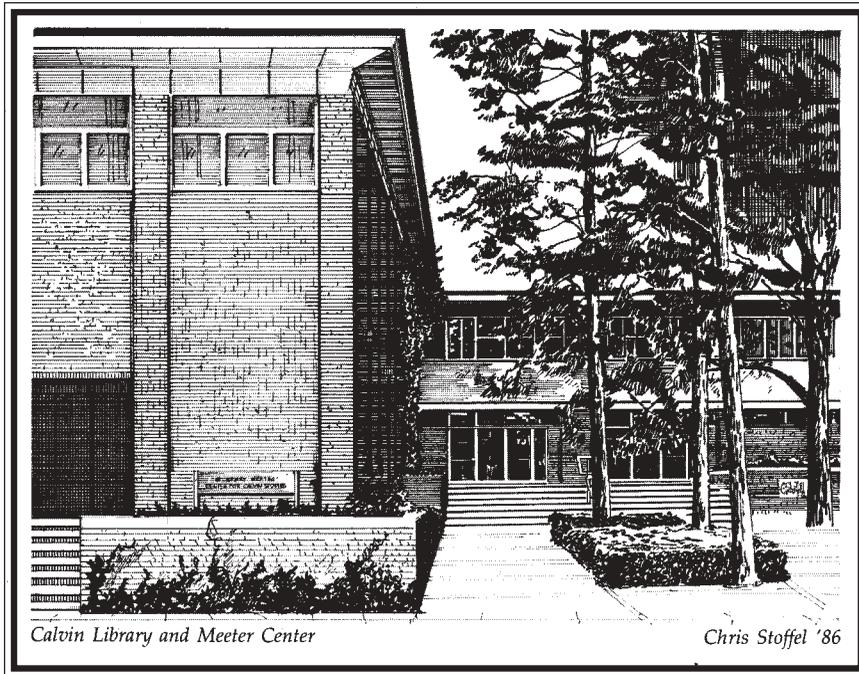


THE HISTORY OF THE H. HENRY MEETER CENTER FOR CALVIN STUDIES

Hugh J. Meeter



With a Foreword by Eve Meeter



John Calvin

© 1999 by H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies

3201 Burton St. S.E.

Grand Rapids, MI 49546

**THE HISTORY OF THE
H. HENRY MEETER CENTER
FOR CALVIN STUDIES**

Hugh J. Meeter

With a Foreword by Eve Meeter



CONTENTS

Foreword	6
The Life of John Calvin	9
The Life of H. Henry Meeter	11
The History of the H. Henry Meeter Center	13
Suggestions for a Calvinism Research Center	17
Evolution of the Calvin Study Center	19
Chronological History of the H. Henry Meeter Center	22

FOREWORD

The H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies of Basic Historic Calvinism culminates the dream of Dr. H. Henry Meeter who served as head of the Bible Department of Calvin College from 1927 to 1957. His vision for this scholarly research center included both a large number of rare books pertaining to Calvinism and related memorabilia and the physical housing for the collection. He particularly wanted the doors of this fine center open to students and laypeople alike.

This torch of enlightenment was later passed on to Dr. Meeter's only son, Hugh J. Meeter, who remained active in further enlarging the scope of the Meeter Center in the U.S. and abroad. When people posed the question "Why Calvinism; why not just Christianity?" my husband, Hugh, would respond, "In a world of exploding technology and information we need the biblically rooted worldview of Calvinism that once made our nation great and our churches strong. We are living in a vast mission field that requires believers to be deeply rooted in their historic faith as rediscovered in the Reformation."

John Calvin has been underestimated by many historians, but he can now be looked upon, in the words of Sir Alfred T. Davies, K.B.E., C.B., as "one of the greatest lights of the world upon which he had an amazing influence." Calvin was humble, considerate, and generous with his time. He made available his aid and advice to almost anyone who sought them. Loyal, he never deserted a friend or took advantage of an antagonist. He preferred a simple lifestyle and chose to be buried in an unmarked grave. Nevertheless, Calvin's influence was widespread and encompassed theological, legal, economic, and social areas. While frail in health most of his life, John Calvin was an intellectual athlete. James Russell Lowell said of his own native land, "America has never produced a man of wider information or more varied and brilliant gifts."

