

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THREE ADDRESSES

DELIVERED BY

PROFESSORS IN UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AT A SERVICE IN COMMEMORATION OF THE  
FOUR HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF

JOHN CALVIN

IN THE ADAMS CHAPEL  
ON MONDAY EVENING, THE THIRD OF MAY  
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINE

THE REV. PROFESSOR WILLIAM WALKER ROCKWELL, S.T.B., LIC.TH.  
CALVIN AND THE REFORMATION

THE REV. PROFESSOR WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, PH.D., D.D.  
CALVIN'S INFLUENCE UPON THEOLOGY

THE REV. PROFESSOR THOMAS CUMING HALL, D.D.  
THE INNER SPIRIT OF THE CALVINISTIC  
PURITAN STATE

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### III.

## THE INNER SPIRIT OF THE CALVINISTIC PURITAN STATE.

PROFESSOR THOMAS CUMING HALL, D.D.

Calvin's relation to Puritanism raises the whole interesting question as to the relation of Puritanism to Roman Catholicism. That Puritanism proved one of the bitterest foes of Roman Imperialism needs no detailed argument. Nor can one close one's eyes to the fact that in denying papal supremacy, rejecting a celibate clergy, five of the seven sacraments, the doctrine of purgatory and merit, masses for the dead, the whole monastic system and the exclusive use of a sacred language, the Reformers, both Lutheran and Calvinistic, separated themselves most widely from the popular faith, and that in making a stand at these points for Protestantism, Puritanism became a bulwark against Papal aggression.

Calvin himself stands out in history in too sharp an outline and in too great proportions to make it worth while to praise him for virtues he did not possess, or to blame him for things which were the outcome of his time. There is no excuse for misunderstanding John Calvin—no man is his superior in the clear, forceful use of both Latin and French. He knew his system and he knew its limitations; he was content to live in that system and was almost petulantly impatient of those who blurred its outline.

John Calvin was not primarily a theologian. He had little or no interest in speculative theology as speculative theology. He himself turns distinctly and strongly away from many of the questions with which theology has always occupied herself. His system of theology interested him only because he regarded it as revealed directly from heaven, and as the basis upon which God was building His true church.

On the doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, Soteriology, and, save with the exception of Purgatory, Eschatology, the Council of Trent speaks substantially as the Reformers did, and Calvin accepted this theology. The place of Authority was the real issue. And this gives us the key to Calvin's character and Calvin's service. He gave the world a definite theory of the church as a great fighting machine for the destruction of the papacy and the reconstruction of civil and religious life. Calvin looked out upon a world dark with clouds of disorganization and disruption, and he gave it authoritative organization.

The Reformation was but a religious phase of a great awakening and various phases of the movement mingled and divided human life. Luther had not been able to organize a church strong in her own strength; he had turned to the German princes and left to them the responsibility of this reorganization. As over against disorganized Protestantism, the papal hierarchy with its long traditions, its magnificent organization, its renewed ethical life (since the Councils of Pisa, Constance and Trent) seemed likely to overwhelm the divided and confused forces of the Reformation. It is almost useless to speculate upon what might have happened had naught but Lutheranism stood in the way of the papacy. All we can say is that the Counter-Reformation did sweep Italy, Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, and the southern provinces of Germany and was already threatening both France and Holland. It was then that John Calvin and his work began to make themselves felt in the fortunes of European history.

Calvin is the father of the Puritan State. To understand Calvin one must understand the inner spirit of the Puritan State, and in order to understand the Puritan State one has to turn back to the organizing conceptions of Calvin.

We notice at once as upon the surface the break between John Calvin's organization and the organization of Rome. It was no light thing to defy the papacy, to deny five of the

seven sacraments, to turn away from the sacred language and to break with the whole monastic system. But, after all, these steps had been already taken and at this point Calvin simply caught up the watchwords of the older generation of Reformers. But he took these protests and built them into a definite and tremendously powerful conception of life. He gave them homogeneity, and their place not simply in a theology but in the working theory of statesmen and politicians.

The question that is of vital interest is as to whether the organizing conceptions of the Calvinistic Puritan State are really Protestant, as that word is now used, or not. And on that point something turns on the conception of the inner spirit of Protestantism. It is not fair to Protestantism to judge of it by too narrow phases of its life. There has been steady development of what may be called a non-ecclesiastical Protestantism, which is as much a part of it as its creeds and church leaders. Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Leibnitz, Des Cartes, Hume and Kant are the children of Protestantism in a more real sense than Charlemagne and Charles the Fifth, or Petrarch and Dante, are children of Rome.

What makes Protestantism essentially one is the emphasis placed upon the final appeal to the inner assurance of the individual. Authorities may make their appeal, but the last analysis leaves the soul asserting with increasing emphasis its own moral autonomy. This belongs to the essence of Protestantism from the time of Luther's famous stand at the Diet of Worms up to Kant's almost equally famous philosophic formulation of the principle.

This principle is wrapt up with a truly Protestant estimate of the worth of the individual. Freedom and democracy spring naturally from the assertion of man's inherent moral autonomy. Between the soul and God no priest has a right to come. No Church can do more than lead the soul into the presence chamber; then the child answers in its own name to the Father. The Roman Catholic Church kept its "laymen"

constantly as "Children of Mother Church." A true and self-conscious Protestantism knows no "laymen," all men are Kings and Priests unto God, and only functions separate the various ministries. Although Luther was never consistent, yet it is easy to show that he maintained at all periods of his life with vivid clearness these several positions. Luther went further, however, and made religion so intimate and personal a thing, that its relation as an organized church to the state became of but secondary importance. Nationalism had a strong hold upon Luther's mind and heart. His appeal was to the princes to simply protect the new gospel, and to encourage its growth. He had either no theories of the relation of church to state, or extremely confused notions about it.

As a consequence of this Protestantism was in seemingly grave danger. How real that danger was might be a matter of academic dispute. It is perhaps easy now to overestimate it. At any rate the actual state of Protestantism was disorganized. Tyranny was already at the door. Nationalism in its triumph was in danger of being as tyrannical and unspiritual as international Imperialism had been. It is impossible to say and useless to try and speculate on what would have happened had Germany stood alone against the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. But it did not stand alone. The actual facts are bad enough, but the waves of the Counter-Reformation broke largely on the rocks of Calvinistic Puritan States founded in France, Switzerland, Holland, Scotland and the distant shores of New England.

It was said of Samuel Adams by one of his relatives that only such hardened tempered steel, polished and sharpened, could have cut through the bond that bound the Colonies to England. And so too, it was only the hardened and tempered steel of a unified Calvinistic system that proved itself capable of cutting the bonds that still bound men to old traditions and held them loyal to the Church at Rome.

It was no accident, perhaps, that the year 1541 saw Ignatius Loyola launch his organization for the conversion of the world to Papal Imperial supremacy, and saw John Calvin reinstated in Geneva to organize a Puritan State which was at last to bid successful defiance in the western world to those imperial ambitions.

Our deep gratitude is due to the man who, in God's providence, did so much to organize the thought and feeling of the Puritan State, and justice to his memory brings us now together to consider and honor John Calvin. The greatness of the man and his service none should deny.

All this, however, should not blind us to the facts that lie on the very surface of any thoughtful study of Calvin's conception of the state. It is not fair to Calvin to praise him for things he himself denounced and disliked. And Calvin knew perfectly well what he disliked. He admirably defined Democracy and rejected it. The trifling extensions of the suffrage in Geneva were made simply to take in all of birth and property.

The "twin premises," as Professor Foster puts it,\* of the *Institutes*, namely the Sovereignty of God and the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, were not as Calvin taught them, the natural foundation for an autonomous Democracy.

This Puritan State was not democracy. It may be questioned whether any democracy could have held its own amidst the storm and stress of the period. Calvin realized perfectly clearly the essential difference between democracy and aristocracy. His ideal was an aristocracy resting upon the consent of the people, and this aristocracy was to be no godless and material power, but a divine aristocracy resting upon the imperative call of God and strong in the sense of His almighty sovereignty. This very conception of Calvin's of the sovereignty of God was the basis of his political state. Men were ruled by God and the state was sovereign over men, but only

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\* Harvard Theological Review, Vol. I, No. 4, p. 396.



so far as that state obeyed the behests of God and represented honestly and righteously his sovereignty. Hence the Puritan State has always been in a high degree aristocratic, and logically so. For the thought of God that dominates Calvin is not the forgiving Fatherhood of God, but the conception of Power. And the thought of an external authority in the Bible is in close relation to that constitutional sovereignty which was the favored form in Calvinistic Europe.

Thus, in the last analysis, John Calvin made the church supreme. He fought the hierarchy with the hierarchy's own weapons. He would have been untrue to his principle, untrue to conscience and his God had he not handed over Servetus to the hands of an obedient state for proper and just punishment. Having pronounced sentence all Calvin could do was to ask for mercy, that Servetus might perish rather by the sword than by fire.

The Puritan State was built upon authority, supreme and unflinching. It is perfectly vain to plead the freedom of Calvin's occasional textual criticism as a ground for believing that he held modern views as to the fallibility of Scripture. He did nothing of the kind. Again and again, he states his ground strongly and freely, when once the text of Scripture has been ascertained we must bow to it in lowly reverence and listen to it as though God himself were speaking to us. Calvin met the authority of the papacy with the authority of the Scriptures and held aloft not only the letter of the New Testament but the letter of the Old as binding upon all men's conscience. And men felt the power of this appeal. We all desire to be under authority; thorough-going Protestantism has tremendous and startling responsibilities. Calvin's Puritan State took some of the weightiest of these from off men's shoulders.

This aristocratic republicanism was not especially modern in tone, but it suited the commercial trading world which had entered upon its imperial march. The speaker doubts,

however, whether Weber has demonstrated his main thesis that Calvinism and Capitalism are closely related in spirit.\* In the Southern States in America Calvinism found the aristocratic slave feudalism far more to its mind than the industrial capitalism of New England. And at the time of the Evangelical revival in England it was not Calvinism but Arminianism that allied itself most closely with the industrial development. That Calvinism became the religion of the commercial nations is only partly true. England never was wholly Calvinistic, and Scotland was not commercial when she was most Calvinistic. Nor has it significance, as has been alleged, that Calvin defended interest, for in point of fact the Roman hierarchy had never really put it down. The commercial Republics of North Italy were all Roman Catholics, and devoutly so.

The strength of the Puritan State was its centralized aristocratic oligarchy, and in organizing the commercial oligarchy Calvin fought fire with fire. Over against the feudal Imperialism Calvin put the small, closely knit aristocratic oligarchy, and it won the battle in Switzerland and Holland, but it was beaten in France and England, and failed to maintain itself in New England.

Over against the Church Calvin put the external authority of the Bible as the Word of God, and this in a sense never true of German Protestantism or of the Anglican reformation. No theory of inspiration could be drawn that would have been too exacting for Calvin. Of the Scriptures he says, "The full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they (the Scriptures) are believed to have come down from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them," † and many other passages assert the same thing.

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\* "Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus." Archiv für Socialwissenschaft und Socialpolitik XX.

† Institutes, Bk. I: 7:1

The Puritan State is built upon the Scriptures as an external authority binding all, and the Old Testament is on the same level with the New. *It is, in fact, a new theocracy.* This was its tremendous power. Its claims were set over against the Roman hierarchy with telling effect. It is not just to Calvin to say that "the State is distinct from the Church." What Calvin himself says is that "the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things widely separated."\* When now he comes to the function of civil government he denounces "fanatics, indeed, indulging in unbridled license" who would separate Church and State. The function of the State in fact is "to foster and maintain the external worship of God, to defend sound doctrine and the condition of the Church, to adapt our conduct to human society, to form our manners to civil justice, to conciliate us to each other, to cherish common peace and tranquillity.† "Wherefore no man can doubt that civil authority is, in the sight of God, not only sacred and lawful, but the most sacred, and by far the most honorable of all stations in life."‡ Rulers are to be "a kind of image of the Divine Providence, guardianship, goodness, benevolence, and justice."§

Church and State in other words are both simply the theocracy functioning in two ways. The Church has the duty of preaching the word and administering the sacraments. The State has the duty of conserving the Church, watching over the true religion and enforcing the laws of God.

So far as Calvin rendered a service to modern liberty by pointing out the modern way in which political tyranny could be constitutionally checked, he only followed in the footsteps of Gregory the Great, Leo<sup>7</sup> and Gregory the Seventh. The Roman hierarchy had been a very real check on tyranny, and the success of the Reformation gave the world directly the tyranny of Henry VIII, Francis I, and all the little German princelings whose tyranny was unchecked until revolution

\* Bk. IV: 201.

† Bk. IV: 20:2

‡ Bk. IV: 20:4.

§ Bk. IV: 20:6.

came; but revolution was not Calvin's prescription. The men that Calvin trained demanded not liberty for Holland, Scotland, England and America, but simply a new kind of tyranny, the tyranny of a church oligarchy; and this broke down everywhere; in Holland through the attacks of rationalistic Protestantism, in Scotland because of the haughty opposition of a landed feudalism, in England because Independency and Tory Churchmanship were too strong for it, and in America because of the free individualism engendered by French philosophy and the economic situation. But so long as it lasted it did successfully battle with Rome's tyranny.

Nor is it historically accurate to make Calvinism the protector of free intellectualism. The thing was abhorrent to the mind of Calvin. At this point the burning of Servetus is the sufficient answer. Calvinism did no more for education than the Roman hierarchy had done. It too established schools, colleges and universities, and the Jesuits became the most skillful teachers in Europe. But the teaching was within a closed system and therefore scholastic and ineffective. The same would have been true of Calvinistic education had it followed in Calvin's footsteps, only the closed system would have been the Old and New Testaments in the place of creedal Christianity, although even here Calvin bound free exegesis by the introduction of scholastic theology as a final interpretation of Scripture. Modernism grew up in spite of Calvinism and has had its hardest battles with the closely organized "authoritarianism" of Calvinism. Calvin never contemplated an "independent Church." Such a thing would have made his soul sick. The State had as its chief function the task of seeing that all men and women entered the Church. All citizens had to do it, or take the civil consequences. He believed in the "ancient apostolic discipline" enforced by fire and sword. To call that modernism is to abuse speech.

The principles of the Calvinistic Puritan State were authority, aristocracy, moral supervision of every detail of conduct,

thoroughgoing scholasticism, a divine Theocracy on the basis of the Old Testament, a sharp division between the ruled and the rulers, and severe discipline to maintain the *status*. Calvinism became to Protestantism what Jesuitism was to Rome; its military host to fight and defend it. And just as Romanism has had again and again to repudiate Jesuitism in the interests of its own life, and will now die if it fails to cast it off, so Protestantism has, in the higher interests of its own freedom, had to repudiate Calvinism as the Northern Presbyterian Church has formally done, and in practice all Protestantism since Hume and Kant has had to do.

When now we turn to mark the course of history, we realize the services Calvin rendered to the ultimate cause of human freedom. True it is that liberty and freedom were but by-products of Protestant forces. Calvin never expected to make men free to choose their own church and construct their own Bible, but in organizing a fighting force he rendered untold services to the ultimate liberation of human thought. The Puritan State was not always equally successful. In France it bore itself bravely and the Huguenots rendered a good account of the services of their swords, but Jesuitism proved too crafty for them in the end, and though they fought a brave battle, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes left them but a feeble folk. Not so in Holland, where the Puritan State stood guarded by dykes and angry waters and where one after Calvin's own heart held lonely watch over the fortunes of a seemingly shattered Protestantism; there Calvinism set its face like a flint and stood, scarred indeed and wounded, but triumphant, over against its foe. In England another military genius was fired by a conception modified indeed but yet drawn from John Calvin, and when Roundhead met the shock of Catholic Cavalier the stern Puritan rode the laughing Cavalier in dust and blood upon the field of defeat.

And yet here again the Puritan State did not long maintain itself. Having in God's providence served its purpose, other

and still larger Protestant forces practically swept it aside. In Scotland indeed it long guarded the northern hills and heaths, although even there with modifications which would have made Calvin's heart oft weary and sore.

When we turn our eyes to New England we see again the providence of God raising in the Puritan State an instrument to guard the feeble plantage of democracy on the bleak coast of New England. There a Puritan State was erected as hard, as unyielding, as tyrannical as that instrument Calvin forged on the banks of Geneva. But it also could only hold its own for a little, and the forces of disintegration began as early as the work of Roger Williams.

When thus we survey the field two or three things force themselves upon our attention. First, he who would claim to be a Calvinist must plant himself firmly upon Calvin's conception of the Church and State rather than upon his theology, for here is where his strength lay. But he must also realize the tremendous risks and dangers that beset the conception. Secondly, we must face the fact that the services of Calvin, like the services of Jesuitism, must largely be regarded as temporary and passing, in the very interests of that larger kingdom to which both Ignatius and Calvin gave their lives.

And, thirdly, this Puritan State is substantially sacerdotal. For Calvin and the Puritan State the ministry of the sacraments and the preaching of the word were the real notes of a true church. And only duly appointed ministers could properly either preach that word or administer the sacraments. In some sense Calvin at this point is even more unyielding than the Council of Trent. There was in this Puritan Church no room for the layman, save as a humble hearer and an obedient subject. The church is really constituted of ordained men, whether ordained to preaching or to ruling, and the tremendous force of this organization made itself felt at once in the politics of Europe.

Thus again, we find Calvin striking at false sacerdotalism with what he regarded as a true sacerdotalism, and some of his most vigorous work was done in the purifying of that priesthood which he regarded as the hope of the church.

And, lastly, we must remember that stern old John Calvin like John the Baptist of old stood at the threshold of a new world, into which he himself never really entered, and that the least in this new kingdom of God can look out with clearer eye and lighter heart than was possible to the fighting prophet of an older dispensation. The evangelical revival gave us again in something of its glory and its fullness the vision of God in the face of Christ Jesus our Lord. It is no longer possible for us to live as did John Calvin amidst the terrors of Sinai and the legal enactments of Judaism. But because he lived and died for his God, we through him have entered into the more splendid vision of the unfailing mercy and the everlasting kindness of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Calvin was too great a man and the Puritan State too real an influence to blur the outline. They stood for things we now repudiate. They rendered defensive service as over against the attacks of Rome, but the work of reconstruction was faulty as far as it was along Puritan lines, and modern evangelical, post-Kantian Protestantism should be fully conscious of the world-wide difference that separates us from the reactionary scholastic and in essence Roman Catholic elements in the Puritan State as founded by Calvin. While yet we render all honor to the old hero. May each of us in his time and place render one tithe of his service in something like his loyalty and fidelity!