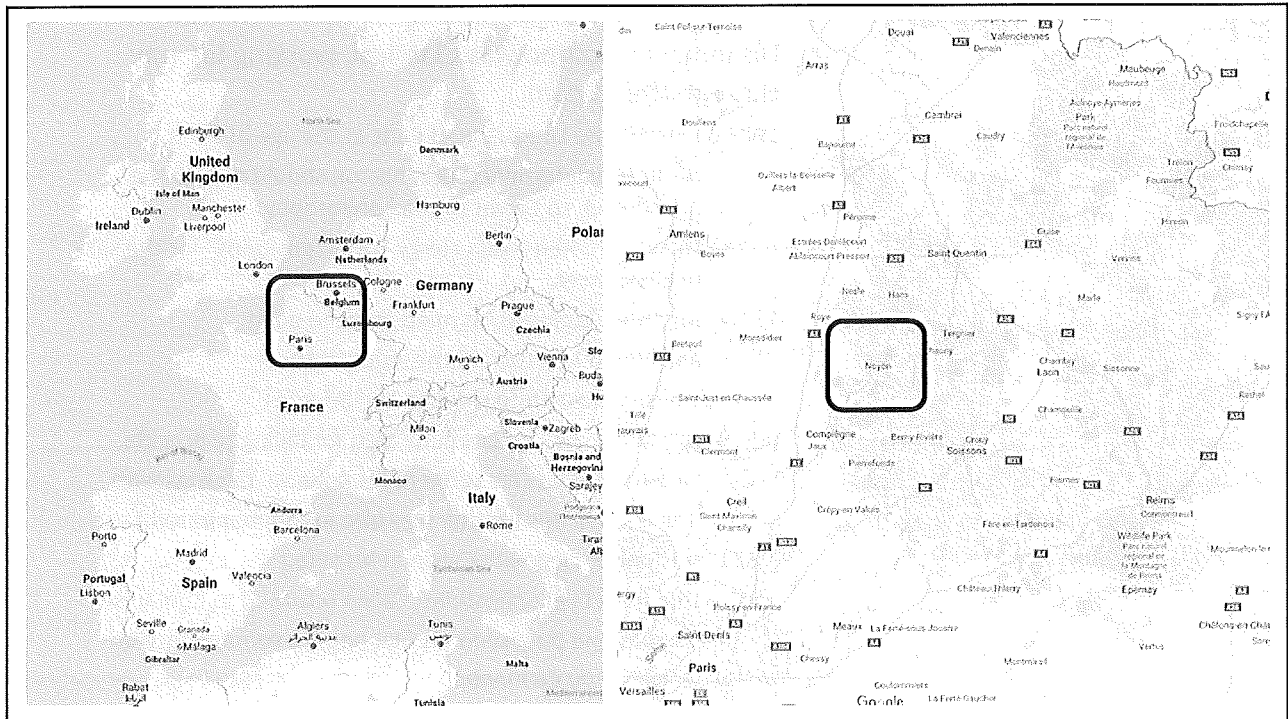




Calvin: the Enigma

"Now he comes at last, Calvin, that elect and incomparable instrument of God, to whom no other in our age may be compared, if at all there can be the question of another alongside of him."

Martin Bucer
upon Calvin's return to Geneva, 1541





The Birthplace of John Calvin (July 10, 1509 - May 27, 1564) in Noyon, France

Jehan Cauvin, 7/10/1509

"Here, as throughout his career, a curious silence resonates through history concerning the personality of Calvin. Of the intellectual stimulus he injected into the history of ideas we know much, yet of the historical person who generated them we know tantalizingly little. As a human being, Calvin remains an enigma." (McGrath, p. 14)

Sainte-Godeberte Cathedral,
Noyon



His initial education was Classical, working his way through the *trivium*.

1523 – entered the University of Paris at the age of 14

- His father determined that his son should go into the priesthood, so Calvin studied philosophy.
- He was granted token clergy "titles/positions" for the sake of allowances.

1527 – his father changed his mind at some point

- and aimed him toward the study of law
- Transferring him to Orleans and Bourges

(1528 – his father was excommunicated for failing to provide audited records for some of his financial dealings with the church. His brother was also excommunicated.)

(1531 – his father died with Calvin at his side.)

1532 – free from filial obligations, Calvin returned to humanist studies and published his first book, a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*.

