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CALVIN AND MISSIONS

SOME writers seem to have unjustly criticized Calvin, concerning an alleged lack of zeal for foreign missions. It would be far easier to turn the criticism against many modern Calvinists, who have vastly more information, equipment, opportunities and resources, for their manifest lukewarmness. Good answers have been offered to justify Calvin and the other Reformers, and these should be emphasized. Prior to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, after the first Reformers had passed away, the sea power of the world was in the hands of those who opposed the Gospel. An illustration of the situation was seen in the disastrous ending of the evangelical colony that Admiral Coligny sent to Brazil. Calvin apparently did everything for it that was in his power. Of late years, do sensible people condemn the Bible Societies for not sending colporteurs to Soviet Russia, or missionary societies for not attempting to enter some Moslem lands where imprisonment or death might promptly arrest the missionary? With shame and sorrow we confess that many professed Calvinists have not a spark of Calvin's zeal for the Gospel. The Reformation was itself a missionary movement, on a grand, international scale; and for more than a century it had to fight for its life. In some lands it suffered losses which have never been regained. Our foreign missions, so glorious in results, are expensive; and it is a strange ignorance or forgetfulness which imagines that Reformers, generally poor in purse, could commandeer the funds needed for such an enterprise.

In various aspects, evangelical missions in Latin America, also missions among French, Italians or Slavs in the United States or Canada, resemble the Reformation, confronting the same errors, using the same Scriptural methods, and obtaining similar conversions and results. Three goodly volumes were published, being reports of Commissions, presented to the Congress on Christian Work in Latin America, Panama, February 1916. Representatives of fifty organizations from twenty-two countries assembled there. Interdenominational missionary conferences were held in New York City in 1854 on the occasion of the visit of Rev. Alexander Duff to the United States; another, in Liverpool in 1860; and a far larger one in 1888 in London. In New York City a really ecumenical one in 1900 was attended

by some seventeen hundred delegates and six hundred foreign missionaries. A great advance was seen in the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, in 1910. But Latin America was excluded here, through the influence of some German Societies, and some elements of the Church of England. The advocates of mission work in lands nominally Christian said that millions and millions of people there are practically without the Word of God and do not really know what the Gospel is. How interesting, that a modern missionary conference, on a technicality, would seem to exclude the Reformation, and the work of John Calvin!

It ought to be an edifying stimulus to all missionaries and their supporters, to gather from Calvin's writings some revelations of his missionary zeal. In his exposition of the Lord's Prayer (*Institutes*, Book III, Chap. XX, 41, 42) he says, "As the name of God is not duly hallowed on earth, it is at least our duty to make it the subject of our prayers." "God sets up his kingdom, by humbling the whole world, though in different ways, taming the wantonness of some, and breaking the ungovernable pride of others. We should desire this to be done every day, in order that God may gather churches to himself from all quarters of the world, may extend and increase their numbers, enrich them with his gifts, establish due order among them." Also, note some comments: Isa. xii. 4, "declare his doings among the people", "He means that the work of this deliverance will be so excellent, that it ought to be proclaimed, not in one corner only, but throughout the whole world." Mic. iv. 3, "A law shall go forth from Zion, that is, it shall be proclaimed far and wide; the Lord will show, not only in one corner, what true religion is, and how he seeks to be worshipped, but he will send forth his voice to the extreme limits of the earth." And the last verses of Romans, "He again refers to the end, mentioned in the beginning of the first chapter, for which the gospel is to be preached,—that God may lead all nations to the obedience of faith."

Calvin's lectures on Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the Minor Prophets were followed by appropriate prayers. Here follows a portion of his prayer after commenting upon Mic. vii. 10-14, "May we daily solicit thee in our prayers, and never doubt, but that under the government of thy Christ, thou canst again gather together the whole world, though it be miserably dispersed, so that we may persevere in this warfare to the end, until we shall at length know that we have not in vain hoped in

thee, and that our prayers have not been in vain, when Christ evidently shall exercise the power given to him for our salvation and for that of the whole world." And in conclusion of comments on the last verses of Malachi i, his prayer, in part : " O grant, that we may seek true purity and labour to render our services approved by thee by a real sincerity of heart, and so reverently profess and call upon thy name that it may be truly acknowledged as fulfilled in us, which thou hast declared by thy prophet,—that undoubtedly thy name shall be magnified and celebrated throughout the whole world, as it was truly made known to us in the very person of thine only-begotten Son."

In the volume of Dr. B. B. Warfield's articles, *Calvin and Calvinism* (p. 14) we read, " Calvin was the great letter-writer of the Reformation age. About four thousand of his letters have come down to us, some of them of almost the dimensions of treatises, many of them also of the most intimate character in which he pours out his heart. In these letters we see the real Calvin, the man of profound religious convictions and rich religious life, of high purpose and noble strenuousness, of full and freely flowing human affections and sympathies. Had he written these letters alone, Calvin would take his place among the great Christians and the great Christian leaders of the world."

