The title of one of Richard Muller's studies of Calvin's theology, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, attests to a principal feature of his contributions to the study of Reformation theology and the subsequent period of Reformed orthodoxy: the historical interpretation of the leading theologians of the period must not be unduly shaped by contemporary theological interests or debates, but must be disciplined by attention to the historical and theological context of their reformatory labors.\(^1\) Rather than accommodating the reading of Calvin's writings so as to enlist him as an ally in present-day theological controversy, Calvin's writings need to be treated within the historical framework from which they first emerged. In Muller's estimation, among the principal and most egregious illustrations of a non-contextualized interpretation of Calvin's theology, and ones that considerably influenced Calvin's studies throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, were the nineteenth century advocates of a “central dogma” thesis and the twentieth-century neo-orthodox portrayals of a non-scholastic and non-Aristotelian Calvin. Whether in the interest of rejecting Calvin's putative “decretal” theology in favor of a more existential, Lutheran theology, or in the interest of pitting Calvin's Christocentrism against an austere doctrine of the divine decrees, the study of Calvin's theology was inappropriately governed by modern theological emphases rather than sixteenth-century concerns.

One interesting facet of the discussion regarding how Calvin's theological writings are to be interpreted in their sixteenth-century context is the interpretation of the history and organization of Calvin's *Institutes*, 1536–1559. The history and development of Calvin's *Institutes* have often been the focus of discussion in the study of Calvin's theology, and offer an example of how contemporary theological interests can influence the interpretation of Calvin's decisions regarding the placement of a particular theological topic in the *ordo docendi* of the *Institutes*. For example, Calvin's decision to treat the doctrine of predestination toward the end of

---

\(^1\) Muller, UC.
Book III of the *Institutes* has often been adduced as evidence for a more soteriological and christological treatment of the doctrine than that of the scholastic theological tradition, which treated predestination as a *pars providentiae*.² However, more recent, contextualized studies of the organization of Calvin's *Institutes* have shown that the placement of the doctrine of predestination in Book III reflects specific sixteenth-century factors, such as the organization of the *Institutes* after the pattern of Melanchthon's *Loci communes*, which itself reflects the sequence of topics in the book of Romans, and Calvin's ongoing polemics with his theological contemporaries.³

The aim of the following study is to offer a small contribution to and illustration of the need to interpret the history and organization of Calvin's *Institutes* in its sixteenth-century context. Interpreters of Calvin's *Institutes* have often commented on his unusual ordering of the two benefits that believers receive when they are united by faith to Christ—regeneration or repentance and justification.⁴ In Book III of the *Institutes*, Calvin provides an account of the work of the Holy Spirit in uniting believers to Christ, and of the two benefits of this union, which Calvin terms the *duplex gratia Dei*. Rather than treating the “first” of these benefits, justification, before the “second,” Calvin informs his reader of his decision to reverse this sequence and thereby go contrary to the *ordo docendi* that might have been anticipated. Though Calvin's decision to follow this unusual sequence of topics has elicited some discussion in studies of Calvin's *Institutes*, its significance for an understanding of the way Calvin organizes his *Institutes* within the context of sixteenth-century theological controversy has not been a special focus of study. Since Calvin extensively comments on the reasons that led him to follow this unusual order, he provides some insight into the kinds of considerations that played a role in the general organization and arrangement of topics in the *Institutes*.


³ See, e.g., Muller, *UC*, 118–139; and Paul Helm, ‘Calvin, the “Two Issues,’ and the Structure of the *Institutes,*” *CTJ* 42.2 (2007): 341–348.

⁴ Though Calvin uses the language of “regeneration” or “repentance” and “justification” for these two benefits, the more common terminology in the history of theology is “sanctification” and “justification.” In what follows, I will commonly use “repentance” and “sanctification” as synonyms to describe the second of these two benefits that Calvin denominates the “twofold grace” of God in Christ.