"[S]ince I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life.

Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies I yet pursued them with less ardour."

From the Introduction to
Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms, 1557.



King Francis I of France, 1495-1547

- 1521 – Parliament forbid Luther's books
Zealous preachers and writers such as Lefevre d'Etaples, G. Farel, Briconnet, and de Berquin were succeeding in stirring up insurrection.
- 1528-9 – French Council of Sens sided with the Roman Catholic Church and the king ordered persecutions; but then waffled consistently.
- 1532 – Nicolas Cop gave a controversial, evangelical address
- 1534 – Placards (posters) appeared mysteriously in Blois, Rouen, Tours, and Orleans.

Genuine articles on the
horrific, great and unbearable
abuses of the papal mass,
invented directly contrary to
the Lord's Supper of our
Lord, sole mediator and sole
savior Jesus Christ!

CHRISTIA

NAE RELIGIONIS INSTI-
tutio, totam ferè pietatis summâ, & quæ
quid est in doctrina salutis cogniti-
cellarium, complectens; omnibus pie-
tatis studiosis lectu dignissi-
mum opus, acre
cens edi-
tum.

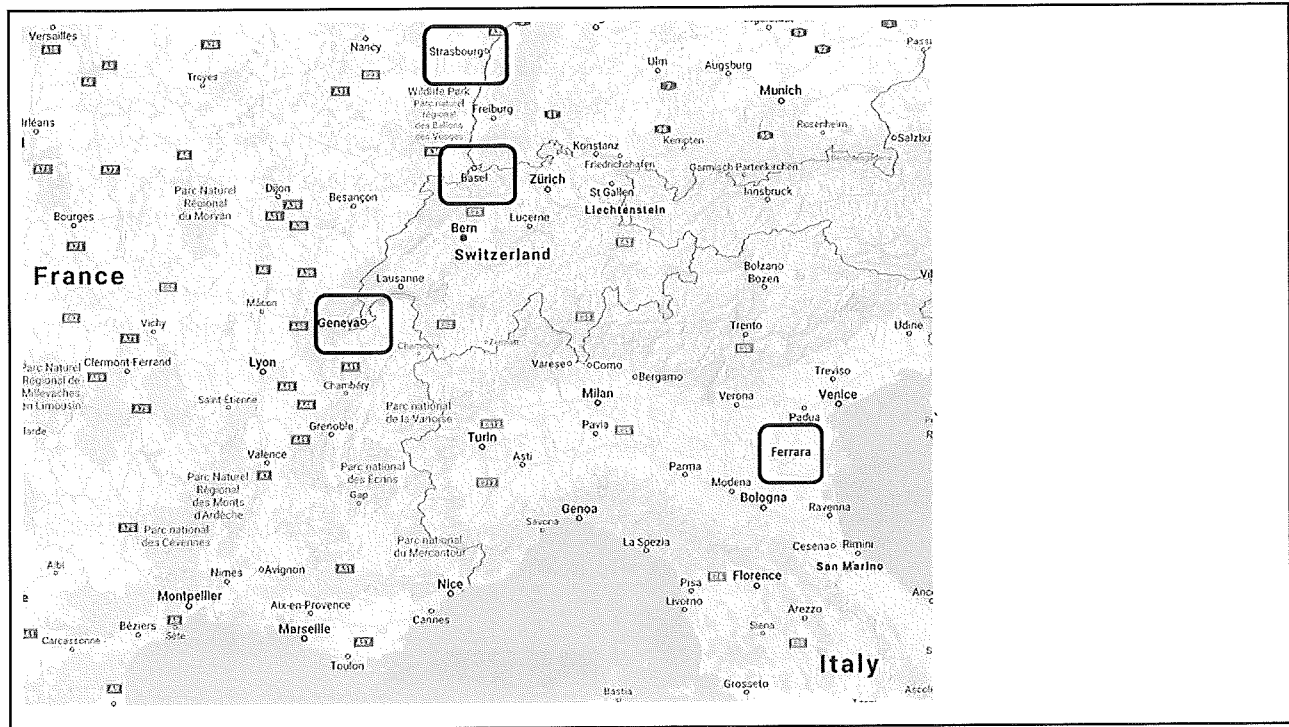
PRAEFATIO AD CHRI-
stianissimum REGEM FRANCIAE, quæ
hic cili-ber pro confessione fidei
offertur.

