

John Calvin

by Simonetta Carr

with Illustrations by Emanuele Taglietti



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John Calvin

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As you read this book, you can follow John Calvin's travels on this map.

Introduction



During the times described in this book, the Roman Catholic Church had great influence in Europe. The head of that church, the pope, owned a large territory in Italy and fought to protect it. The pope, who called the German nation the “Holy Roman Empire,” also appointed the German emperor. Every other nation in Europe feared the pope and tried to keep him as friend. Some individual cities within the empire, however, declared their independence from the Roman Catholic Church.



John Calvin

At a time when the church was more interested in riches and power than in its faithfulness to the teachings of the Bible, some Christians fought to return to the truth. Those who fought for the truth were called “Reformers.” To “reform” means “to change for the better” and that period in history is referred to as “the Reformation.” John Calvin was one of the most famous Reformers.



The Cathedral of Noyon. Calvin probably visited it frequently with his father.

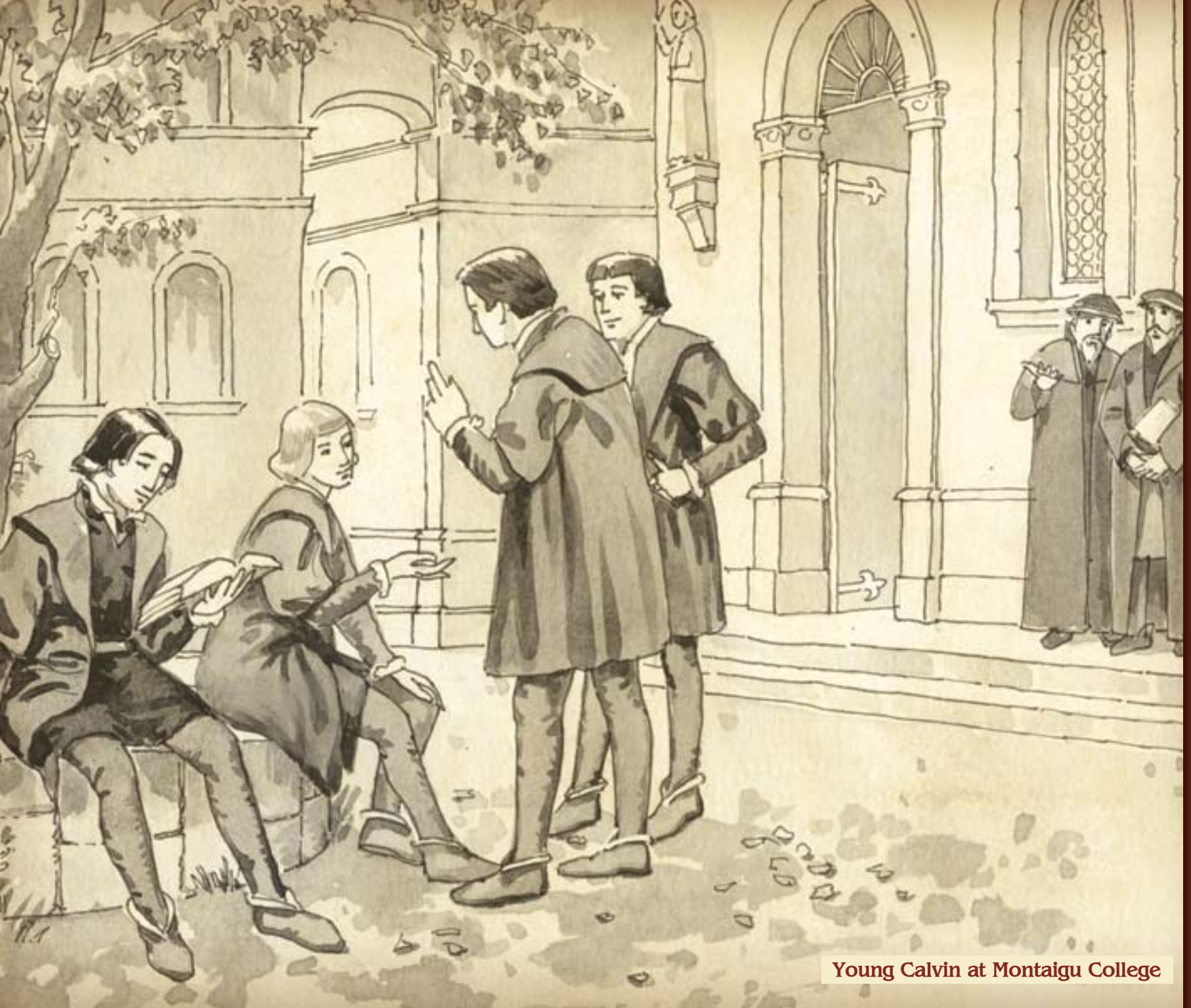
CHAPTER ONE

Early Studies



John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, a town in the northern part of France. He was the second of either three or four brothers. His mother, Joan, died when he was still very young. His father, Gerard, worked for the Roman Catholic bishop of Noyon, taking care of legal matters. This job allowed him to give his sons a good education, financed by the church, first through the private tutor of a noble family and later in college.

In those days, children went to college when they were still quite young. John Calvin probably started when he was thirteen or fourteen. He was always an excellent student even when the schools he attended were very strict. At Montaigu College, for example,



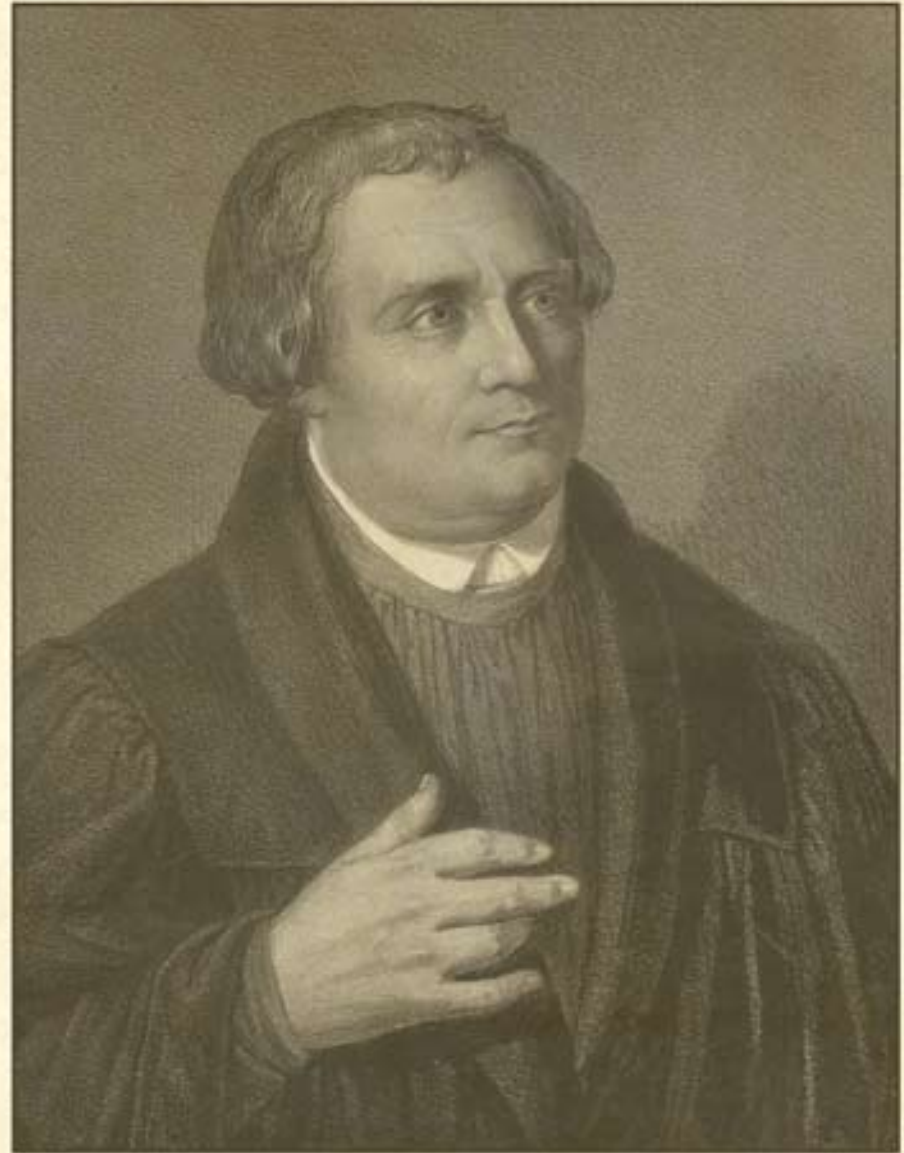
he had to get up at four o'clock in the morning and study or read all day with almost no time to rest. This taught him to use his time wisely and work hard—something that he did for the rest of his life.

