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Calvin

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JOHN CALVIN

Hanan Portrait,



HON. FRANK T. GLASGOW,
Lexington, Va.

CALVIN'S INFLUENCE UPON THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORLD.

By FRANK T. GLASGOW
Lexington, Virginia.

John Calvin died May 27, 1564, in the 55th year of his age; and a quaint writer adds, "He left behind him only \$170 in money; but an incalculable fortune in fame and consequential influence."

In this man, we are told by one, "lies the origin and guaranty of our constitutional liberties."

And again: "It is admitted by all scientific students," says Kuyper, "that Calvinism has led public law into new paths; first in Western Europe, then in two continents, and to-day more and more among all civilized nations."

Let us inquire how far these claims are well-founded.

Quoad our subject, or to be more exact, in relation to human government, what is Calvinism?

Fundamental as was the doctrine of Justification by Faith, this we conclude was not Calvin's distinguishing tenet. But going back to a broader generalization, the thoughtful student of Calvin's *Institutes* (said to be one of the most remarkable products of the human mind in any age, and the backbone of the Reformation), cannot fail to recognize the accuracy of the statement, that Calvin's distinctive and dominating principle, in the widest sense manifestly was, *the Sovereignty of the Triune God!* God's sovereignty over his whole creation; in all spheres

and kingdoms, visible and invisible. Sovereignty in nature; sovereignty in the state; sovereignty in society; sovereignty in the church, and sovereignty in the individual.

According to Calvin, had not sin entered, God would have remained the sole King of all men, everywhere, and forever.

With sin present, a representative government is the ideal form, that of the Republic.

Calvin's doctrine of sin and depravity has been the greatest of all levellers. "It concludes all men under sin; from the slave in his hovel to the King on his throne." In the light of this tremendous fact, all earthly distinctions disappear; the foundation of the privileges of birth and caste crumbles and the lustre of all earthly grandeur is dulled.

Thus, all men owe to God the same supreme allegiance; and the offer of mercy is made to all men upon the same terms and conditions. If all men are equal before God's law, all men are equal before man's law. Hence emerges clearly to view the fundamental axiom of Modern Democracy, that "all men are created equal, and vested with certain inalienable rights." This great principle, therefore, properly limited, is Calvin's, rather than Jefferson's! . . . It irresistibly follows that "to have placed man on a footing of equality with man, so far as purely human interests are concerned, is the immortal glory which incontestably belongs to Calvin!"

"And Freedom reared in that August sunrise,
Her beautiful bold brow."

Sir James Stephen, the eminent English Statesman, churchman, and jurist, and professor of Modern His-

tory in the University of Cambridge, in speaking of the organization effected by the General Synod of France in 1559, says: "A great social revolution had thus been effected. Within the centre of the French monarchy, Calvin and his disciples had established a spiritual republic, and had solemnly recognized as the basis of it, four principles, each germinant of results of the highest importance to the political commonwealth.

These principles were:

First. That the will of the people was the one legislative source of the power of their rulers.

Second. That power was most properly delegated by the people to their rulers.

Third. That in ecclesiastical government, the clergy and the laity were entitled to an equal and co-ordinate authority; and,

Fourth. That between the church and the state, no alliance, or mutual dependence, or other definite relation necessarily or properly existed."

Calvin's church organization, Green calls, a "Christian Republic;" a "Christian state, in which the true sovereign was not pope or bishop, but the Christian man."

Calvinism therefore stands throughout for a system of popular government according to law. It provides a true authority, resting humanly speaking on the consent of the governed. By its deep conception of sin it has laid bare the true root of state-life, and has taught us two things:

First, that we should receive with gratitude the institution of the state from God's hand; and at the same

time that we must be ever watchful against the danger, which, from human weakness, lurks in the power of the state.

