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A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

THE CALVINISM OF CALVIN.

By A. H. Newman, D.D., LL.D.

The topic assigned to the writer in the word above implies that not all that goes under the name of Calvinism can be fairly attributed to John Calvin. That the teachings of Calvin should have undergone modifications during the three centuries and a half that his system has commanded the attention of the Christian world is by no means an isolated phenomenon. A host of scholars today are devoting all of the critical acumen they possess to efforts to determine precisely what the Christianity of Christ was, precisely what original Paulinism was, precisely what Augustinianism involved, precisely what Luther meant to teach. A recent German writer (Lic. Horst Stephan, *Luther in den Handlungen seiner Kirche*, Giessen, 1907) has shown in a very interesting way how, even before the death of the Reformer, and still more after his death and continuously up to the present time, every phase of thought and life developed in connection with German Protestantism has claimed the precept and example of Luther in its support. The self-indulgent and convivially-disposed have defended their practice by citing Luther's alleged maxim: "Who loves not wine, woman and song lives a fool his whole life long," and by referring to his free indulgence in drink and his extreme hostility to whatever savored of asceticism. The pietistically inclined have found in Luther's precept and practice regarding Scripture study, prayer and meditation abundant support for their type of religious life. Dogmatists have justified their confessional rigor and their bitter polemicism by citing Luther's uncompromising hostility to Romanists, Zwinglians and Anabaptists. Rationalists of the age of "enlightenment" and of later times have found their justification in Luther's intense hostility to mediaeval scholasticism and his free exercise of Bib-

lical criticism; while mystics have found ample support for their fantasies in his early relations to Staupitz and his enthusiastic admiration for Tauler and the "German Theology." Just as every religious teacher who wishes to be aligned with Christians seeks to show his accord with some phase of the life and teachings of Christ, so when Luther became a national hero and his precept and example became normative for great state-controlled and state-supported ecclesiastical institutions, it was natural that Luther's many-sidedness and his very inconsistencies should have been made to do service in the way of securing toleration and consideration for almost every phase of thought.

The authority of the great Genevan Reformer early became normative throughout wide circles and in many ecclesiastical establishments; but Calvin was so unambiguous and self-consistent in his statement of doctrinal positions that it was difficult for widely divergent modes of thought to find shelter under his aegis. Socinianism under Humanistic influence avowedly rejected Calvinism in all of its essential features with the Augustinianism on which it was based and became frankly Pelagian in its anthropology and frankly Arian in its christology. Arminianism, while at first for prudential reasons it sought to disguise its departure from orthodoxy, was soon forced into open warfare with Calvinistic teaching. The same may be said of the Saumur School with John Cameron as leader and Amyrauld Placeus, et al., as propagators and continuators. Each innovator claimed the right to criticize and correct the work of the great master.

The task assigned to the writer may be most usefully performed by allowing Calvin to speak for himself on the principal points of doctrine and practice.

I. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

Far more than Augustine, far more than Thomas Aquinas, far more than the old evangelicals of the Middle Ages, far more than Zwingli, or Luther, or the Anabaptists, Calvin laid stress

upon the plenary inspiration and the absolute authority of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments in all their parts. The old evangelicals and the Anabaptists (except chiliaric theocrats like the Taborites and the Münster men) laid chief stress on the New Testament, and above all on the words of our Lord, and supposed the theocratic system of the Old Testament, with its inclusion by circumcision of the entire population in the covenant membership, its intolerance toward other forms of religion, its infliction of capital punishment for the violation of its rules, its toleration of polygamy and concubinage, its sacerdotalism, its ceremonialism, its permission and requirement of oaths, its encouragement of revenge and the stress it put on the rewards and the penalties of the present life as compared with those of the life to come, had been completely superseded by the gospel of Christ, whose kingdom was not of this world, who practiced and taught meekness, humility, non-resistance, self-abnegation, and the laying up of treasures in heaven and not on earth; and who seemed to them to forbid oaths, magistracy, warfare, capital punishment, the accumulation of wealth, and everything that savored of selfishness and vengeance.

Equally far removed was Calvin from the capriciousness of Luther, who did not hesitate to exalt or disparage individual books of the Old Testament and the New Testament alike according as they seemed to support or fail to support his favorite doctrine of justification by faith alone, and who, in almost Manichaean fashion, contrasted Moses with Christ as darkness with light.

No less distasteful to Calvin was the Humanistic latitudinarianism of Zwingli, who found indication of divine inspiration in Greek philosophy and other systems of pagan thought and who indulged the "larger hope" with respect to Socrates, Plato, etc. While he did not deny that a modicum of truth was possessed by heathen thinkers, and that all truth spoken intelligently by the impious is from God and is to be accepted as divinely given, yet he insisted that "faith can as little be separated from the word (meaning Scripture) as the sunbeams from the sun." "We do not raise the question here, which we

shall consider elsewhere, whether for the sowing of the word of God whence faith is conceived human ministry is necessary; but we say that the word itself, whencesoever it is conveyed to us, is a mirror, so to speak, in which faith beholds God" (Inst. iii. 2, 6). "Our knowing can consist only in our accepting with humble docility and accepting unconditionally what is laid down in Holy Scripture." In the Scriptures alone God gives witness of himself. He, therefore, who will let the true religion become vital in himself, must make this heavenly doctrine his starting point, and no one will be able in even the slightest degree to attain to sound doctrine unless he become a disciple of Scripture." "The first point of Christianity is, that the Holy Scripture is all our wisdom and that it is necessary for us to listen to God who speaks there, without any sort of modification" [on our part] (Opera, xxvi. 131). He declares the Scriptures to be the only "rule of teaching and learning." He charges papists with blasphemy in denying the sole authority of Scripture. "Let us know that not elsewhere than in the word of the Lord can faith have its foundation," and in "all controversies only its testimony can decide" (Opera xlviii. 393). "Let it stand therefore as a fixed axiom, that no doctrine is worthy of credence unless it is manifestly based upon the Scriptures" (Opera xlviii. 401).

He denounces as sacrilege the Roman Catholic contention that the Scriptures owe their authority to the church, maintaining on the basis of Ephesians 2:20 that the church is founded on the writings of the prophets and the preaching of the apostles. He seeks to set aside the claim of the papists that Augustine is on their side in the controversy by reference to the context of the passage in which he said that he would not believe the gospel unless the authority of the church moved him thereunto, attributing this inconvenient declaration to the stress of Manichean controversy. He answers the question, "Whence then will we be persuaded that the Scriptures have come forth from God unless we take refuge in the decree of the church?" with another: "Whence shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter?" "For,"

he continues, "Scripture bears before itself no obscurer indication of its truth than do white and black things of their color, sweet and bitter things of their taste." To the human mind that has come into right relations with God the divine and infallible quality of Scripture he felt to be so self-evident that to ask for proof was an impertinence.

Accordingly all questions of higher and lower criticism that tended to make uncertain the original perfection or the correct transmission of the Biblical writings he regarded as an evidence of wantonness on the part of those that raised them. Having utterly cast aside church authority and having no confidence in unregenerate reason, he felt a strong necessity for an inerrant guide in religious truth. He became profoundly convinced that the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments constitute such a guide, and the difficulties involved were easily surmounted by his faith or explained away by his penetrating mind. The self-evidencing character of the Scriptures was closely connected in Calvin's mind with the belief that the Holy Spirit bears testimony to its divine truth in the experience of the believer.

The Reformed churches (Swiss, French, Dutch, Scotch, German, etc.) have abandoned Calvin's doctrine of Holy Scripture, a large proportion of the scholars of these bodies having given up the claim of inerrancy and admitted the right of Lower and Higher Criticism.