This center represents John Calvin's many accomplishments so that future generations can appreciate the rich heritage of his world-and-life view and pattern their lives after it. Sincere appreciation is due to Calvin College and to Calvin Theological Seminary for their interest and enthusiasm over many years and to many other dedicated Christians, old and young alike, who have shared this treasured worldview.

With a hope toward recapturing the spark that kindled the Reformation, we enthusiastically invite all who enter here to accept our warm spirit of hospitality and appreciation for each of you as together we endeavor to glorify God in our hearts and lives through the work of the Holy Spirit.

May this center serve as a beacon for enlightenment, knowledge, and truth both here and around the world. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.”

Soli Deo Gloria!

Eve Meeter





John Calvin

JOHN CALVIN

Written by Dr. Karin Maag, director of the H. Henry Meeter Center

John Calvin was born in Noyon, France, on July 10, 1509. He studied humanities in Paris and law in Orléans and Bourges. His father's first intention was for Calvin to become a priest, but after a quarrel with the church in Noyon, his father decided Calvin should become a lawyer instead. At his father's death Calvin went back to Paris to continue his studies of the humanities. However, in 1533 Calvin fled Paris because he was associated with his friend Nicolas Cop's inaugural speech as rector of the University of Paris in which Cop asserted his belief in justification by faith without works.

In 1536, Calvin's major work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was printed in Basle in its first Latin version. This work, through all its revisions during Calvin's lifetime, became one of the bestsellers of its time and helped to shape Calvin's reputation as a theologian. At the insistent request of the reformer Guillaume Farel, Calvin began his work that year as a reformer in Geneva without ever having formally studied theology or been ordained.

Two years later the magistrates of Geneva exiled Calvin and Farel after they failed to comply with the magistrates' orders barring them from preaching during a time of unrest over admission to the Lord's Supper and its ritual.

In 1541, after three years in Strasbourg, during which time he got married and honed his skills as a pastor while serving the French refugee church in that city, Calvin was recalled to Geneva. By 1555, after a period of struggle with opponents among the clergy, magistrates, and leading families of Geneva, Calvin managed to establish a base of solid support in the city in large part because of the growing number of French refugees active in Genevan government.

After years of chronic illness, Calvin died on May 27, 1564. He left a solidly established church in Geneva and a growing body of followers of the Genevan path of Reformation across all of Europe.



Dr. H. Henry Meeter

H. HENRY MEETER

Written by Dr. Karin Maag, director of the H. Henry Meeter Center

H. Henry Meeter was born on April 29, 1886, in Chicago, Illinois. He studied at Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Princeton Theological Seminary, where he received his B.D. in 1913, obtaining scholarships for further study. He then went to the Free University of Amsterdam for his doctoral research and graduated cum laude in 1916, the first American to be awarded this distinction at the Free University. His dissertation was entitled “The Heavenly High Priesthood of Christ: An Exegetico-Dogmatic Study.”

Dr. Meeter was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church, serving as the first pastor of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church from 1917 until 1926. While pastor there he served as a member of Calvin College and Seminary’s board of trustees.

Beginning in 1926 Dr. Meeter taught at Calvin College as professor of Bible, teaching biblical studies, Reformed doctrine, church history, and Calvinism. Until 1946, when he was joined by other colleagues, he was the sole faculty member in the Bible Department, and subsequently became departmental chair.

In addition to his academic responsibilities, he played a major role on Calvin’s campus as spiritual advisor to generations of Calvin’s students. He also served on the Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church until 1953. He was the author of two significant works, *The Fundamental Principle of Calvinism* and *Calvinism: an Interpretation of Its Basic Ideas*, later published as *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*. He retired in 1956 and died in 1963.