Wm. C. Preston, of South Carolina, wrote: "Certainly it was a most remarkable and singular coincidence that the constitution of the Presbyterian Church should bear such a close and striking resemblance to the political constitution of our country." Dr. Smith, however, in his wonderful book, "*The Creed of Presbyterians*," a work which, with us I am sure, stands second only to our standards, says: that when "the fathers of our Republic sat down to frame a system of representative government, their task was not so difficult as some have imagined. They had a model to work by. As Chief Justice Tilghman says: "The framers of the Constitution of the United States borrowed very much of the form of our Republic from the constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.'"

We need not therefore be surprised to find that one of our last and greatest expounders of constitutional law (John Randolph Tucker), in his masterful work on the constitution, gives us concrete Calvinism as applied to the fundamentals of human government, thus:

"Man's title to his liberty is from his Creator. It consists in the selfuse of endowments bestowed on him, under trust responsibility of God. God ordained society as the school of the race; and government, as the organic force, was ordained to preserve social order, and conserve the liberty of man."

These things being conceded, "the related order of these social elements is: Man trustee of his liberty for God; society the Divinely ordained trustee for man; and government the Divinely ordained trustee for society.

Man is the object of all this Divine arrangement. They (government and society), are ordained for him; he not created for them. His good is the *ultimatum* of all their use of power; and their power is only legitimate in title, or in exercise, when it does justice to him in the protection of his right and liberty. Man has not only the right of self-preservation, but God has made it his duty. It is his primal duty therefore to see that the Divine means ordained for his protection shall not be perverted to his injury or destruction."

"To sum up, power and right are correlated; both are divinely ordained. Political power is vested in trust for man; right is vested in man in trust for God. Right is primal, power is ancillary. Right is the end, power and means. Right is the good to be secured, power the minister, the servant of right. The divine constitution is not *jus Divinum regum*, but *jus Divinum hominum*.

"This political philosophy is not the result of social compact; but is the logical consequence of that intense individuality of man, arising out of his sole responsibility to God; to conserve and develop which society and government were divinely ordained."

Let us remember that religious and civil liberty, whilst having no organic connection, yet have a strong natural affinity, the one for the other. And that, "by the side of every religion is to be found a political opinion connected with it by affinity. If the human mind be left to follow its own bent, it will regulate the temporal and spiritual institutions of society in a uniform manner; and a man will endeavor, if I may so speak, to harmonize earth with heaven."

In entering this discussion, we cannot pause even to glance at the early life of this great man; nor to trace his wonderful and chequered career. "The sixteenth century is the greatest century in Christian times; the epoch where (so to speak) everything ends and everything begins. Nothing is paltry, nothing small, not even a little city of 12,000 souls, lying unobserved at the foot of the Alps."

We must content ourselves therefore with concentrating our gaze at once upon this marvelous expounder of Truth, human and divine, as we find him in Geneva; in Geneva, well-styled the "Thermopylae of Protestantism and Freedom!"

"The history of the political emancipation of Geneva is interesting in itself. Liberty, it has been said, has never been common in the world. It has not flourished in all climates; and the periods when a people struggles justly for liberty, are the privileged epochs of history."

Under the heroic, patient and consecrated Farel, God was preparing Geneva for Calvin. At the same time, he had Calvin in the school of preparation for Geneva. The union of these two natures and forces (predestined for each other), could not fail to produce remarkable results in the world.

For years, and even centuries, persistent and perilous efforts had been made at Geneva for a firm establishment of freedom. She had had her martyrs of liberty, and her martyrs of faith. "Her career illustrates the great maxim, that political freedom and Christian truth must advance hand in hand, for the salvation of nations, and salvation of souls." To convert the spark of evangelical fire already in Geneva, into a pure, dazzling light, there was need of an intellect of vast depth,

a will of vast energy, and a faith of vast power. God sent the man endowed with these gifts, in the person of John Calvin. In the quiet of due Tillet's library at Agou-lême was the forge where the new Vulcan had prepared the bolts, which later he systematized, and finally scattered broadcast on every side from Geneva.

We now fix our eyes on Calvin during the period of his great labors in Geneva, beginning in 1541. He is conducting most remarkable enterprises; as pastor, preacher, teacher, and reformer! We see his wonderful school now firmly established. The teacher is giving full swing to his great and ripe powers. Thousands of pilgrim pupils, from all over Continental Europe and the British Isles, sit at his feet; some fleeing from oppression at home; others fleeing for the hope of the true light set before them. This continues for many years. He prosecutes the great work with tremendous vigor, masterful skill and untiring energy to the end of his life.

Says Bancroft: "More truly benevolent to the human race than Solon, more self-denying than Lycurgus, the genius of Calvin infused enduring elements into the institutions of Geneva, and made it, for the modern world, the impregnable fortress of popular liberty, the fertile deedplot of Democracy."

Had Calvin done nothing more than to make government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" a startling and triumphant reality in the earth, he would have deserved well of mankind.

This achievement marked the opening of a new chapter in the history of humanity.

From Geneva his influence radiated into every corner of Christendom. "Calvin's true home," Schaff says,

“was the Church of God.” He broke through all national limitations. “There was scarcely a monarch or statesman or scholar of his age with whom he did not come in contact. Every people of Europe was represented among his disciples. He helped to shape the religious character of churches and nations yet unborn. The Huguenots of France, the Protestants of Holland and Belgium, the Puritans and Independents of England and New England, the Presbyterians of Scotland, and throughout the world, yea, we may say, the whole Anglo-Saxon race, in its prevailing religious character and institution, bear the impress of his genius, and show the power and tenacity of his doctrines and principles of government.”

Says Rufus Choate, the great American lawyer: “In the reign of Mary, from 1553 to 1558, a thousand learned Englishmen fled from the stake at home, to the happier states of continental Protestantism. Of these, great numbers—I know not how many—came to Geneva. I ascribe to that five years in Geneva an influence which has changed the face of the world. I seem to myself to trace to it as an influence on English character, a new theology, new politics, another tone of character, the opening of another era of time and liberty. I seem to myself to trace to it the great civil war in England, the Republican constitution framed in the cabin of the Mayflower, the theology of Jonathan Edwards, the battle of Bunker Hill, the Independence of America.”

Thus, “the light of Calvin’s genius shattered the mask of darkness, which superstition had held for centuries before the brow of religion” and human government.

It is not possible for us here to indicate, much less trace all the channels through which his influence ran,

to refresh and water the earth, and to "make glad the city of our God." Calvin played on a harp of a thousand strings; and the music of his playing echoed, wherever heard, in the hearts of untold thousands of brave, God-fearing spirits. We see the fruits of his influence taking shape in France, in the Netherlands, and in Scotland. We see his influence, "under God create the Dutch Republic, and make it the first free nation to put a girdle of empire around the world."

"The one man, who was the principal instrument in the hand of Providence in reforming Scotland, was John Knox. He had learned his theology at the feet of Calvin at Geneva; and had known, as a galley-slave, the tender mercies of Romanism. He was one of the six clerical "Johns" who composed the first General Assembly of Scotland.

His was the voice which taught the peasant of the Lothians that he was a free man; the equal in the sight of the God with the proudest Peer or Prelate that had trampled on his forefathers!" For whilst Calvin's doctrine of sin "abased the pride and humbled the pretensions of the great, his doctrine of predestination exalted the lowly. To the arrogance and pride which went with earthly power, the simple peasant, conscious within himself of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus, could oppose a yet higher pride. 'Though his name did not appear in the Register of Heralds, it was recorded in the Book of Life.' Though unknown among men beyond the limits of his lord's estate, he was known in the councils of Heaven. His name was among those whom the Father from all eternity had given to the Son in an everlasting covenant. He had been bought with a great price, had been saved with a great salvation. For in his stead the Prince of Glory had died upon the tree!"

Marvelous indeed then was the transformation "when the great doctrines learned by Knox from the Bible in Scotland, and more thoroughly at Geneva while sitting at the feet of Calvin, flashed upon the sober mind of Scotland! It was like the sun rising at midnight! Says Carlyle: 'This that Knox did for his nation, we may really call a resurrection as from death.' 'John Knox,' says Froude, 'was the one man without whom Scotland as the modern world has known it, would have had no existence.' Knox made Calvinism the religion of Scotland; and Calvinism made Scotland the moral standard for the world."

"'Here,' said Melville over the grave of John Knox, 'here lies one who never feared the face of man.' And if Scotland still reverences the memory of the reformer, it is because at that grave her peasant and her trader learned to look in the face of nobles and kings and 'not be ashamed.' He it was that raised the poor commons of his country—into men whom neither king, noble nor priest could force again to submit to tyranny."

Allow me here to pause a moment, to say this much of the true Scotchman: Wherever we see him in history, he is loyal both to truth, and to liberty. He is also loyal to the faith and traditions of the fatherland. For, whilst solving the world's problems, and extending Anglo-Saxon liberty and Christian civilization around the globe, he ever "carries with him his Confession of Faith, his catechism, Bible and Psalm-book; and from his dwelling or his Kirk, in his native Pentland Hills, or in the Appalatchian wilds; or on the banks of the St. Lawrence, the Ganges or the South Sea Islands, his simple praise ascends to Heaven, in words and music born in the land of the bluebells and the heather."

Later, if we again ask, who brought the final great deliverance to English liberty, we are answered by history. That illustrious Calvinist, William, Prince of Orange, who, as Macaulay says, "found in the strong and sharp logic of the Geneva school something that suited his intellect and his temper; the keystone of whose religion was the doctrine of predestination; and who with his keen logical vision, declared that if he were to abandon the doctrine of predestination, he must abandon with it all his belief in a superintending Providence."

"On two great leaders, William, Prince of Orange, and (second only to him in the great crisis), Marshall Schomberg, a Hollander and a Frenchman, be it said to the everlasting glory of their countries, the liberties of the world were then, under God, depending: the one, William, almost unable to sit on his gray horse from physical weakness and loss of blood; the other, venerable with years and honors, who there, in the Boyne waters, gave his noble life, a sacrifice for the welfare of mankind!"

We see then what element fought the battle of the Boyne. "The very watchword of William's army was 'Westminster'; the word which was before, and has ever since been stamped on the symbol of the Calvinistic churches."

As to the effect of William's victory and reign as William III. of England, Macaulay says: "It has been, of all revolutions, the most beneficent; the highest eulogy that can be pronounced upon it is this, that it was England's best; and that for the authority of law, for the security of property, for the peace of our streets, for the happiness of our homes, our gratitude

is due, under Him who raises and pulls down nations at his pleasure, to the Long Parliament, to the Convention and to William of Orange."

"It was the battle of the Boyne (in Ireland in 1690) that decided the fate of Protestantism, not only for Great Britain, but for America; and for the world, indeed; for had William been defeated there, Protestantism could not have found a safe shelter on the face of the earth."

Where learned our ancestors, the immortal principles of the rights of man? Of human liberty, equality, and self-government, on which they based our Republic, and which form to-day the distinctive glory of our American civilization? History here likewise gives answer.

According to D'Aubigne, Luther transformed princes into heroes of faith, but soon settled down at peace with them. The reformation of Calvin, on the other hand, was addressed particularly to the people. It was ever advancing, and ever contending with the rulers of this world. And wherever Calvinism was established, it brought with it not only Truth, but Liberty, and all the great developments which these two fertile principles carry with them.

Says Bancroft: "Calvinism was revolutionary. It taught as a divine revelation the natural equality of man." "It is the essential tendency of Calvinism," says Doyle, the eminent Oxford scholar, "to destroy all distinctions of rank, and all claims to superiority which rest on wealth or political expediency." "Calvinism is essentially Democratic," says Buckle. "A democratic and republican religion," it is called by DeTocqueville, one of the ablest political writers of the century.

“Calvinism, therefore, opposes hereditary monarchy, aristocracy, and bondage.” John Richard Green, the author of the greatest history of the English people yet written, belonged to the Anglican church. Yet he says: “It is in Calvinism that the modern world strikes its roots; for it was Calvinism that first revealed the worth and dignity of man. Called of God, heir of heaven, the trader at his counter, and the digger in his field, suddenly rose into equality with the noble and the king.” “In that mighty elevation of the masses,” he says again, “which was embodied in the Calvinistic doctrines of election and grace, lay the germs of the modern principles of human equality.”

And even Castelar, an eloquent unbelieving Spaniard, grudgingly admit, that “Anglo-Saxon democracy is the product of a severe theology learned by a few Christian fugitives in the gloomy cities of Holland and Switzerland, where the morose shade of Calvin still wanders. And that it remains serene in its grandeur, forming the most dignified, most moral, most enlightened and richest portion of the human race.”

“Before proving its power in the new world, Calvinism had fought and won the fight for freedom in the old. Not only in Scotland, as we have seen, but also in England and Holland it had challenged and conquered tyranny.” To the Puritans, declares Hume (a hater of Calvinism), England owes “the whole freedom of her constitution. . . . The battle that saved England to constitutional liberty was fought and won by Calvinists.” Of Holland the same writer says: “The Reformation had entered the Netherlands by the Walloon (Calvinistic) gate.”

Seventeen years before Calvin's birth, America was discovered. It waited well nigh two hundred years for important settlements. Europe was not ripe; the hour had not yet struck. By and by, however, the mighty exodus began; and God sent some of his best across the waters first, to lay the foundations for the future. These were Huguenots, Dutch, Puritans, Scotch, and Scotch-Irish! Had there ever before in the world's history been a nation founded by such people as these?

At the time of the Revolution the estimated population of our country was 3,000,000. Of this number 900,000 were of Scotch or Scotch-Irish origin; 600,000 were Puritan English; while over 400,000 were of Dutch, German Reformed, and Huguenot descent. That is to say, two-thirds of our Revolutionary forefathers were trained in the schools of Calvin; embracing the New England colonists, and the Scotch-Irish immigrants, pronounced by the learned author of "American Christianity" the most masterful races on the continent.

According to Bancroft, "The revolution of 1776, as far as it was effected by religion, was a Presbyterian measure. It was the natural outgrowth of the principles which the Presbyterians of the old world planted in her sons, the English Puritans, the Scotch Covenanters, the French Huguenots, the Dutch Calvinists, and the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of Ulster"; and may I add, in her daughters? For "Calvinism has moulded her own type of womanhood; worth without vanity; self-sacrifice, with self-righteousness; zealous service, without immodesty; strong convictions, without effrontery, and human loveliness, heightened and softened by heavenly-mindedness."

The first Declaration of Independence, certainly the first body of resolutions to that effect, was sent forth by the Mecklenburg Assembly, in session in Charlotte, N. C., composed of twenty-seven staunch Calvinists, of whom nine were ruling elders, and one a Presbyterian preacher.

It strikes us now as strange, that, as late as August, 1775, Thomas Jefferson said: "I would rather be in dependence on Great Britain, properly limited, than on any nation on earth, or than on no nation." And that Washington, in May 1776, said: "When I took command of this army (in June, 1775), I abhorred the idea of independence." These great and brave patriots, however, soon gravitated to the point before reached by the Mecklenburgers, and demanded independence. But the children of the Covenanters were in advance! There is not a doubt, says Bancroft, that the first voice publicly raised in America "to dissolve all connection with Great Britain, came not from the Puritans of New England, nor from the Dutch of New York, nor the Planters of Virginia; but from the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians."

So intense, universal and aggressive was their zeal for liberty, that the struggle of the colonists for independence was spoken of in England as "The Presbyterian Rebellion." An ardent colonial devotee of King George wrote home: "I fix all the blame of these extraordinary proceedings upon the Presbyterians. They have been the chief and principal instruments in all these flaming measures. They always do and ever will act against government, from that restless and turbulent anti-monarchical spirit which has always distinguished them everywhere." And when news of

“these extraordinary proceedings” reached England, Horace Walpole said in the English Parliament, “Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian Parson.”