And these letters reach representatives of the three great families of Christendom : Latin, Slav, and Teutonic. Being a Frenchman, of the Latin race, we need give no illustrations of his profound missionary influence upon France. We may mention, however, his noble messages to heroic men, women and students of France, upon the eve of their martyrdom. Nor will we quote his letters to Italian co-workers. Turning to the Slavs, the Poles were and still are an important branch of that European family. In 1549 King Sigismund Augustus of Poland accepted from Calvin the dedication of his commentary on Hebrews, where he says : " Your kingdom is extensive and renowned, and abounds in many excellences ; but its happiness will then only be solid when it adopts Christ as its chief ruler and governor, so that it may be defended by his safeguard and protection ; for to submit your sceptre to him is not inconsistent with that elevation in which you are placed, but it would be far more glorious than all the triumphs of the world." In 1555 Calvin wrote to Nicholas Radziwill, one of the most distinguished

of the Protestant nobles of Poland : “ It is my wish that the kingdom of Christ should flourish everywhere, yet at the present moment Poland deservedly occupies my thoughts with a very special anxiety. For from the time that the light of a purer doctrine began to shine upon it, this happy beginning has at the same time inflamed my desire with the hopes of a better progress. Unquestionably you see that it is a work of immense difficulty to establish the heavenly reign of God upon earth. You see with what indifference that cause is treated, which ought not only to occupy the chief place among our cares, but even absorb all our thoughts.” In closing a letter to the Waldenses of Bohemia, Calvin said, “ We pray our Heavenly Father to govern you continually by his Spirit, to shield you with his protection, to enrich you with his gifts, and to bless all your holy labours.”

And Calvin was interested in the Teutonic peoples, and had such friendly relations with Germans, for instance Melancthon, that we here omit quotations from that correspondence. But so large a proportion of his followers to-day speak English, that it is apropos to quote from his missionary messages to them. To John Knox he writes : “ It was a source of pleasure, not to me only, but to all the pious persons to whom I communicated the agreeable tidings, to hear of the very great success which has crowned your labours. But as we are astonished at such incredible progress in so brief a space of time, so we likewise give thanks to God whose extraordinary blessing is signally displayed herein.”

His letter to the precocious boy-king, Edward the Sixth, deserves remembrance : “ It is indeed a great thing to be a king, and yet more over such a country, nevertheless, I have no doubt that you reckon it beyond comparison better to be a Christian. It is therefore an invaluable privilege that God has vouchsafed you, sire, to be a Christian king, to serve as his lieutenant in ordering and maintaining the kingdom of Jesus Christ in England.”

In dedicating a new edition of his commentary on Isaiah to Queen Elizabeth, he wrote : “ It is not so much my object to be favoured with your countenance in my personal labours as humbly to entreat, and by the sacred name of Jesus Christ to implore, not only that through your kindness all orthodox books may again be welcomed and freely circulated in England, but that your chief care may be to promote religion, which has

fallen into shameful neglect. And if this is justly demanded from all kings of the earth by the only begotten Son of God, by a still more sacred tie does he hold you bound, most noble Queen, to perform this duty, for when even you, though a King's daughter, were not exempted from that dreadful storm which fell with severity on the heads of all the godly, by the wonderful manner in which he brought you out safe, though not unmoved by the fear of danger, he has laid you under obligation to devote yourself and all your exertions to his service. So far are you from having any reason to be ashamed of this deliverance that God has given you large and abundant grounds of boasting by conforming you to the image of his Son, on whom the prophet Isaiah bestows this among other commendations, that from prison and from judgment he was raised to the loftiest height of heavenly dominion." And to Bucer he wrote: "I pray that the English may make a stand for the genuine purity of Christianity, until everything in that country is seen to be regulated according to the rule which Christ himself has laid down."

All the works of Calvin show his genius, but the *Institutes* was his masterpiece. The first editions appeared some four centuries ago, and celebrations will take place. But should there not be some good and permanent results from these celebrations? Look again at the vast field of foreign missions. Why should not plans be formed to obtain funds for the translation of the *Institutes* in perhaps a score of missionary languages? Our missions will be infantile, immature, unless they are furnished with adequate Christian literature. And here we have a work that has been commended by a great chorus of critics in each of these centuries. Do we wish to see something like the Reformation in a score of modern peoples? By the blessing of God such a republication may be a powerful assistance, supplying the native preachers with the Scriptural teachings that they need. Calvin was the first to give a systematic form to the ideas of the Reformation. Enemies called the *Institutes* "the Koran of the heretics". Reyburn says, "What Newton's *Principia* is to science, that Calvin's *Institutes* is to theology." And millions, even hundreds of millions, may yet be won to Christ through Calvin's gospel.

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