THE HISTORY OF THE H. HENRY MEETER CENTER FOR CALVIN STUDIES

Written by Mr. Hugh J. Meeter in 1994, updated 1998

The history of the H. Henry Meeter Center is a long and winding one. It began with a collection of important books and a bibliography by Calvin College Professor Dr. H. Henry Meeter during his tenure of teaching in the Bible (now Religion and Theology) Department from 1927 to 1957. The collection was enlarged by the intensive work of College Librarian Dr. Lester DeKoster and enthusiastically supported by College President Dr. William J. Spoelhof from 1951 to 1976.

After the establishment of the Meeter Center the collection and bibliography were expanded expertly by Curator Peter DeKlerk from 1981 to 1990. That expansion continues under his successor, Curator Paul Fields. Today the Meeter Center with its rare items, books, articles, literature, and bibliographies is acclaimed worldwide as one of the most extensive of all Calvin/Calvinism collections. Meeter Center materials by Lester DeKoster, for example, and the bibliographies of Peter DeKlerk are known and appreciated by Calvin scholars everywhere.

At the initiative of Dr. Meeter, Calvin College and Seminary established the Committee for Scholarly Research and Development of Basic Historic Calvinism in 1961. Dr. Meeter bequeathed monies for the work to continue after his death in 1963. The members of the committee were Mr. Hugh J. Meeter (son of Dr. Meeter), chairperson, Calvin College President Dr. William J. Spoelhof, Calvin Seminary President Dr. John Kromminga, Calvin College and Seminary Director of Development Mr. Sydney Youngsma, and Calvin College Bible Department Chairperson Dr. John Bratt.

The collection of materials continued rapidly and by the early 1970s was looked upon as one of the world's leading resources on Calvin and Calvinism. With this growth of materials came the need for additional space which was anticipated in Dr. Meeter's will.

Some members of the committee thought the collection should be integrated into the campus both physically and through the curriculum. Others believed the collection should be integrated through the curriculum but housed separately in an annex to the library. In 1974 Dr. Spoelhof requested the chairman of the committee to record his thoughts on this matter. He did so in a document entitled *Suggestions for the Calvinism Research Center* (see the following), which envisioned high visibility for the collection to generate broader knowledge of Calvinism and greater enthusiasm for it.

Providentially the need for space was recognized and supported by the family of Mr. Hugh J. Meeter (already anonymous financial supporters of the collection) and by the Pew Foundation of Grand Rapids, Michigan, who made possible the 1981–82 construction of the existing three-story H. Henry Meeter Center and Heritage Hall as an extended wing of the Calvin College and Seminary library. Thus the Committee for Scholarly Research and Development of Basic Historic Calvinism was the genesis of the H. Henry Meeter Center and its governing board.

In 1976 and 1983 the new presidents of Calvin College and Calvin Seminary respectively, Dr. Anthony J. Diekema and Dr. James A. De Jong, began their involvements with the committee and with the Meeter Center. This was continued by President De Jong and Dr. Gaylen Byker, successor to Dr. Diekema as Calvin College president in 1995.

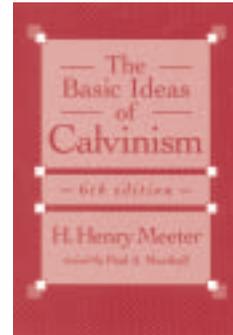
New recognition was given to the Meeter Center with the 1990 International Congress on Calvin Studies, arranged by President De Jong, which brought to the Meeter Center the world's foremost Calvin scholars.

Dr. De Jong envisioned a Calvin Seminary doctoral program that would utilize the Meeter Center as the cornerstone for scholarly Calvinism research that would inspire a new generation of church leaders around the world. The program was established in 1992.

The first directorship of the Meeter Center was assumed by Calvin College history professor Dr. Howard Rienstra in 1983. A gracious and learned educational statesman, Dr. Rienstra organized the center and charted an ambitious future course until his untimely death from cancer in 1986. He was succeeded as director by Dr. Richard

Gamble, who led the center until 1997. In that year, the Meeter Center Governing Board appointed Dr. Karin Maag to be the center's new director. The Meeter Center extends the invitation to scholars everywhere to pursue their studies at this rich reservoir of Calvinism. And thus it has come to pass, through God's grace and human perseverance, that the vision of Dr. H. Henry Meeter articulated in the 1920s and cultivated over the decades became a reality.