IOANNE CALVINO
Noniodunensi autore.

BASILEAE,
M. D. XXXVI.

*Helveticæ Cellarj Synagoga seu
Anno 1536.*





The Political Climate of Geneva

- More German than French
- Once controlled now independent
- Reformation began in 1530s
- Farel at height of his influence

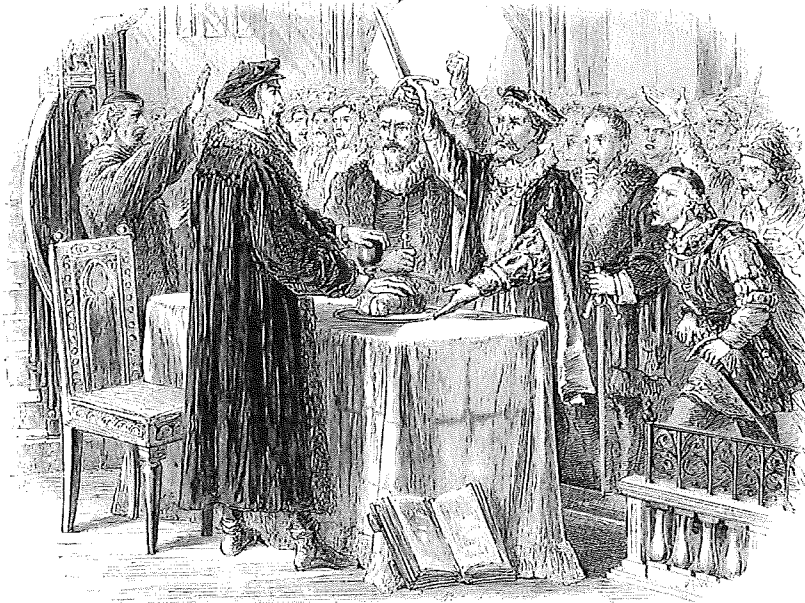




"Guillaume Farel detained me at Geneva, not so much by counsel and exhortation, as by a dreadful curse, which I felt to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me. ... Farel, who burned with extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. ... [H]e proceeded to utter the imprecation that God would curse my retirement and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to help, when the necessity was so urgent. ... I was so terror-struck, that I gave up the journey I had undertaken;"