At that time, parents usually decided what their children would do when they grew up. From the start, Gerard thought that his son should become a priest. After John's graduation, however, he suddenly changed his mind. He had come to some disagreements with the bishop and, knowing that lawyers can have a very profitable career, he told John that he should study law instead. Obeying his father, John attended the best schools in the country and received a license to practice law. After Gerard's death, he moved back to Paris to study what he liked best: the ancient languages of the Bible (Hebrew and Greek) and the great writings of the past.

In Paris, John Calvin read the writings of Reformers like Martin Luther, who reminded the church of the original teachings of the Bible: mankind is saved only by grace and only through faith. The Roman Catholic Church, the only established church of that time, taught that in order to be saved, people had to do good works.

Calvin said that it was very difficult for him to disagree with teachings that he had accepted for so long, but he knew that the Bible was the only truth. In his writing he said that it was God who changed his heart and mind, giving him a great “desire to make progress” in the truth he had just found.

The Roman Catholic Church did not like the writings of Luther and other Reformers and it did all it could to stop people from reading and believing them.



Martin Luther (1483–1546)



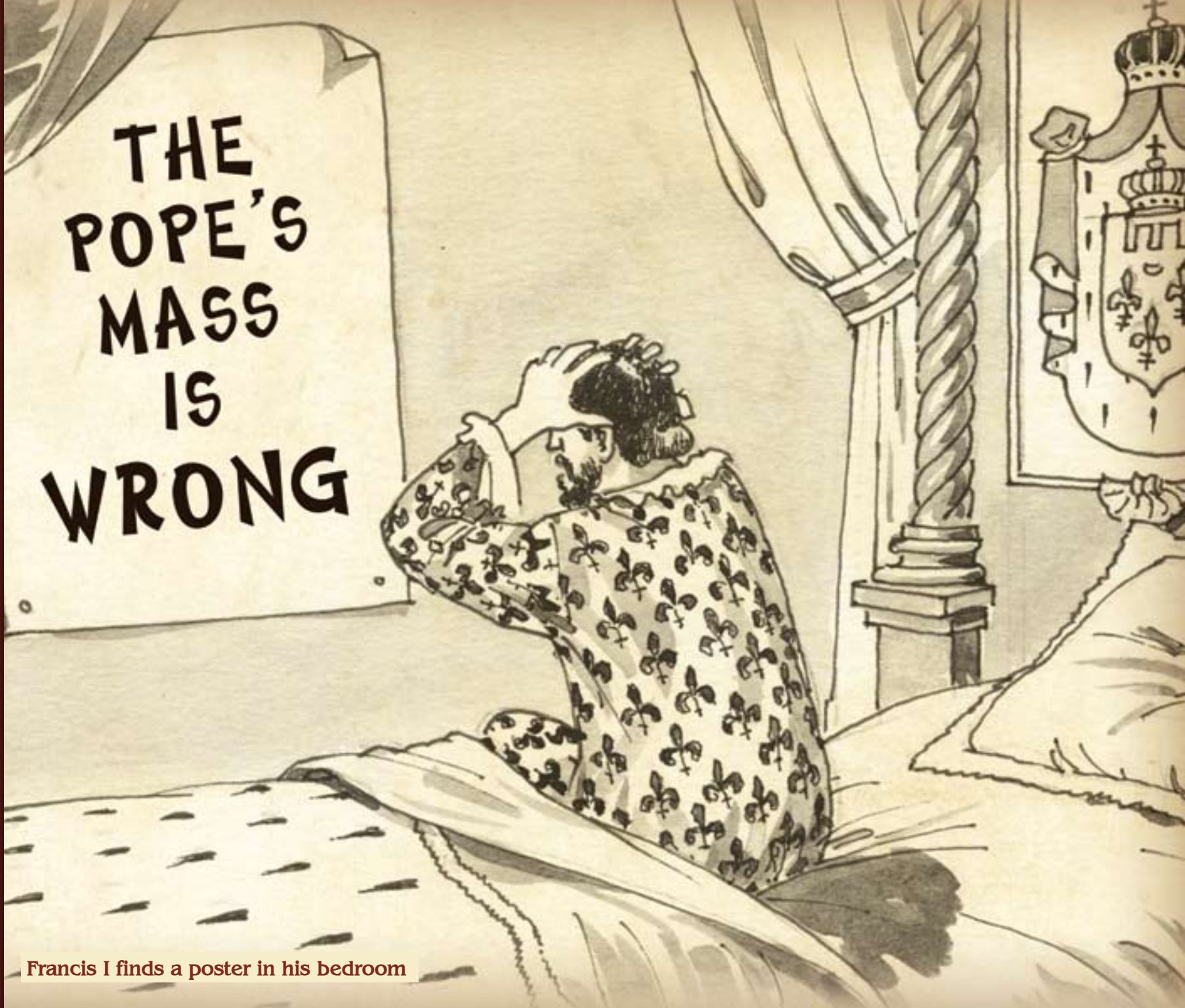
Calvin leaves Paris disguised as a farmer

In 1533, Nicholas Cop, the head of the University of Paris and a friend of Calvin, gave a speech, which sounded so much like the teachings of Luther that some college and state officers became angry. They did not want these new teachings to be taught openly. Things became so dangerous that Cop had to leave the country.