The primary goal of Dr. Meeter was to make scholarly research on Calvinism understandable to and applicable by students and laypeople. This goal was articulated and achieved in his classic 1939 work that has come to be known as *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*. Published by Baker Book House, the book is now in its sixth edition; additionally it has been translated into five languages: Dutch, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, and Russian.



Unrealized, however, were the plans of Dr. Meeter to write two additional books, the one to be entitled *Calvinism, Economics, and Sociology* and the other *Calvinism, Science, and Art*. It is prayerfully hoped that these publications will be undertaken by the Meeter Center in the years ahead.

Impetus for this came in 1994 when the first two laypersons were added to the governing board of the Meeter Center. Mr. Pieter Lion and Mr. Wayne Muller were appointed to give emphasis to the practical applications of Calvinism for students and laypeople, which was the long unrealized and cherished goal of Dr. Meeter and his son, Mr. Hugh J. Meeter.

To this end also the Hugh and Eve Meeter Calvinism Awards for High School Seniors were established in 1993 by Dr. Meeter's son Hugh and his daughter-in-law Eve Meeter. The awards will stimulate an interest in and a knowledge of the Calvinistic world-and-life view among high school seniors. Annually two cash prizes will be given for Calvinism research papers. The inaugural topic was "Calvinism and Health Care."

It is prayerfully hoped that the influence of the Meeter Center under its reconstituted governing board and complemented by the Calvinism awards will ignite the study, development, and appreciation of Calvinism among both scholars and the people of the



Mrs. Eve Meeter with the 1996 award winners: from the left sitting, Stacey Wieland, Scott Westhouse, and Mrs. Eve Meeter; standing, Bronwyn Drost and Amanda Drost

market place. It remains the prayer always of the Meeter family that God will be glorified and Christ's kingdom extended through the monumental work of John Calvin—and also that many students, scholars, and laypeople will be drawn to a personal acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ in all areas of life through the inspiration of the Meeter Center.

The following documents were crucial in the development of what has come to be the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies and provide additional chronological information.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A CALVINISM RESEARCH CENTER

*Written by Mr. Hugh J. Meeter in 1974 in response to a request from
Dr. William J. Spoelhof on behalf of the Basic Historic Calvinism Committee*

In response to the request made of me, this is a simple attempt to formalize some thoughts expressed recently regarding the Calvinism Collection at the Calvin College and Seminary Library. I am concerned about the lack of visibility of this collection and harbor a growing apprehension of the possibilities of a great but dusty collection.

We are told that this collection is already the largest or nearly the largest in the world, and it is growing rapidly. This is a compliment to the interest and to the planning of the present administration and to the diligence and skill of the library staff. For all of this I am grateful.

Prompted by the request again to submit our annual donation for this cause, I visited the library to view the collection. It was apparent to me that it stands in need of expanded physical housing. This observation precipitated conversations about the future of the collection.

My concerns are twofold: visibility and participation. It seems doubtful to me that we can have participation unless there is increased visibility—visibility in the manner in which we present Calvinism to the student body, faculty, visiting scholars, and to all interested in the subject of Calvinistic foundations.

VISIBILITY

We give high visibility to music, art, and science; prominent buildings on campus testify to this emphasis. But who can find the Calvinism Collection? To generate enthusiasm for the foundation of our heritage the student body, the faculty, and our Christian Reformed denomination must see that we believe the collection sufficiently important to devote to it a physically prominent place on campus where it can be a topic of conversation and pride.

PARTICIPATION

Participation results from the force and boldness of the presentation. Increased visibility through a more prominent home for the collection will complement increased participation through the following.

For students there may be awards for the best topical Calvinism studies, Calvinism seminars, and even a Calvinism club.

For faculty members there may be awards for studies and seminars and recognition for the teaching of Calvinism in connection with the various academic disciplines.

For the Christian Reformed denomination there may be the challenge to support Calvinism research and writing, and there may be invitations for the Calvin Research Center to become a center of action rather than merely a collection of materials.