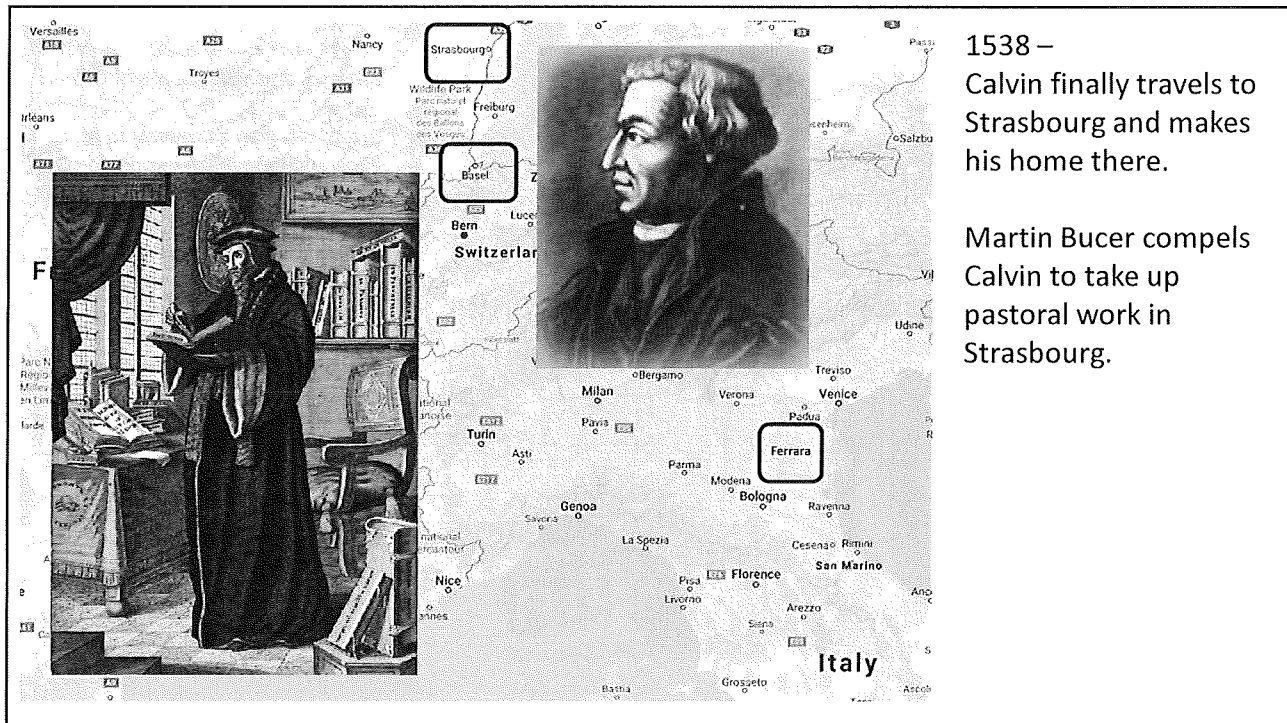
Calvin

- 1536 – Calvin appointed a preacher and pastor of the church in Geneva
 - Farel and Calvin began working on a book of church order, a catechism, and initial plans for a confession of faith.
 - The medieval conception of the relationship between church and state was still in the mindset of most people of the day –
 - only an “implicit faith” was required
 - The state governed on behalf of the church
 - Calvin’s unpopularity began to grow, almost immediately.



- Calvin and Farel drafted a church order to organize the life of the church.
- Began work on a Confession of Faith and Catechism in only 6 months.
- Church discipline over moral sin was absolutely necessary.
- The City Council and pastors disagreed on the authority by which to excommunicate.
- Calvin stressed a separation of church and state over the medieval tradition of church/state identity.
- Easter, 1538, the ministers refused communion to protest their lack of spiritual authority.
- Calvin and Farel were banished from the city.

“... it does appear to me, that we shall have no lasting Church unless that ancient apostolic discipline be completely restored, which in many respects, is much needed among us. We have not yet been able to obtain, that the faithful and holy exercise of ecclesiastical excommunication be rescued from the oblivion into which it has fallen. ... The generality of men are more ready to acknowledge us as preachers than as pastors.” (J. Calvin in R. Godfrey, p. 39)



1538 – Calvin finally travels to Strasbourg and makes his home there.

Martin Bucer compels Calvin to take up pastoral work in Strasbourg.



In Strasbourg, Calvin

- Adopted Bucer's four offices for the church: pastor, doctor, elder and deacon.
- petitioned spiritual examination before Communion and for monthly observance – both were granted.
- refined the worship liturgy
- Developed a master plan for Christian education for all the people.



While in Strassburg:

