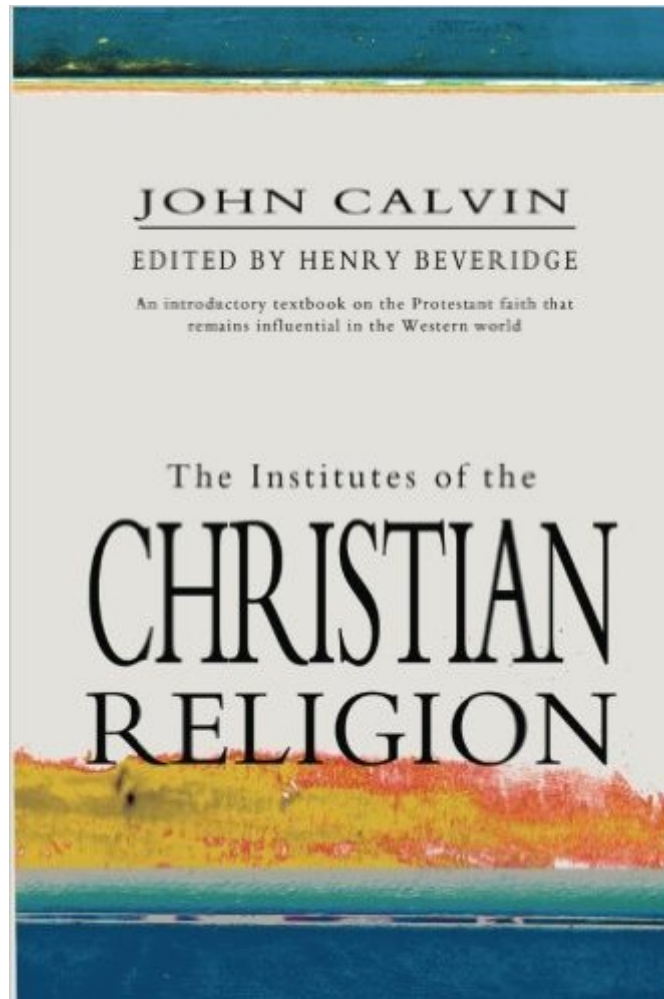


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# The Institutes Of The Christian Religion



## Synopsis

John Calvin's seminal work on Protestant systematic theology, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, was written as an introductory textbook on the Protestant faith and remains influential in the Western world and still widely read by theological students today.

## Book Information

Paperback: 136 pages

Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (June 15, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1463562837

ISBN-13: 978-1463562830

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.3 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.3 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (237 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

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.

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:<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> The following is from J.I.

Why you should read this book:<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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