Some thought that Calvin himself had written the speech, so they went to his college quarters to arrest him, but he was not there. They searched his room and took some of his letters, which identified the names of some of his friends. Calvin knew that it was time for him to move on too, so he left Paris disguised as a farmer.

Calvin spent the next few months in different French cities as a guest of friends, including the king's own sister, Marguerite d'Angouleme, who supported the Reformers.

THE
POPE'S
MASS
IS
WRONG



Francis I finds a poster in his bedroom

Right at that time, a group of French Christians decided to protest against the Roman Catholic Church by making posters describing how the Roman Catholic way of worshiping God was wrong and not based on the Scriptures. When people woke up on the morning of October 18, 1534, the posters were everywhere. There was even one in the king's bedroom!

Obviously, the king, Francis I, was not pleased to find his privacy invaded. More important, he had made an agreement with the Roman Catholic pope and could not risk losing this new and powerful friend. He sent his guards to find the men responsible for the posters.



More than two hundred people were arrested, and twenty killed, including one of Calvin's friends. Calvin decided that it was time to leave France and left on horseback with his roommate and friend, Louis du Tillet.

Taking two servants with them, Calvin and his friend started out to Basel, a university town in what was then called the "Holy Roman Empire," where Nicholas Cop had found refuge. One of these servants, however, did not behave honestly. On their way to Basel, he robbed his masters of all their money and escaped with their best horse. It would have been a total disaster if the other servant had not lent them enough money to make it to Basel and find a place to stay.

Empire



Calvin robbed by a servant