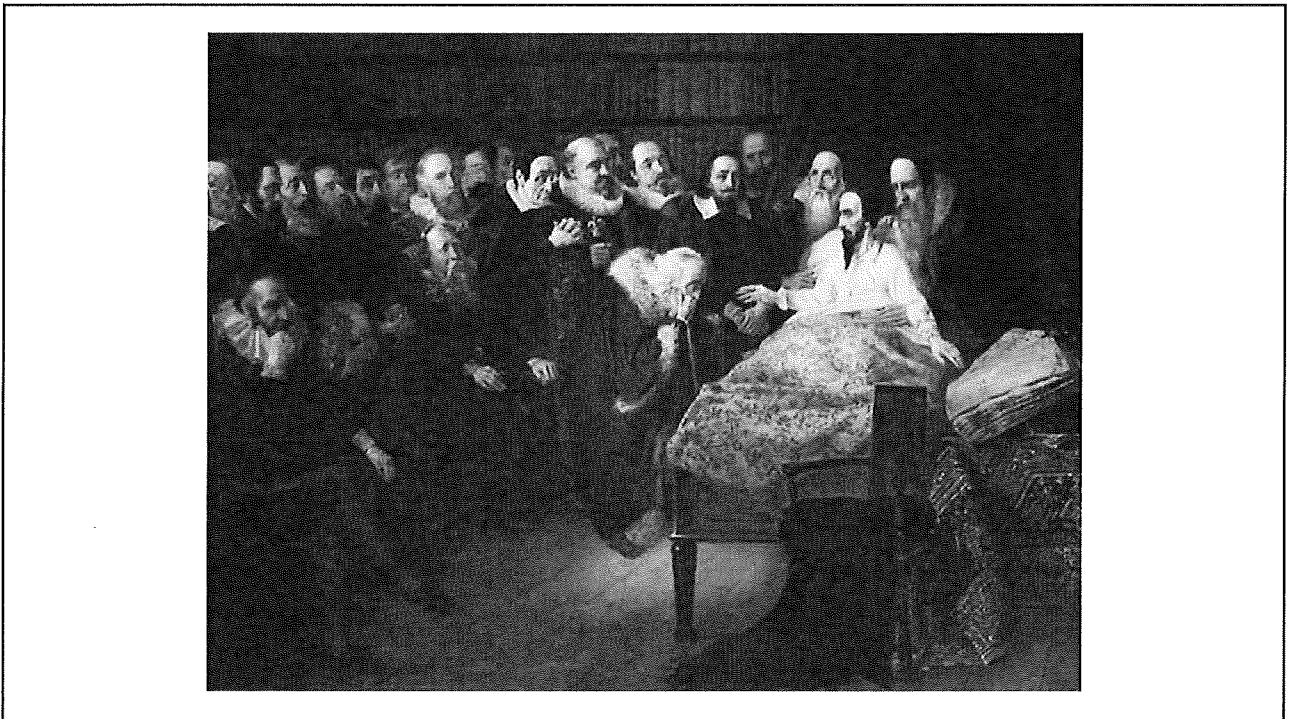
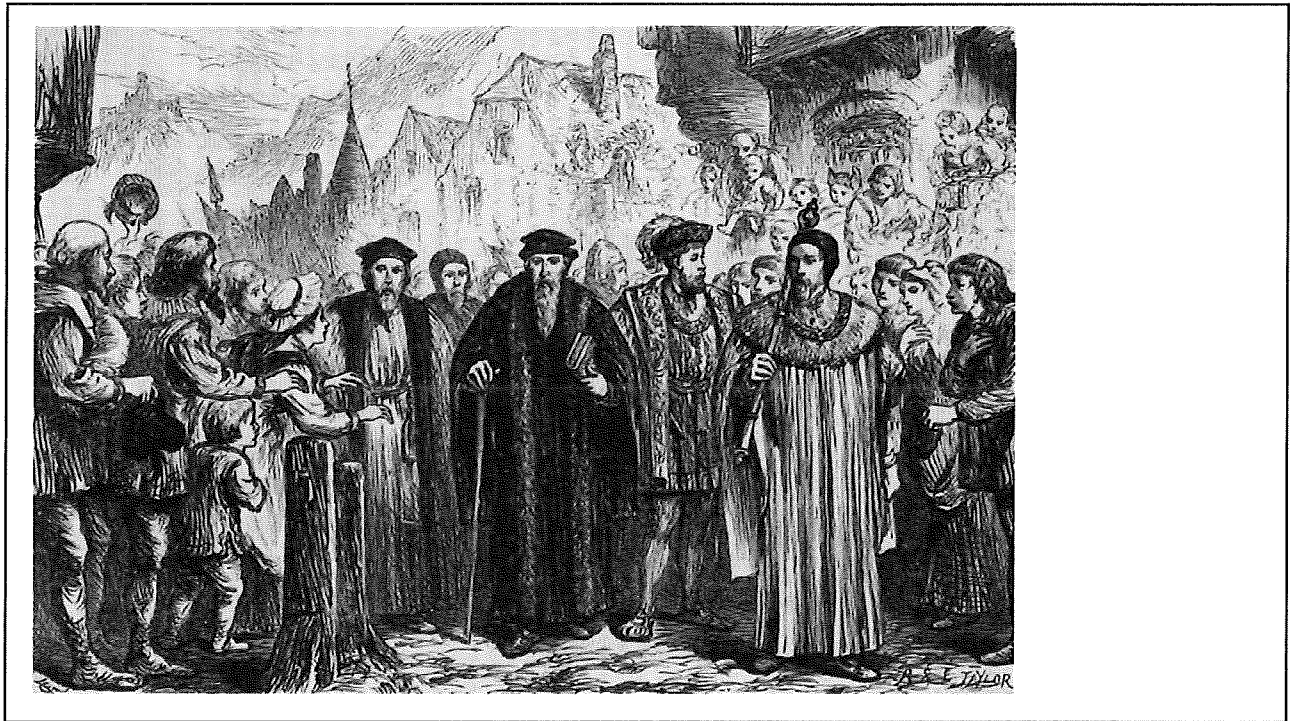
- He was confronted again by Pierre Caroli and heatedly debated and defended the doctrine of the Trinity.