II. HIS DOCTRINE OF GOD.

Calvin's idea of God was that of Augustine, with the Neo-Platonic (semi-pantheistic) element eliminated and the Stoical idea of a moral world-order irresistibly working itself out in human history and bringing to naught all finite opposition brought into utmost prominence, the result being in substantial accord with the Old Testament ascription of all natural forces, whether beneficent or hurtful from the human point of view, to God, but with a clearer conception of the moral and intellectual attributes and a great reduction of the anthropomorphic element, in substantial accord with the New Testament teaching,

diminished stress being laid upon the love of God and increased stress upon his functions as lawgiver and judge. As Calvin believed it to be the duty of a Christian man to accept unconditionally the canonical books of the Bible as God's word, notwithstanding the difficulties that present themselves to human reason, so he wisely maintained the infinite wisdom, power, justice and goodness of God, notwithstanding the apparent imperfections in the present world-order and the widespread prevalence of moral evil in human history. While not ignoring the love of God in Christ and his fatherhood of believers through Christ, he prefers to dwell upon the harsher aspects of his nature. God is a "Warrior," a "Lawgiver," a "Consuming Fire," an "Avenger," a "Zealot." Of course he recognizes God as manifesting in Christ and toward believers all the benignant and beneficent attributes manifest in the life and teachings of Christ. Against Calvin's conception of God, no less than against his view of the Scriptures, there has been a widespread revolt among the Reformed churches.

III. PREDESTINATION AND REPROBATION.

In his teaching respecting predestination and reprobation Calvin followed closely in the footsteps of Augustine; but he was less concerned than his great teacher about vindicating the ways of God to men. He conceived that God's glory is manifest just as really in the eternal damnation of the wicked as in the eternal blessedness of the redeemed. "All are not created in a condition of equality; but to some life eternal, to others damnation eternal is foreordained. God in his hidden counsel chooses whom he will, others being rejected. We say that in his eternal and immutable counsel God has determined once for all whom thereafter he would lay hold upon for salvation, and whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction." The following articles, printed from an autograph that has been preserved at Geneva (Opera ix. 713), express his view as precisely as could be desired: "Before the first man was created God had established (*statuerat*) what he willed

should take place (*fieri*) concerning the entire human race. In this secret counsel of God it was determined (*factum est*) that Adam should fall away from the integral (unimpaired) state of his nature, and by his defection should draw all his posterity into condemnation to eternal death. On this same decree depends the difference between the elect and the reprobate: because he adopted for himself some for salvation, others he destined to eternal destruction. While the reprobate are vessels of God's just vengeance, the elect, on the other hand, are vessels of mercy; yet no other cause of the difference is to be sought in God than his mere will, which is the highest rule of justice. Although the elect receive by faith the grace of adoption, yet election is not dependent upon faith, but in time and order is prior. As the beginning of faith and perseverance therein flows from God's gratuitous election, so no others are truly illuminated in faith or endued with the spirit of regeneration except those whom God chose; but it is necessary that the reprobate either remain in their blindness or fall away from the part of faith if any was in them. Although we are elected in Christ, nevertheless the Lord's decreeing us among his own is prior to his making us members of Christ. Although the will of God is the highest and first cause of all things, and God holds the devil and all the impious in subjection to his will, yet God cannot be called the cause of sin nor the author of evil, nor is he chargeable with any fault. Although God is truly hostile to sin and condemns whatever of injustice there is in men because it is displeasing to him, nevertheless not by his bare permission alone, but also by his expressed assent (*nutu*) and secret decree all the deeds of men are governed. Although the devil and reprobate men are God's ministers and organs and execute his secret judgments, nevertheless God in an incomprehensible manner so works in them and through them that he contracts no contamination from their vice, because he justly and rightly uses their malice to a good end, although the manner is often hidden from us. They act ignorantly and calumniously who say that God is made the author of sin if all things take place, he willing and ordaining them: be-

cause they do not distinguish between the manifest badness of men and the secret judgments of God."

That Calvin was responsible for a pretty high type of Calvinism the above quotation makes abundantly manifest. The question is still worth discussing, whether or not his teaching was distinctly supralapsarian. The writer was at one time inclined to class Calvin with the supralapsarians on the basis of these and similar passages; but a somewhat careful testing led to the conclusion that, while he approached perilously near to supralapsarianism and made use of language that was calculated to lead less cautious thinkers into the supralapsarian ranks, no sentence can be found in his voluminous writings that is inconsistent with sublapsarianism. The writer in his lectures is accustomed to use the following formulae in distinguishing the two positions: Supralapsarianism teaches that God in his eternal counsel determined to create the universe, and man in order that man might fall and the opportunity might be furnished to manifest his love and mercy in the salvation of the elect and his justice in the damnation of the non-elect or reprobate. Sublapsarianism, on the other hand, maintains that God determined in his eternal counsel to create the Universe and man, notwithstanding the fact that he foresaw that man would fall and become involved in sin and ruin, but having in mind the working out of a great moral system with the scheme of redemption, the ultimate result of which will exceed in glory a world in which sin should have been impossible, no moral choice having been permitted. The term *supralapsarian* implies that in the divine mind the decree of the fall logically preceded the decree to create; the term *sublapsarian* (*infralapsarian*) implies that the decree of the fall logically succeeded the creative decree. So far as the writer has been able to discover, Calvin never committed himself distinctly to the supralapsarian position, thus understood, as did Beza, his successor in Geneva, Gomar, Piscator, Bogerman, *et al.*, in the Netherlands, Whitgift in England, etc. The interested reader is advised to compare Calvin's statements given above with some unquestionably supralapsarian utterances selected and trans-

lated by the writer and published in his "A Manual of Church History" (Vol. II., pp. 337-339).

Most sublapsarians have differed from Calvin in his attitude toward reprobation, shrinking from ascribing the damnation of the lost to a direct divine decree and preferring to think of them as simply left in their fallen estate from which divine grace alone could rescue them. As none merit salvation and God is under obligation to save none, there is no injustice involved in leaving some to their fate while delivering some. Calvin agrees with supralapsarians in teaching reprobation with the same positiveness and assurance as election.

It is not necessary to dwell here upon the closely related doctrines of election, irresistible divine grace, perseverance of the saints, etc.

IV. THE WILL.

From what we have seen above of Calvin's views on God and Predestination, we could not expect him to find a place in the universe for more than one free will. His most elaborate discussion of this subject is his "Defense of the Sane and Orthodox Doctrine Concerning the Servitude and Liberation of the Human Will Against the Calumnies of Albert Pighius of Kampen," published in 1543. The title itself implies that in man's fallen estate his will is in servitude, while in his regenerate state it becomes free by being brought into joyful accord with the will of God. He maintained that the "will is bound by the servitude of sin," so that "it is not able to move itself toward the good, much less to apply itself to the good." He speaks of the "sinner" as "bound by tight fetters as long as, deserted by the Lord, he acts under the yoke of the devil. Nevertheless will remains, which is strongly inclined and hastens with most eager affection toward sinning; so that man is not deprived of will when he has given himself up to this necessity, but of saneness of will." Calvin insists upon the distinction between necessity and compulsion. God acts freely while he necessarily does only what is good. The devil can do only evil, and yet he

sins voluntarily. "Who, therefore, will say that man sins less voluntarily because he is obnoxious to the necessity of sinning?" (Inst. ed. 1559, II. Ch. iii.) In his polemic against Pighius he is chiefly concerned to defend his doctrine from attempts to identify it with Manichean and Gnostic fatalism, with its blasphemous and immoral consequences, and to explain Augustine, with whom he wishes to be in accord, where in controversy with Manicheans he seemed to have gone too far in the direction of recognizing human freedom.

V. THE ORDINANCES.

In his doctrine respecting the Lord's Supper Calvin took a position intermediate between that of Zwingli and that of Luther. To regard the Supper with Zwingli as a mere memorial rite seemed to him to strip the ordinance of all solemnity and impressiveness. Denying as he did the Lutheran (Euty-chian) doctrine of the communication of all divine attributes, including omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience, by the divine to the human nature of Christ, and accordingly denying the ubiquity of Christ's humanity, which he asserted was locally in heaven after the resurrection, he was unable to hold with Luther that after the consecration of the bread and wine in the Supper the body and blood of Christ are present along with the bread and wine (consubstantiation), and are partaken of by all who receive the elements whether they are believers or impious, and even by a mouse if it should chance to devour them. Of course he rejected with even greater horror the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, in accordance with which the consecrated elements cease to be bread and wine and become solely and absolutely the body and blood of Christ, while retaining the attributes (appearance, consistency, taste, etc.,) of bread and wine. The result of his efforts to keep clear of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran errors, which he regarded as superstitious and idolatrous, on the one hand, and to avoid the bareness and tendency toward lack of reverence in the Zwinglian position on the other, was a theory that seems rather out of

accord with his habitual clearness and self-consistency, and has in it an element of mysticism which one would not expect to find in Calvin. He speaks of the sacrament as "a spiritual feast where Christ bears witness that he is lifegiving (John 6:51), by which our souls are fed with reference to a true and happy immortality." "First of all, the bread and the wine are the signs which represent to us the invisible nourishment which we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ. For as in baptism God regenerating us inserts us into the society of the church and makes us his own by adoption, so, as we have said, he fulfills in it the office of a provident father of the family in assiduously ministering the food that preserves and maintains us in that life into which he begat us by his word. Since Christ is the only food of the soul, the Heavenly Father invites us to him, in order that refreshed by communion with him we may continually gain vigor until we shall have arrived at heavenly immortality. But since this mystery of the secret union of Christ with the pious is by nature incomprehensible, he exhibits its figure and image in visible signs well fitted for our littleness" (Inst. ed. 1559, iv. Ch. xvii). In other terms, he insisted that in the sacrament the body and blood of Christ are spiritually present and are efficaciously partaken of by the believer. The Anabaptist who celebrated the ordinance with the utmost solemnity as an act of absolute consecration to the service of Christ, involving readiness to follow him unreservedly in self-sacrificing ministry even unto death, is at the same time more intelligible and more in accord with the purpose of the Master in instituting the ordinance.

Calvin believed in the most thorough preparation of heart for participation in the Supper, and resolutely withheld it from such as were under discipline. He also restricted participation in the ordinance to baptized believers.

As in the case of the Lord's Supper, Calvin treats Baptism as one of the "external means to salvation." He defines baptism (Inst. ed. 1559, Bk. iv. Ch. xv.) as follows: "Baptism is a sign of initiation whereby we are chosen into the society of the church in order that, being incorporated in Christ, we may

be counted among the children of God. It has been given to us by God, first that it may minister to our faith toward him, and then that it may minister to confession toward men. Baptism brings three things to our faith: 1. It is placed before us by the Lord as a symbol and proof (*documentum*) of our cleansing, or (that I may better express what I mean) it is, as it were, a certain signed and sealed letter patent (*diploma*) by which he confirms to us that all our sins are blotted out, covered over, obliterated, so that they may never come in sight again or be remembered or imputed. He wishes all who believe to be baptized for the remission of sins." He thus explains such passages as Eph. 5:26, Tit. 3:5, and I. Pet. 3:21, having in view specifically the last: "For he does not wish to signify that our ablution and salvation are effected by water, or that water contains in itself the power of purging, regenerating, renewing, or is the cause of salvation, but only that in this sacrament the knowledge and assurance of such gifts is received. . . . For Paul connected closely the word of life and the baptism of water: as if he should say, Through the gospel the announcement of our ablution and sanctification is brought to us, through baptism the message is sealed. . . . Baptism promises no other purification to us than through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, which is figured through water on account of the similitude of cleansing and washing."

He repudiates the idea that baptism applies only to past sins and that "other new remedies of expiation are to be sought in other sacraments of whatever kind, as if its power were obsolete as regards the future."

Believing as he did that infants "bring with them damnation from their mothers' womb," and that "even if they have not yet brought forward the fruits of their iniquity, yet have the seed of it included in themselves," "nay, that their whole nature is a sort of seed of sin," and therefore "of necessity odious and abominable to God," he was glad to find in baptism an efficacious remedy." Believers become certain through baptism that this damnation is removed and driven away, since the Lord promises to us in this sign that full and solid remis-

sion has been made both of the guilt which would have been imputed to us and of the punishment which must have been suffered on account of the guilt. They also lay hold upon righteousness, but such as in this life the people of God are able to obtain, that is by imputation only, because the Lord in his mercy holds them for just and innocent."

