

JOHN CALVIN

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450th
Anniversary Commemoration



Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?

and

John Calvin's Social Consciousness



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Introduction

THIS year, 1959, turns our thoughts afresh to that great and controversial man—John Calvin. As we commemorate the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth, and the four hundredth anniversary of the third and final edition of his monumental *Institutes*, we are acutely conscious of the need to study seriously the teaching and work of our Reformer.

Perhaps at no point is Calvinism more relevant today than in the sphere of social activity, and if Christianity, as applied to human affairs by Calvin, had been practised in succeeding centuries, the so-called 'social gospel' of our generation would never have obtained so great a following.

It is not our intention to eulogise Calvin; nevertheless, to study him and thereby refute the misrepresentations and caricatures which have so thoughtlessly and cheaply been associated with his name is our privilege as well as our duty. The word 'Calvinism' we use only because of its historical and theological connotation—such a term would have shocked Calvin. We believe that what was at stake at the Reformation was Christianity—and so did the Reformers.

Present-day Calvinists may not be able to follow Calvin at every point (e.g., the possibility of intervention by the State in Church affairs in exceptional circumstances)—and he would not have wished or expected that—therefore, in this pamphlet the reader may at times have important questions to ask, and that should stimulate a thorough and persistent study of Scripture in relation to the witness of the Church in human society.

We wish to acknowledge the kind permission of Professor F. F. Bruce, D.D., editor of *The Evangelical Quarterly*, to reprint the lines by Rev. Dr. L. MacLean Watt, and "Did Calvin Advocate a Theocracy?", also the kind permission of Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, editor of *Christianity Today*, to reprint "John Calvin's Social Consciousness."

F. S. L.

Calvin

*CLEAR as the snows and solemn as the pines
Above his mountain solitudes
Far in the highest heaven his passion shines,
Beyond the common mists and vulgar moods;
Yet into his ice-clear reasoning oft intrudes
The still small voice, the sound of a falling tear,
Dreadful to see and terrible to hear,
For that the human soul and the great God are near . . .
He shrank not when the whisper bade him rise,
Till, to his own full stature gather'd, he
Found pierc'd hands take Rome's napkin from his eyes
That he might view, far-stretching, broad and free,
God's thought of man's great need, and Christ his prize.*

*Lo, while men sleep, God's watchful heart, unsleeping,
Its vigil keeping,
Throbs till, like thunder, even the stars it shakes,
And Thought, in wonder, from her bonds awakes,
And, like the green withes twined on Samson's wrists,
Snaps Superstition's chains, in cruel coil and twist,
That she may wander forth in joy and youth
Whispering to weary hearts the word of truth.
So his soul would have slept, for very sweet
To him were quiet fields, the calm retreat,
The solitary glade of silent thought;
Yet, whither he went his presence with him brought
Crowds of the seekers, with their souls on fire,
And shining eyes aglow with love's desire
For God reveal'd of old, and for His Christ
Whom gold had never bought, nor greed had priced.*

*Dragged into fields of conflict, where shone white
Keen Logic's blades, hot in the stress of fight
'Gainst wrong and error, there he made his home,
And shook with prayer and scorn the iron bars of Rome;
Holding as treasure dearer than mortal breath
Truth, whom to wrong were worthy the wage of death,—
Youth, manhood, strength,
Life's breadth, and depth, and length,—
Glad unto God with both strong hands he gave,
Building, through Romish hate and exile's ills,
A city of God amid the eternal hills,
Greater than wrong, and stronger than the grave.*

*If fear he knew, this was his only fear—
Lest, when the advancing footsteps he should hear
Of God's Christ coming to judgment of all lands,
He should be idle found, eyes closed, and folded hands.
So, till God gave him sleep,
He toiled as those who keep
A tryst with One through morning drawing near.*

By REV. DR. LAUHLAN MACLEAN WATT,
Ex-Moderator of the Church of Scotland
(*The Evangelical Quarterly*, January 1936).

Lochcarron, Scotland.

Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?

By MARC CHENEVIERE

Doctor of Jurisprudence, Geneva

I

SOME illusions are extremely difficult to dispel! Even today many Protestants imagine that the ideal politico-religious regime of Calvinism is a theocracy, understanding by that term a political regime which implies the domination of the clergy over civil society. In actual fact, however, no notion could be more erroneous; Calvin never showed the least sympathy for a political regime of this sort, in proof of which statement may be cited his constant criticism of the Roman clergy for usurping the temporal power of princes. The most cursory examination of his teaching concerning the functions of Church and State will suffice to make it clear that our Reformer gave no countenance to theocracy envisaged in this manner.

At the same time, in the true sense of the word, which is far broader than its popular signification, a theocracy designates simply a society in which authority is regarded as emanating from God and exercised by His representatives. According to this definition, the expression "representative of God" denotes not the clergy exclusively, but any person endowed with power proceeding from Him. This, too, is the etymological significance of the term theocracy.

Now it is certain that for Calvin all authority, whether civil or religious, proceeds from God and has been delegated and divided by Him among His various representatives, civil magistrates as well as ecclesiastical authorities. It would even seem that for our Reformer the title "representative of God" pertains more particularly to the magistrate; the pastor is considered by Calvin rather as the "messenger" of God. Probably this attitude arises from the fact that he does not attribute the actual material power to ecclesiastical authorities, as we shall have occasion to notice later.

From this point of view, but from this point of view only, it may be said that human society, as conceived by Calvin, is a theocratic society in which all power proceeds from God and in which all power is exercised by His representatives: an observation that is obviously not valid for theocracy in the popular sense of the term.

II

At this stage we may remark that the politico-religious thought of Calvin does not concern us, Protestants of the twentieth century, except in so far as it rests on a Biblical foundation. Such an attitude in regard to Calvin is natural on the part of Calvinists. If, then, we limit ourselves in the present paper to a consideration of Calvin's thought on the subject, without proceeding to a comparison with the sacred Scriptures, it is because his thought is that of a man whose sole preoccupation was to be loyal to the Word of God in thought as well as in action; it possesses far more than mere historical interest for us; it has the value of a testimony to eternal truth. It is important to remember this at a period when some Protestants would place in opposition the theology of the Reformers and what they are pleased to style "the true spirit of the Gospel."

It is Calvin's fidelity to Scripture that gives so much value to his teaching; it is this that *a priori* inspires our confidence in him, for we know by experience that it enables us to conserve practically intact the essence of his message. Confronted with the Gospel, Calvin was able to remain infinitely more independent in regard to his century, and more submissive to Scripture, than so many of the idealist theologians of today. Do not these latter display a certain naïveté when they imagine themselves nearer to the Gospel than he whose supreme preoccupation was to remain faithful to it, especially as they themselves claim to re-read the Gospel in the light of "the progress of the modern consciousness"?

These observations appear to us particularly well-founded in regard to political doctrine. Nothing can be more dangerous, and at the same time more anti-Evangelical, than certain social utopias of a contemporary pseudo-evangelism.

III

Holy Scripture speaks of the Church, says Calvin, "under two aspects." Sometimes the reference is to the invisible Church, which comprises all the children of God "who have been since the foundation of the world," i.e., the Church complete, entire, including the living as well as the dead, and of which God alone knows the exact number of its members. Sometimes it speaks of the visible Church of which Jesus Christ is the founder and head, of the "body of Christ" which appears to us in the form of a multitude of local Churches, distinct one from another, and each

possessing a material organization. It is the totality of these local Churches which constitutes the true visible Church, the body of Christ, the Church universal.

Contrary to the views of numerous theologians, Calvin does not sacrifice one of these Churches to the other. He does not oppose one to the other; he merely distinguishes them. The one comprises the totality of the elect throughout all ages, while the other comprises only the totality of those who, regardless of the particular Church to which they attach themselves, or the particular place where they reside, make a profession of believing the Gospel message transmitted by the Church, and of conforming to it. That is to say, every member of the visible Church does not necessarily form part of the invisible Church, for the simple reason that external profession of the Christian faith does not necessarily imply that internal devotion which alone counts in the sight of God. In practice, however, given the means and spiritual discernment at our disposal, we are obliged to recognize as members of the Church all who make outward profession of faith.

IV

Let us now describe briefly the nature and the rôle of the visible Church which alone concerns our purpose. We have already observed that in the course of centuries this Church has become divided into a multitude of local Churches. This does not imply that all so-called Churches are authentic Christian Churches. Although Calvin may be broader than one might think in his critical examination of various Christian bodies, he considered nevertheless that a Church could not truly be reckoned among the members of the universal Church unless it could be recognized by two "signs," viz., the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). When a Church possesses these two signs, i.e., when it devotes itself to the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, it then forms part of the universal Church, independently of all secondary matters (e.g., order and liturgy) that may distinguish it from other Churches.

While these two signs enable us to distinguish a true Christian Church from a false one, they also define the essential rôle of a visible Church: the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. It may not be unprofitable to recall this fact to the Reformed Churches of the twentieth century. The Church must not be occupied directly with temporal affairs. We do not find in Calvin's thought the element that characterizes a theocratic

concept in the popular sense of the term. The Church should not even occupy itself actively with accessory questions, social or otherwise, which belong to the domain of the State, and which can only hinder the accomplishment of its Divine mission.

Calvin did not concern himself solely with defining the rôle of visible Churches; he was concerned also with their organization. He distinguishes in each of them a fourfold magisterium: that of pastors (which is to preach the Word and administer the sacraments); that of doctors (which is to study the sacred Scriptures); that of elders (which is to exercise discipline within the Church, i.e., to caution and rebuke the faithful and to pronounce excommunication); and finally, that of deacons (which is to dispense charity).

In the organization of these various ministries Calvin is careful to reduce State supervision to a minimum. In particular he is anxious that the Church shall have full liberty of preaching, and complete independence in regard to the interpretation of the Scriptures, and ecclesiastical organization and internal discipline. If he exercises great care in organizing the various Churches, he is careful above all things to ensure their independence of the State; but, on the other hand, he does not claim from them any power over the State or over temporal affairs. The mission of the visible Church is to bear testimony to Christ and the Christian faith, not to reign in a material sense over the world.

Calvin adopted a well-defined position in regard to the Church, which distinguishes him from the Roman theologians, who in principle confound the visible with the invisible Church, and also from certain neo-Protestant divines for whom the visible Church assumes no more than the character of a voluntary association among Christians and not that of the "body of Christ." He never claimed for the Church any power over the State, but placed it in the midst of the State as a spiritual guide commissioned to teach and preach the Word of God, and to enable the faithful to receive the grace transmitted in the sacraments.

V

For our Reformer the State stands side by side with the visible Church, its relation to the latter being that of a younger brother to an elder sister! The State is an institution created by God for the purpose of putting a rein on the disorder engendered in the world by the introduction of original sin. Human society is natural; the State in itself is not. On this point Calvin diverges markedly from the Roman view, and on this initial divergence of view depend all other divergences concerning the subject.

The rôle of the State differs *in toto* from that of the Church, although both have a common origin. The State for Calvin is essentially an organ of constraint in which the dynamic element is represented by the magistrate, while the static element appears in the laws. Hence he does not defend the State by invoking sentimental reasons for order such as patriotism, reasons which are perfectly legitimate, but which have the defect of convincing only those who already hold them. Instead he draws from Holy Scripture an entirely theological justification of the State which has the advantage of not depending on the subjective sentiments of Christians, but of imposing itself on them as an order laid down in the Word of God. It would be well at the present time, when the political parties which call themselves "Fascist" arrogate to themselves the monopoly of the defence of authority in political matters, to show that there exists also a Christian justification of authority, but an authority that is by its origin subordinated strictly to God, and obliged to respect the independence of the Church, while at the same time that authority is raised infinitely above men.

All authority for Calvin proceeds from God; to disobey authority is to disobey God. That is why Calvin teaches that the Christian must obey the magistrate, even if persecuted by him. The magistrate must render an account to God; he is not responsible to men. There can be no question of legitimate or illegitimate power; all powers and governments are legitimate and must be recognized as such by Christians. The form of government plays only a secondary part in our Reformer's thought. At the same time he teaches that in no circumstances can this duty of obedience compel men to deny their faith. Yet even though a case should arise in which the obedience that the faithful owe to God obliges them to disobey human authority, complete submission to that authority is still due in political matters. Calvin, then, is very far from being a "democrat" in the modern sense of the term.

Nowadays there is much talk of the organization of labour in trades unions or on an occupational basis. Without denying whatever may be just in the one or the other of these two methods of solving the social problem, we believe that neither is capable of replacing the State. As we have seen, the State is raised by Calvin infinitely above men as a sort of supreme judge charged with arbitrating in the conflicts created by human selfishness and greed. In the net result the trade union or guild can do no more than form powerful groups composed of those sharing identical aspirations and desires. If one or the other of these systems materializes, the selfishness inherent in human nature will

only reappear in another guise and on a larger scale, while the authority of a free and independent magistrate will be more necessary than ever to ensure the protection of smaller groups, and above all of isolated individuals. To imagine that harmony would be easier to establish or more natural among certain powerful groupings than among individuals is to dream of a utopia impossible of realization.

To the radical politicians and economists who accuse Christians of tolerating and even of exploiting social instruments of restraint such as the army and the police, Calvin replies that God Himself has not willed to apply the methods of heaven directly to the world, and has ordained that men shall submit themselves to the State and to all the instruments of restraint which depend on it. God has ordained this because of the presence of evil in the world, evil which has rendered such institutions necessary to social life, and which does not permit men to live on the earth now according to the laws of the kingdom of heaven. As Pastor Jean de Saussure writes: "The contemporary pseudo-evangelism which would apply to mundane conditions the methods of heaven is a dangerous utopia."

At the same time, the State is charged with the duty of restraining the anarchic and egotistical tendencies of human nature let loose by sin, and in the final resort of preventing the strong from taking advantage of the weak. The State has also a positive aim, which is to secure the minimum of peace and concord required by human society for its existence. That is to say, the State has also for its mission the maintenance of a certain measure of social justice. We say "a certain measure" advisedly, for there can be no question of egalitarianism: the Calvinist idea of a particular vocation for each individual is absolutely opposed to that. The State has simply to ensure to each individual the possibility of accomplishing his vocation.

The State has not only to maintain peace; it must also endeavour to maintain, here below, a certain standard of morality or, as Calvin calls it, "some taste of the celestial realm." With this object in view it must apply to social life the principles that are found in the Decalogue, which set forth what was in a certain sense the natural law of humanity before the Fall. It would scarcely be possible to exaggerate the importance of the Decalogue in Calvin's political thought. By it alone he teaches the magistrate the normal rules of social life which human society must respect in order to secure happiness. It will be noticed that Calvin does not believe in the existence of a natural right proper to human nature. He knows well that sinful men prefer to obey their passions rather than the Divine law. Hence the

magistrate is armed with the sword, the symbol of power, to constrain men to obey. In obliging men to respect the Decalogue the magistrate does not claim to effect an inward change, but merely to cause them to observe outwardly a relative morality sufficient to secure for them, in spite of themselves, or even contrary to themselves, an existence worthy of the name. To oblige men to live externally according to the Divine law also constitutes for Calvin the best means of teaching them to know the will of God and to obey Him. In order to fulfil his task in the best possible manner, the magistrate must first of all have been the subject of a true Divine vocation.

In Calvin's view the magistrate occupies a very important position in relation to the Church. It is he who is charged with the "grand task," while the Church has only a purely spiritual activity. Moreover, the State is also commissioned to maintain peace and even a certain moral standard among men. How far exactly does this moral standard carry us? A long way, according to Calvin, for it is the magistrate's duty to secure respect for the Decalogue, the first commandment of which instructs men to honour God. The magistrate must cause this commandment to be respected like the others, or, as Calvin will sometimes say, even before the others. That is to say, if Church and State are two institutions absolutely distinct the one from the other, they are nevertheless united by a community of interests. There is no moat between the Church's sphere of action and that of the State. They impinge on each other; they are complementary one to the other. The Church's mission is to bear testimony among the people to Christ and the Christian faith; the State's highest function is to cause this mission to be respected. At the same time the Church has no power over the State; theoretically, indeed, the State must insist that men shall respect her teaching, but the Church has no means of constraining the State to do this. If the State disobeys the Word of God, the Church can only suffer in silence and continue to fulfil her mission, reprimanding the State without positively revolting against it. Above all, the Church must not barter away its independence to the State, for this is a precious possession.

The State, then, must cause the Church's teaching to be respected, but is not the judge of its doctrine. In principle Calvin concedes to the State the right to interfere in the life of Churches to purge them from scandals that may arise in them; this forms part of its right of police. He sought, however, to reduce the possibilities of State intervention to a minimum by the institution of the Kirk-Sessions, charged with administering ecclesiastical

discipline, and of Presbyteries and Synods for the maintenance of discipline among the clergy in particular.

The Church's sole opportunity of intervening directly in temporal affairs is afforded in the execution of her duty of exhortation and reprimand in regard to the magistrate who openly disobeys the Word of God.

There is, then, no opposition between the mission of Church and State; they are rather complementary one to the other. Indeed, it may be said that the rôles of Church and State are co-ordinated. Normally, however, the Church is not required to intervene in the affairs of the State, nor the State in the affairs of the Church. Their duty of collaboration alone can oblige one of these two institutions to intervene in the affairs of the other.

Such are the principal characteristics of the politico-religious thought of our Reformer. It will be seen that he has envisaged human society as a whole, directed simultaneously by Church and State, and not by one of these institutions to the detriment of the other.

Public opinion has often been led astray on the subject of Calvin by the example of Geneva. It is frequently assumed that theocracy in the popular sense of the term prevailed in that city at the time of Calvin. There can be no doubt that from 1536 to 1541 Geneva was governed by a regime in which the State claimed to direct both the religious and the civil life of the citizens. This system of caesaropapism prevailed at the period in most of the Swiss towns. Calvin himself was exiled from Geneva because his theological opinions did not meet with the approval of the magistrates.

From 1541 onwards the public life of Geneva was characterized by a conflict which Calvin was compelled to sustain against the magistrates in order to induce them to concede a certain measure of independence to the Church, but even at this period one cannot truly speak of a "theocracy" at Geneva. The popular error is due to confusion between an actual power of Church over State which never existed, and the extraordinary but purely moral ascendancy which Calvin ultimately exercised over the Genevan magistracy towards the close of his life. But it is only from 1555 onwards, that is to say, about nine years before our Reformer's death, that one can speak of an actual ascendancy of Calvin over the magistrates. In any case, it is certain that this purely spiritual ascendancy never constituted authority in the juridical sense of the term.

(The Evangelical Quarterly, April 1937).

John Calvin's Social Consciousness

By REV. FREDERICK S. LEAHY

THE year 1959 marks the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin and the four hundredth anniversary of the third and final edition of his *Institutes*. In a day when the "social gospel" has been placarded before the world, it is perhaps pertinent to stress that there is but one Gospel and this Gospel has its social implications. Fallen man is essentially a sinner, and any "social gospel" which does not deal in a radical manner with his sin is no gospel at all—it is "good advice" rather than "good news." On the other hand, if *the* Gospel is preached without any reference to its clear social implications, then it is not being proclaimed in all its fullness. Man is a social being, and the Gospel, which is addressed to the totality of his being, has its social dimension.

Misappropriating Calvin

Frequently we witness complete misunderstandings of the Reformed faith in relation to the social needs of man. Trevor Huddleston, in his disturbing and challenging book, *Naught for Your Comfort*, writes:

"The truth is that the Calvinistic doctrines upon which the faith of the Afrikaner is nourished contain within themselves—like all heresies and deviations from Catholic truth—exaggerations so distorting and so powerful that it is very hard indeed to recognise the Christian faith they are supposed to enshrine. Here, in this fantastic notion of the immutability of race, is present in a different form the predestination idea: the concept of an elect people of God, characteristic above all else of John Calvin."

Huddleston goes on to argue that this idea has been transplanted from its European context, and subconsciously "narrowed still further to meet South African preconceptions and prejudices." "Calvinism," he says, "with its great insistence on 'election,' is the ideally suitable religious doctrine for white South Africa" (pp. 63 f). Here is a serious accusation which cannot be lightly dismissed. The present writer does not agree that the doctrine of election is the ideological root of the unchristian treatment of blacks anywhere: whites who hold Arminian doctrines would be prone to racial prejudice, too. And if Calvinistic whites have tried to justify their anti-black policy by hiding behind election, that is neither the fault nor the consequence of

the doctrine. In Britain we sometimes hear the criticism that extreme individualism, with the tenet that "a man's home is his castle," is really a fruit of Calvinism, which is thus virtually represented as being anti-social—to that we shall return.

John Calvin was too big a man for any *ism*: he knew that Truth could not be dissected, or contained by any man-made filing system. When we turn to the man himself, what do we find? We discover a remarkable social consciousness which can be easily detected in at least three spheres.

Social Consciousness in Theology

In the last chapter of the *Institutes*, Calvin considers the question of civil government and maintains that "the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things very widely separated." This does not mean that "the whole scheme of civil government is matter of pollution, with which Christian men have nothing to do," and we must remember that the State has the same Lord as the Church. The Christ Who is Head of the Church is Lord of this world. This point in Calvin's theology has been well stressed by Dr. Wilhelm Niesel (*The Theology of Calvin*, pp. 229 f). Calvin saw all things under Christ for the well-being of the Church. His view of the State, as a Divine institution, was the highest possible and he quotes such passages as "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice" (Prov. 8: 15). Magistrates, in Calvin's view, "have a commission from God" and "are invested with Divine authority" (*Institutes*, IV, 20, 4). Here Calvin's argument, as always, is well buttressed with Scripture.

The implications of this doctrine for today are as vital as they are relevant. First, the Communist doctrine of the State is immoral in that (a) it makes the State exist for its own sake and (b) it has no conception of serving in any way whatever the well-being of Christ's Church. Second, the same ideology is anti-social because it makes the State absolutely sovereign. Calvin really taught what Abraham Kuyper termed "sphere sovereignty"—i.e., family, Church, and State are sovereign in their own sphere and while bound to respect and help each other must not encroach on each other's sanctity—but *all* are *equally* subject to the sovereignty of Christ. Thus the sovereignty of Christ is the only safeguard against tyranny, and Calvin declares: "The Lord, therefore, is the King of kings. When He opens His sacred mouth, He alone is to be heard, instead of all and above all. We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against Him let us not pay the least

regard to it . . ." (*Institutes*, IV, 20, 32). The Gospel in the hands of Calvin was, among other things, social dynamite.

Heinrich Quistorp has drawn attention to the social implications of Calvin's eschatology (*Calvin's Doctrine of Last Things*, pp. 162 f.) He shows clearly that Calvin viewed earthly government as only a temporary arrangement. The consummation of the reign of Christ will mean the end of all other rule and authority, including rule which at present is based on Divine authority. Thus Calvin's social application of the Gospel could never be called a "social gospel." Its ultimate orientation was indisputably eschatological.

Preaching and the Social Thrust

Calvin's preaching was expository, and it impinged upon the lives of the people; in a word, it was relevant, and consequently effective. "Calvin's preaching," writes Leroy Nixon, "was a big factor in changing the character of the city of Geneva from a city of doubtful moral standing to one of the cleanest, most moral and most intellectual cities of Europe" (*John Calvin, Expository Preacher*, p. 66).

It is sometimes said that Calvin is responsible for much of today's "isolationism" in society—men living selfishly in their own homes, neglecting their fellow-men. Well, listen to this:

"He has joined us together and united us in order that we may have a community; for men ought not to entirely separate themselves. It is true that our Lord has appointed the policy that each one shall have his house, that he shall have his household, his wife, his children, each one will be in his place; yet no one ought to except himself from the common life by saying, 'I shall live to myself alone.' This would be to live worse than as a brute beast" (Sermon on Job 19:17-25).

In the same sermon Calvin says: "God has joined them all together (as we have said) and they ought not to separate themselves from each other. . . ."

If we turn to Calvin's commentaries on the Hebrew prophets, we again see his insight into the historical setting of their ministry, and his own social consciousness is thus revealed. Joel is a good example of this, so is Isaiah. In Isaiah, chapter 1, we read of a people who were orthodox and most religious, but because of their social sins their very prayers wearied God. Calvin comes to this passage with piercing insight and lays bare the burden of Isaiah.

Social Impact of His Life

Calvin's own life was a witness to the sincerity of his social concern. He himself was a poor man. In the Rue des Chanoines the great preacher of God's Word lived in the utmost simplicity. T. H. L. Parker well says that Calvin "lived without financial worry, but he did not get rich at Geneva's expense" (*Portrait of Calvin*, p. 69). His fearless devotion in visiting the deceased when the plague struck Geneva in 1542, and despite the Council's prohibition, again reveals the love and unselfishness of the man. He did not belong to the Dives class of men.

Whatever men may say of Calvin's attempted theocracy, it cannot seriously be denied that ere he died Geneva was, to quote James Orr, "the astonishment of Christendom for civil order, administration of justice, pure morals, liberal learning, generous hospitality and the flourishing state of its arts and industries" (*The Reformers*, p. 260). Calvin aimed at making Geneva a city of God, and of that city John Knox declared: "In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so sincerely reformed I have not yet seen in any other place beside" (McCrie, *Life of Knox*). In Geneva, Calvin had to grapple with sexual immorality which was rampant and open, widespread drunkenness and gambling. Calvin has been wrongly blamed for harsh measures: the truth is that he found a fairly severe form of legislation in existence—and little wonder—and he brought to bear upon it his own high ideals and convictions regarding a godly and sober life for the individual and nation. Those who pour calumny on Calvin, or "frame" his faults, do not always admit that this man made Geneva a model township with clean streets, proper drainage, health regulations, hospitals, and schools. Distressed to see little children falling out of windows, he had the herald proclaim that houses should have rails and shutters. Industries such as silk, velvet, and wool owed their foundation in Geneva to him.

Moral Influence survives

We might, in conclusion, note that Calvinism in history, active in the Huguenots, Puritans, Covenanters, and others, has maintained its moral influence. N. S. McFetridge's *Calvinism in History* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia, 1882) is still an invaluable aid to this side of our subject; it needs to be read again today.

The principles manifest in Calvin's Geneva would take definite issue with unworthy facets of modern capitalism and labour, and

with *Apartheid*, and the unbiblical otherworldliness of “fundamentalism.” Whatever mistakes Calvin may have made, he seriously endeavoured to apply biblical principles to contemporary society, and he achieved, under God, remarkable success. Are we as frank and courageous to acknowledge the social implications of the Gospel and to grapple with current evils? We need not turn to the “social gospel”—indeed we dare not—but we *must return* to the full Gospel that was preached and applied by Calvin. And as, in imagination, we hear the bells of St. Pierre peal over the waters of Lake Léman, while the herald recites the official proclamation of the reign of God in the city of Geneva to the great multitude standing in Molard Square, do the portentous words not find at least a prayer in the hearts of evangelical Christians in our modern times?

“In the name of Almighty God. That whereas the preservation of the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in all its purity is the highest of human actions, we, the Syndics and the Councils, greater and lesser, of the city of Geneva ordain as follows: There shall be established in our city a government in accord with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(*Christianity Today*, January 5, 1959).

Prayer

GRANT, Almighty God, that as Thou hast made us a royal priesthood in Thy Son, that we may daily offer to Thee spiritual sacrifices, and be devoted to Thee, both in body and soul,—O grant, that we, being endued with Thy power, may boldly fight against Satan, and never doubt but that Thou wilt finally give us the victory, though we may have to undergo many troubles and difficulties: and may not the contempt of the world frighten or dishearten us, but may we patiently bear all our reproaches, until Thou at length stretchest forth Thine hand to raise us up to that glory, the perfection of which now appears in our Head, and shall at last be clearly seen in all the members, in the whole body, even when He shall come to gather us into that celestial kingdom, which He has purchased for us by His own blood. AMEN.

This prayer by John Calvin is typical of the many which we possess, and shows his faith and loyalty in the service of Christ. The following prayer reveals where Calvin's one hope of salvation lay:

GRANT, Almighty God, that as Thou invitest us daily by various means to repentance, and continuest also to urge us, because Thou seest our extreme tardiness,—O grant, that we may at length be awakened from our indifference, and suffer us not to be inebriated by the charms of Satan and the world; but by Thy Spirit rouse us to real groaning, that, being ashamed of ourselves, we may flee to Thy mercy, and doubt not but that Thou wilt be propitious to us, provided with a sincere heart we call on Thee, and seek that reconciliation which Thou daily offerest to us by Thy Gospel in the name of Thine only begotten Son. AMEN.



*Obtainable from the Convener of the
Witness-Bearing Committee:*

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