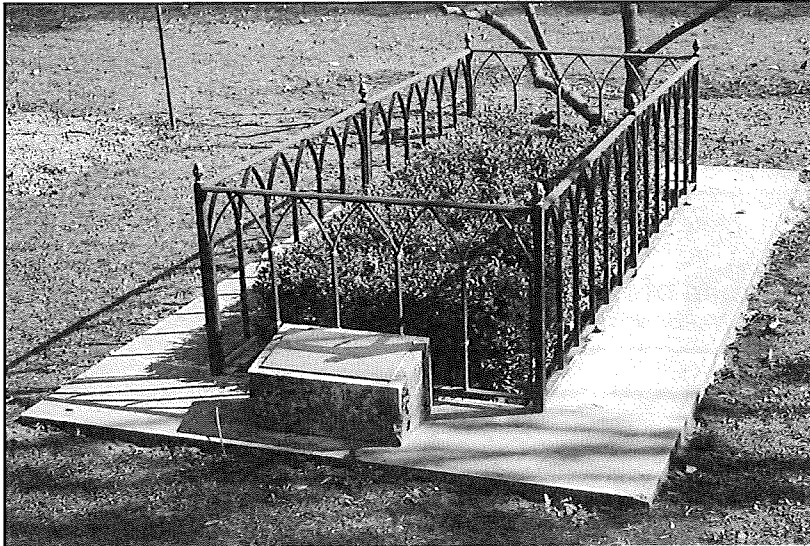
- 1540 - Calvin married Idelette de Bure

"O God of Abraham, and of all our fathers, in thee have the faithful trusted during so many past ages, and none of them have trusted in vain. I also will hope."



"This division of theological writing and biblical commentary proved to be a most effective approach. Of all the sixteenth-century commentators, Calvin remains the most admired and most consulted. ... Any modern commentator, no matter of what theological persuasion, recognizes the need to consult Calvin and interact with his analysis." (Godfrey, p. 51)





Cimetiere de Plainpalais, Geneva

He was buried on Sunday in an unmarked grave at a secret location somewhere in Geneva.

“It is good that famous men should be buried in unmarked graves.”

John Calvin

Epitaph

“It is probably fair to suggest that Calvin was not a particularly attractive person, lacking the wit, humour and warmth which made Luther so entertaining at dinner parties.” (McGrath, p. 17)

Epitaph

"[H]e was the most Christian man of his generation."

Ernest Renan, (Lindsay, p. 159)

"If Luther sounded the trumpet for reform, Calvin orchestrated the score by which the Reformation became a part of Western civilization."

Mark Noll

Epitaph

"His conduct was always straightforward, irreproachable, and dignified; he was by education and breeding, if not by descent, the polished French gentleman, and was most at home with men and women of noble birth.

His character was serious, with little playfulness, little vivacity, but with a wonderful power of sympathy. He was reserved, somewhat shy, slow to make intimate friends, but once made the friendships lasted for life.

At all periods of age, boy, student, man of letters, leader of a great party, he seems to have been a centre of attraction and of deferential trust.

Epitaph

The effect of this mysterious charm was felt by others besides those of his own age.

- His professor, Mathurin Cordier, became his devoted disciple.
- Melancthon wished that he might die with his head on Calvin's breast.
- Luther, in spite of his suspicion of everything that came from Switzerland, was won to love and trust him.
- Knox, the most rugged and independent of men, acknowledged Calvin as his master, consulted him in every doubt and difficulty, and on all occasions save one meekly followed his counsels.

He loved children, and had them at his house for Christmas trees; but (and this is characteristically French) always addressed them with ceremonious politeness, as if they were grown men and women deserving as much consideration as himself. It was this trait that captivated de Beze when he was a boy of twelve." (Lindsay, p. 154-5)

Epitaph

"Among the martyrs, with whom Calvin constantly conversed in spirit, he became a martyr himself; he lived and felt like a man before whom the whole earth disappears, and who tunes his last Psalm his whose eye fixed upon the eye of God, because he knows that on the following morning he may have to ascend the pyre." (Jules Michelet – Lindsay, p. 159)