For the market place there may be the challenge to offer awards for practical research, and there may be invitations for practical action and for programs to be undertaken.

The thoughts expressed above are only suggestions. Nevertheless their thrust is simple—create a center of action and interest to avoid the stagnation that could overtake this unique and priceless collection. So it seems to me.

EVOLUTION OF THE CALVIN STUDY CENTER

Written by Mr. Hugh J. Meeter in 1983

Through God's providence the Calvin Study Center was born out of commitment and frustration.

The commitment was a thirty-year dedication of Dr. H. Henry Meeter, chairman of the Calvin College Bible Department from 1927 to 1957, to the Scriptures as understood through the world-and-life view of John Calvin. He believed it his prayerful responsibility and privilege to explore, teach, and expand upon this Calvinism with his students. He believed Calvin's guidelines for how to live and how to die were critical for the Christian Reformed Church in particular and for the Reformed Protestant world in general.



*H. Henry Meeter
Center display including
Dr. Meeter's book Basic
Ideas of Calvinism*

The frustration was Dr. Meeter's inability to expand the scope of Calvinism taught in the Bible Department. He was limited to teaching the material contained in his classic book, now known as *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*. It was college policy that each department

restrict itself to offerings in its own discipline. Thus Dr. Meeter was not allowed to broaden the scope of his teachings on Calvinism to areas that were the responsibility of other academic departments.

His classic work was written originally under the title Calvinism: The Theological and Political Ideas and was intended to be the first volume of a series. Volumes two and three were to be Calvinism: The Sociological and Economic Ideas and Calvinism: Science and Art. However the burden of very large classes (the largest in the history of the college), other responsibilities (such as the position of campus spiritual adviser), and duties of the departmental chairmanship, campus committees, and extensive denominational service, prevented the writing of the latter volumes.

This career-long frustration providentially inspired Dr. Meeter in 1959 to provide in his will for a committee for the perpetuation and growth of the Calvinism collection that now is housed in the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies. After his death, the committee for the Scholarly Research of Basic Historic Calvinism, provided for in his will, was duly established. The members of the committee were Calvin College President Dr. William J. Spoelhof; Calvin Seminary President Dr. John Kromminga; Calvin College and Seminary Director of Development Mr. Sydney Youngsma; Calvin College Bible Department Chairperson Dr. John Bratt; and Dr. Meeter's son, Mr. Hugh J. Meeter. Dr. Meeter also bequeathed monies for the housing of the Calvinism collection.

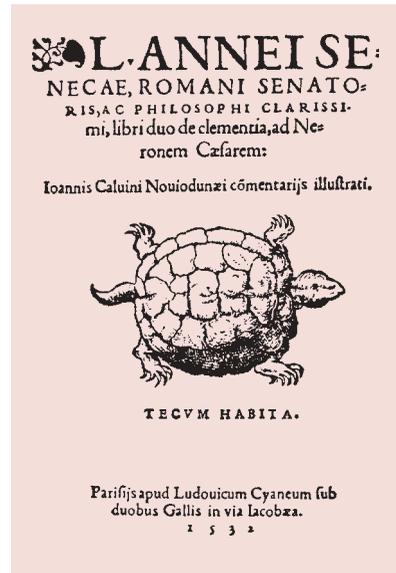
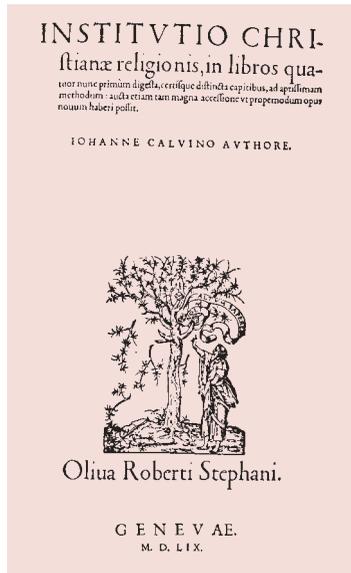
The Basic Historic Calvinism Committee has held meetings from 1959 to the present as the collection continued to grow. What was once the personal library of Dr. H. Henry Meeter was organized and augmented by Calvin College and Seminary Library Director Dr. Lester DeKoster with the support of President Spoelhof. Subsequently the collection was greatly enlarged and systematically catalogued by the dedicated work of Theological Librarian and Curator Peter DeKlerk.

