

**Thomas Norton**  
(1532-1584)

**PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION  
OF HIS TRANSLATION OF CALVIN,  
*INSTITUTIO RELIGIONIS CHRISTIANAE*  
[1561]**

**T. N. THE TRANSLATOR TO THE READER**

Good Reader, here is now offred you the third time Printed in English, M. Caluines Booke of the Institution of Christian Religion, a Booke of great labour to the author, and of great profite to the Church of God. M. Caluine first wrote it when he was a young man, a booke of small volume, and since that season he hath at sundry times published it with new increases, still protesting at every edition himself to be one of those qui scribendo proficiunt, & proficiendo scribunt, which with their writing do grow in profiting, and with their profiting do procede in writing. At length having in many his other workes travelled about exposition of sondry bookes of the Scriptures, and in the same finding occasion to discourse of sondry common places and matters of doctrine, which being handled according to the occasions of the text that were offred him and not in any other methode, were not so ready for the readers use, he therefore entred into this purpose, to enlarge this booke of Intitutions and therein to treat of all those titles and common places largely, with this entent, that whensoever any occasion fell in his other bokes to treat of any such cause, he would not newly amplifie his bokes of Commentaries & expositions therwith, but refer his reader wholly to this storehouse and treasurie of that sort of divine learning. As age and weaknesse grew upon him, so he hastened his labor, and according to his petition to God, he in maner ended his life with his worke, for he lived not long after. So great a iewell was meete to be made most beneficial, that is to say, applied to most common use. Therefore in the very beginning of the Queenes Maielties most blessed reigne, I translated it out of Latine into English, for the commoditie of the church of Christ, at the speciall request of my dere frendes of worthy memory Reginald Wolfe and Edward Whitchurch, the one her Maiestics Printer for the Hebrewes, Greke, and Latine tonges, the other her highnesse Printer of the bokes of common Prayer. I performed my worke in the house of my said frend Edw. Whitchurch, a man well knowen of upright hart & dealing, an auncient zelous Gospeller, as plaine & true a frend as ever I

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knew lining, and as desirous to do any thing to common good, specially by the advancement of true religion. At my said first edition of this booke, I considered how the author therof had of long time purposely labored to write the same most exactly, and to packe great plentie of matter in small roome of wordes, yea and those to circumspectly and precisely ordred, to avoide the cavillations of such, as for enmitie to the truth therin contained, would gladly seke & abuse all advauntages which might be found by any oversight in penning of it, that the sentences were thereby become so full as nothing might well be added without idle superfluitie, and againe so niely pared that nothing could be minished without taking away some necessary substance of matter therein expressed. This maner of writing, beside the peculiar termes of artes & figures, & the difficultie of the matters them [???] being throughout enterlaced with the scholemens controversies, made a great hardnesse in the authors owne booke, in that tounge wherein otherwise he is both plentifull and easie, insomuch that it suffiseth not to read him once, unlesse you can be content to read in vaine. This consideration encombred me with great doutfulness for the whole order and frame of my translation. If I should followe the wordes, I saw that of necessitie the hardnesse in the translation must needes be greater than was in the tounge wherein it was originally written. If I should leave the course of wordes, and graunt my selfe libertie after the naturall maner of my owne tounge, to say that in Englishe which I conceaved to be his meaning in Latine, I plainly perceaved how hardly I might escape error, and on the other side in this matter of faith and religion, how perillous it was to erre. For I durst not presume to warraut my selfe to have his meaning without his wordes. And they that wotte what it is to translate wel and faythfully, specially in matters of religion, do know that not the onely grammaticall construction of wordes suffiseth, but the very building & order to observe all advauntages of vehemence or grace, by placing or accente of wordes, maketh much to the true setting forth of a writers minde. In the end, I rested upon this determination, to follow the wordes so nere as the phrase of the English tounge would suffer me. Which purpose I so performed, that if the English booke were printed in such paper & letter as the Latine is, it should not excede the Latine in quantitie. Wherby, beside all other commodities that a faithfull translation of so good a worke may bring, this one benefite is moreover provided for such