But “the influence of the free spirit of Calvinism in favor of the liberties of the colonies was not confined to the American continent. It was working heroically on the other side of the Atlantic. Two great Scotchmen, David Hume and Adam Smith, were everywhere proclaiming it in their own effective way, and compelling men to hear it. In the House of Commons, also, it was boldly and eloquently upheld by Erin’s gifted son, Edmund Burke, as well as by Charles James Fox, of whom Dr. Johnson said, ‘Here is a man who has divided a kingdom with Caesar, so that it was a doubt which the nation should be ruled by, the sceptre of George III. or the tongue of Mr. Fox.’”

“The Calvinistic philosophy had also taken a firm hold of the popular mind in Germany, where Kant, imbued with its liberty-loving spirit, was loosening the foundations of despotism, and suffering persecution for his valiant defence of the American cause. France, too, was all aglow with the free, bounding, restless spirit of Calvinism, where Rousseau, in spite of the immorality of his life, and the crudity of his theories, was conducting, through his political science, the same political warfare as that in America. His influence in advocating the rights of man contributed very largely to the forming of the alliance between France and the colonies, and to the unfurling of the royal standard alongside that of the blue flag of the Covenanters, hoisted again in a new form over the

American continent. It was Calvinistic France and Calvinistic America that were going forth in loving unity to fight on Western soil for the cause of human freedom.

"Thus Calvinism in Europe, and Calvinism in America were leagued together for the promotion of the one great purpose. Their several currents, civil and spiritual, philosophical and religious, had run together and were sweeping on in one great stream, bearing the colonies on to liberty. Out of Calvinistic Protestantism had arisen the great leaders who had issued their rousing calls to the nations for deliverance from mental and political bondage, and had combined their forces for securing the one great object. Rousseau had inflamed the youthful spirit of France with an intense desire for republican simplicity, and Edwards had summed up the political history of America, when he gave Calvinism its political enthusiasm, by declaring virtue to consist in universal love."

In view of all this, can it surprise us when we find D'Aubigne saying: "Calvin was the founder of the greatest republic"? And that the American nation, which we have seen growing so rapidly, "boasts as its father, the humble Reformer on the shores of Lake Lemane"? Or when we hear the famous French critic and historian, Taine, declare of the Calvinists: "These men are the true heroes of England. They founded England, in spite of the corruption of the Stuarts, by the exercise of duty, by the practice of justice, by obstinate toil, by vindication of the right, by resistance to oppression, by the conquest of liberty, by the repression of vice. They founded Scotland; they founded

the United States, and at this day they are, by their descendants, founding Australia, and colonizing the world."

And so we find that for three and a half centuries now, "Calvinism has been producing in the social conditions of the nations that have received it, transformations unknown to former times. And still at this very day, and now perhaps more than ever, it imparts to the men who accept it, a spirit of power, which makes them chosen instruments, fitted to propagate truth, morality and civilization to the ends of the earth."

May we not, therefore, in concluding, justly claim that this turn in the tide of the world's history, "could not have been brought about, except by the implanting of another principle in the human heart, and by the disclosing of another world of thought to the human mind? That only by Calvinism did the 'Psalm of Liberty' find its way from the troubled conscience to the lips, and that Calvinism has, in fact, captured and guaranteed constitutional liberty to mankind?"

This tree (to adopt the figure of another) may have, to prejudiced eyes, a rough bark, gnarled stem, and boughs twisted often into knotted shapes of ungraceful strength! But, remember, Calvinism is not a willow-wand of yesterday! These boughs have wrestled with the storms of a thousand years; but they hang clad with all that is richest and strongest in the civilization and Christianity of human history. This stem has been wreathed with the red lightning and scarred by the thunderbolt, and all over its rough rind are the marks of the battle axe and the bullet. This old oak has not the pliant grace and silken soft-

ness of a greenhouse plant! But it has a majesty above grace, and a grandeur beyond beauty. Its roots may be rugged and strangely contorted; but some of them are rich with the blood of glorious battlefields; some are clasped around the stakes of martyrs; some hidden in solitary cells and lonely libraries, where deep thinkers have mused and prayed, as in some apocalyptic Patmos; while its great tap-root runs back, until it twines in living and loving embrace around the Cross of Calvary!