The final impetus for the housing of the collection and the appointment of a director occurred during the college presidency of Dr. Anthony J. Diekema. A study committee recommended a building design to house the collection and the structure for a governing board. But this was not an easy attainment. For many years it was accepted that Calvinism was integrated throughout the entire institution; thus it followed that the

Calvinism collection should be integrated into the institution's library.

However the study committee's recommendation resulted in a decision that central housing should be constructed for the collection. Today, upon completion of the structure, the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies is rated second to the library of Geneva as the world's preeminent center for the study of Calvin and Calvinism.

At a time when cults are so prominent across this continent and around the world, the Meeter Center courageously and effectively offers the Calvinistic application of scriptural truth to daily life. It is my prayer now, as it was of H. Henry Meeter many years ago, that this powerful tool will bring balance and stability to the Christian life. I am convinced that it will provide wisdom in applying God's timeless Word to the world of today and tomorrow.



CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE H. HENRY MEETER CENTER FOR CALVIN STUDIES

Written by Mr. Hugh J. Meeter in 1988

- 1959 • The will of Emeritus Professor H. Henry Meeter establishes a committee to promote the Scholarly Research and Development of Basic Historic Calvinism. The will envisions a growing scholarly collection and eventual housing for its storage, exhibition, and use.

Named to the committee are: Calvin College President Dr. William J. Spoelhof, Calvin Seminary President Dr. John Kromminga, Calvin College and Seminary Director of Development Mr. Sydney Youngsma, Calvin College Bible Department Chairperson Dr. John Bratt, and Mr. Hugh J. Meeter.

- 1973 • Mr. Sydney Youngsma, who is active in the promotion of the Calvin College and Seminary Heritage Hall/Colonial Origins project, urges consideration of the Bok Tower in Lake Wales, Florida, as a model for a free-standing campus.
- 1974 • A formal request is advanced to the Calvinism Committee for the establishment of a Calvinism Research Center stressing visibility as a prerequisite to participation. Urged is the construction of a highly visible center structure for the Calvinism Collection to encourage participation of students, faculty, off-campus members of the Christian Reformed Church, scholars, and business and professional persons.
- 1976 • Dr. Anthony Diekema becomes president of Calvin College and a member of the Calvinism Committee provided for in the will of Dr. Meeter. Dr. Diekema appoints an Ad Hoc Committee on the Calvin-Calvinism Collection chaired by Dr. John Bratt. Committee proposals are summarized by Calvin Seminary professor Dr. Fred Klooster in terms of the following needs and options.

Needs: Additional room for both books and users, greater prominence, physical continuity with the existing library, shelf space that might be integrated with the Colonial Origins Collection in Heritage Hall.

Options: Modest expansion into the balcony area of Heritage Hall; moderate expansion with a wing added to the library structure; plush creation, if funds would be available, of a unique architectural unit for the Calvin-Calvinism Collection.

- 1978 • Dr. Ford Lewis Battles, distinguished Calvin scholar, joins the Calvin Seminary faculty and is a strong advocate in the creation of the present center. (Dr. Battles' tenure is cut short by cancer in 1979.)
- 1979 • The Calvinism Study Center Committee is appointed with Calvin College history professor Dr. Frank Roberts as chairman. (The prodigious study, completed in 1981, develops the center's constitution, bylaws, functions, and responsibilities.)
- 1981 • Construction of the plush option is begun.
- 1982 • The completed H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies is dedicated with thanksgiving to God.



From left: Anthony Diekema, Calvin College president; Hugh Meeter; Eve Meeter; Howard Rienstra, Meeter Center director; and William Spoelhof, Calvin College president emeritus at the Meeter Center inauguration of Howard Rienstra as director in 1983

CALVIN
College



CALVIN
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY