

Timothy Ryan
AP Euro
Period C
September 9, 2007

Historical Essay Analysis

Title: Explaining John Calvin

Author: William J. Bouwsma

Author's thesis: John Calvin was not the cold, serious man he is often portrayed as, but was a very contradictory thinker, reflective of the 16th century.

Author's evidence:

- a) Joined radical student movement to reform Church based on salvation by grace
- b) *Institutes* brought him renown among Protestant leaders
- c) Remained in Geneva from 1541 to death, where he created theocracy
- d) Turned Geneva into center of Protestantism
- e) He saw anxiety everywhere, even in the Bible
- f) Rejected hierarchy for utility
- g) Calvin was a pastor and preached regularly
- h) Calvinism influenced liberal political thought

Author's conclusion about the significance of the topic:

John Calvin was a humanist that was often much more friendly and open than he was later portrayed. His ideas and concepts about religion and society would be massively influential to organized religion and society in Europe, as Calvinism surpassed Lutheranism in popularity.

List below questions you have about the reading.

1. Are there any historical documents to suggest that Calvin was not as cold as he was later portrayed?
2. What aspects of society did Calvin have a direct influence on?

To what extent does your knowledge of the period support or conflict with the author's thesis?

My knowledge of the protestant reformation largely supports John Calvin's place in history as a significant religious reformer, as well as one of the originators of Western capitalism through his teachings.

Write a paragraph in your own words explaining the gist of the article, the nature of the evidence, and the significance of the topic.

John Calvin is often portrayed as 17th century Protestants portrayed him: a stern, focused, and serious man. However, historical evidence shows this was not the case, and that Calvin was a very open and friendly person, a humanist at heart, and a brilliant religious reformer. Introduced to Protestantism and being recruited to establish a theocracy in Geneva, Calvin spread his beliefs through several popular writings and his own preaching. He was a biblical theologian, following Scripture in all regards, yet his teachings were more about spirituality rather than theology. It was not until after his death that many of his ideas were misinterpreted and construed, such as the doctrine on predestination.