Anabaptist (Catabaptist) objection made little impression upon Calvin, whether it was directed against Roman Catholic baptism regarded as invalid because administered by the corrupt priesthood of an apostate church, or against infant baptism as absolutely without Scripture warrant and as violative of the Scriptural requirement of faith as the antecedent and condition of baptism, or against community churches in which unregenerate and regenerate alike had membership, or against oaths as definitely prohibited by Christ, or against magistracy as contrary to the practice and teaching of Christ, or against warfare and capital punishment as subversive of the principles of the gospel. He insisted that baptism administered by impious and idolatrous priests in the papal kingdom is administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and is not man's baptism, but God's.

In meeting the other objections of the Anabaptists to his doctrine and practice he relies largely upon the Old Testament. Infant baptism is defended chiefly on the ground of its analogy to circumcision, community membership and theocratic government on the ground of the divine authority of the Jewish theocracy, where saints and sinners alike had membership and the entire body of the circumcised were required to yield unwilling (if not willing) obedience. Oaths, warfare and capital punishment he defended on Old Testament theocratic grounds, and was at no loss to quote precept and example in their favor. Of course he uses the utmost ingenuity in attempting to show that the teaching of the New Testament is in accord with that of the Old in all of the matters in which his Old Testament theocratic ideas put him at variance with the Anabaptists.

VI. CHURCH AND STATE.

While he recognized the distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority and administration, and while in Geneva the two kinds of government were kept more or less distinct, in doctrine and practice he was fundamentally theocratic. He recognized God alone as the supreme authority in both church and state. The authority of God is fundamentally expressed in the Scriptures as interpreted by the divinely appointed and commissioned ecclesiastical leaders,—most perfectly of all by Calvin himself. It is the right and the duty of the ecclesiastical authorities to pronounce censure upon all forms of immoral conduct, including undue luxury in food, dress, adornments, etc., undue gaiety, amusements conducive to worldly-mindedness, neglect of church services, irreverent bearing toward the church services, criticism of the ministers, and whatever in the opinion of himself and his clerical associates was out of keeping with the Christian profession, and it was incumbent upon Christian magistrates to execute the censures of the church authorities with imprisonment, fines, banishment, and in the case of heresy that would not yield to argument death at the stake.

While Calvin maintained that ideally the church in a given locality should be made up wholly of faithful Christians, he recognized fully the fact that no community can be expected to be free from unworthy people. Separatism urged by Anabaptists and others he strongly rejected as a means of securing pure membership. From a false and idolatrous church like the papal, Christian men must needs separate themselves; but where the gospel is truly preached and the Christian ordinances duly administered, discipline and not separation is the remedy. If the truly Christian people are in the majority, or can in a legitimate way control the civil administration, it is their bounden duty to do so. By strictly political means he struggled for years to secure a civil administration that would be completely subservient to the ecclesiastical. He finally became strongly entrenched in power by securing the franchise for the thousands of zealous men who driven by persecution from France, Scotland, England, and elsewhere sought refuge and an

opportunity to realize their religious ideals in Geneva. The community thus constituted was by no means a normal one; but it enabled him to exhibit to the world a small theocracy which should serve as a model for larger ones should opportunity occur. He realized fully that men could not be forced to become sincere Christians, as this depended upon divine predestination and the exercise of irresistible divine grace; but he believed it desirable to suppress all open opposition to the theocratic system by the infliction of the severest penalties. If those coerced were of the elect their sufferings would lead to amendment; if they were not of the elect their punishment here below would only anticipate by a short period the eternal punishment that awaited them, would relieve the true Christians of temptation and annoyance, and would deter others from following in their evil way.

So far as the writer is aware, Calvin never used the term *theocracy* to designate his conception of the relations of church and state. His teachings regarding the church and his teachings concerning the state, his scheme of church-state government for Geneva, the manner in which this scheme was executed, and his constant harking back to the Old Testament theocratic system as model and authority, furnish sufficient proof that he was fundamentally theocratic.

Although he was never boastful of his intellectual or spiritual attainments in any offensive sense, there is a quiet assumption of authority and finality in his interpretation of Scripture and his doctrinal formulations that leave the impression that he considered himself divinely endued with a fulness of understanding that fell little short of infallibility; and there is no reason to believe that he was capable of conceiving it possible that anyone could differ materially from himself without being so morally perverse and intellectually obtuse as to have no claim to generous consideration.