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as are desirous to attaine some knowledge of the Latine tounge (which is at this time to be wished in many of those men for whose profession this booke most sitly serveth) that they shall not finde any more English than shal suffise to construe the Latine with all, except in such few places, where the great difference of the phrases of the languages enforced me : so [???] comparing the one with the other, they shall both profite in good matter, & furnish themselves with understanding of that speach, wherein the greatest treasures of knowledge are disclosed. In the doing hetto, I did not onely trust mine owne wit or abilitie, but examined my whole doing from sentence to sentence throughout the whole booke, with conference & overloking of such learned men, as my translation being allowed by their judgement, I did both satisfie mine owne conscience that I had done truely, & their approving of it might be a good warrant to the reader, that nothing should herein be delivered him but found unmingled and uncorrupted doctrine, even in such sort as the author himselfe had first framed it. All that I wrote, the grave learned and vertuous man M. David Whitehed (whom I name with honorable remembraunce) did amōg other, cōpare with the Latine, examining every sentence throughout the whole booke. Beside all this, I privately required many, & generally all men with whom I ever had any talke of this matter, that if they found any thing either not truely translated, or not plaily Englished, they would enforme me thereof, promising either to satisfie them or to amend it. Since which time I have not bene advertised by any man of any thing which they would require to be altered. Neither had I my selfe, by reason of my profession being otherwise occupied, any leasure to peruse it. And that is the cause, why not only at the second time bu also at this impression, you have no chaunge at all in the worke, but altogether as it was before. In dede I perceaved many men well minded and studious of this booke, to require a table for their ease and furtherance. Their honest desire I have fulfilled in the second edition, and have added thereto a plentifull table, which is also here inserted which I have translated out of the Latine, wherein the principall matters discoursed in this booke are named by their due titles in order of Alphabete, and under every title is set forth a breefe summe of the whole doctrine taught in this booke, concerninge the matter belonging to that title or common place: and therwith is added the Booke, Chapter, and Section or division of the Chapter, where the same doctrine is more largely expressed

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and proved. And for the readier finding thereof, I have caused the numbers of Chapters to be set upon every leafe in the booke, and quoted the Sections also by their due numbers with the usuall figures of Algorisme. And now at this third publishing, the Widowe of my sayd good discrete and honest frend M. Wolffe, by whose charge is now newly Printed, hath caused divers other Tables, which since my second edition were gathered by M. Marlorate, to be translated and here added for your benefite. Moreover, whereas in the first edition the evill maner of my scribbling hand, the enterlining of my Copie, and some other causes well knowen among workemen of that facultie, made very many faultes to passe the Printer, I have in the second impression caused the boke to be composed by the Printed copie, and corrected by the written: wherby it must needs be that it was much more truely done then the other was, as I my selfe doe know above three hundred faultes amended. And now at this last Printing, the composing after a Printed copie bringeth some ease, and the diligence used about the correction, having bene right faythfully looked unto, it can not be but much more truely set forth. This also is performed, that the volume being smaller, with a letter fayre and legible, it is of more easie price, that it may be of more common use, and so to more large communicating of so great a treasure to those that desire Christian knowledge for instruction of their faith, & guiding of their duties. Thus on the Printers behalfe and mine, your ease and commoditie (good readers) is provided for. Now resteth your owne diligence for your owne profite in studying it. To spend many wordes in commending the worke it selfe, were needlesse: yet thus much I thinke I may both not untruely and not vainly saye, that though many great learned men have written bookes of common places of our religion, as Melanchton, Sarcenus, and other, whose workes are very good and profitable to the Church of God: yet by the consenting judgement of those that understand the same, there is none to be compared to this worke of Caluine, both for his substantiall sufficiency of doctrine, the sound declaration of truth in articles of our religion, the large and learned confirmation of the same, and the most deepe and strong consutation of all olde and new heresies: so that (the holy Scriptures excepted) this is one of the most profitable bookes for all studentes of Christian divinitie. Wherein (good readers) as I am glad for the glory of God, and for your benefite, that you may have this profite of my travell, so I beseech you let me have this use

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of your gentlenesse, that my doinges may be construed to such good end as I have meant them: and that if any thing mislike you by reason of hardnesse, or any other cause that may seeme to be my default, you will not forthwith condemne the worke, but read it oftenin which doing you shall finde (as many have confessed to me that they have found by experience) that those things which at the first reading shall displease you for hardnesse, shall be found so easie as so hard matter would suffer, and for the most part more easie than some other phrase which should [???] greater loosenesse and smother sliding away deceive your understanding. I confesse in deede it is not finely and pleasauntly written, not carrieth with it such delitefull grace of speches as some great wise men have bestowed upon some foolisher thinges, yet it containeth sound truth set forth with faythfull plainnesse without wrong done to the authors meaning: and so if you accept and use it, you shall not faile to have great profite therby, and I shall thinke my labor very well employed.

Thomas Norton.

