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## WHAT OUGHT TO BE KNOWN ABOUT CALVIN

### INTRODUCTORY

Is it possible to set down within the compass of an article such as this, all that one should know of Calvin? In one sense, it is not. On the one hand, how are we, within the compass of a few pages, to set forth all his ideas, or recount all his actions? On the other hand, if we attempt to make a selection, do we not run the risk of becoming arbitrary, of being dictated to by our sympathies or antipathies, and, consequently, of acting in a manner that is dangerous to truth?

But, as we think over the matter, we shall easily realise that, in the case of any man whatsoever, ideas and actions are not isolated phenomena, independent of one another. Man, in his activities, is not an aggregate of so many distinct forces. Man is an organism. In him everything hangs together. Everything is mutually subordinate. To know a man is not merely to know what he said at a given moment, or what he did in a particular case. To know a man is to be at home with his general and controlling principles, to be conversant with the principle that inspires and directs him. That alone gives the true meaning of his thoughts and actions. Life, with its complications and contradictions, is an enigma. This principle is the key to it. This inspiring principle may be styled either the man's thought, or the man's character, according as we approach the subject from the point of view of its specially theoretical aspects, or its specially practical aspects.<sup>1</sup>

Only, before beginning our study, we must do our best to fulfil one preliminary condition. We must distrust all that has been told us, and all that is being told us of Calvin. Calvin was one of the most remarkable and most influential incarnations of Protestantism, that Protestantism that is based upon the Gospels. The adversaries of that Evangelical Christianity, from the ultra-Catholics to the ultra-Protestants, have naturally been carried away by their hatreds, or else blinded by their antipathies. Hence come a fantastic, inconceivable mixture of calumnies, and

<sup>1</sup> The texts and the references will be found in the following works: *L'art et le sentiment dans l'œuvre de Calvin* (1902); *La caractere de Calvin* (1921); *Calomnies antiprotestantes, Calvin* (1912). See especially *la Pensee religieuse in Jean Calvin*, vol. iv.

of failures to understand him. As typical of the ultra-Catholic calumnies it is sufficient that, for the beginning of his career, we mention the legend of the "red iron"—he was branded, so they say, at Noyon for an unnatural vice—and, for the end of his career, which took place at Geneva, we may refer to the legend of a death caused by a shameful malady. One can, or rather one cannot, imagine all that has found a place within this framework.

As illustrative of failures to understand on the part of ultra-Protestants, it is enough to quote the works of the Rev. O. Douen, Secretary of a Bible Society, the author of a work entitled *Clement Marot and the Huguenot Psalter*, a remarkable and, in some respects, a very useful book, and which even to-day exerts an extraordinary influence. In this volume we come across these lines: "Of a dry and hard spirit, logical and intellectual in the extreme, Calvin lacked that warmth of heart that made Luther so loveable. His theology is without bowels of mercy." Further on we read: "A man of a frail and weak body, excessively frugal, cold, peevish, austere, the enemy of pleasure or recreation in any form, ill-disposed to the arts and to music, embittered, violent, wrathful, impatient of any contradiction, intolerant, tyrannical, capable of the most atrocious cruelties in order to make his own ideas triumph—such was Calvin." And still further on, we read: "Calvin is the type of a domineering, anti-liberal, anti-artistic, anti-human, anti-Christian, dogmatism."

And finally, with the theological wind veering round, by the side of those ultra-Protestants who are rationalists, there are to-day the ultra-Protestants who are mystics, who sometimes do not hesitate to claim Calvin as their patron. And one may well ask, which is the more dangerous for historical truth, the hostility of the former, or the favour of the latter?

What are we to do? We are to distrust both enemies and friends, not excepting even the historian who writes this, and to trust only to Calvin himself, and to his most authentic utterances. Only, beware of isolated texts. There is no author that can so easily be compromised, or turned from his true meaning, with a few authentic but isolated texts, as Calvin. We shall see the reason for this as we proceed.

Thus put on our guard, let us begin our search.

## THE FIRST PART.

*The thought of Calvin.*

## (a)

The fact from which we must start, because it is the only one upon which everybody is agreed, is the great importance which Calvin attached to doctrine. He always speaks of it. In twelve pages, taken at random, the term "doctrine" meets us twelve times, and, on one single page, it turns up four times. It is true, of course, that in Calvin this word "doctrine" is employed in a great variety of senses. It means, as well as doctrine, lesson, counsel, rule, etc. But those applications apart, we recognise that Calvin attaches very great importance to doctrine properly so called, that is, to the idea explained and formulated. Ultra-Protestants blame him for this, and say that Calvin was an intellectualist. But what does the word "intellectualism" mean? It means here, not the use, but the abuse of the intelligence, of the "idea," the abuse which extends beyond its limits, the domain of the intelligence, of the idea, and ends by substituting intelligence for feeling, etc. . . .

To-day, Modernists themselves have fallen into an opposite extreme. For them, it is now only a question of personal inspiration, an affair of religious experience or of direct contact. Everyone draws from his personal experience the explanation that he desires: a doctrine. But men can draw several different doctrines from one and the same experience. As a result faith no longer defends ideas or doctrines. It is an end to doctrine, and, then, under the pretext of avoiding what they call intellectualism, they fall into mysticism.

The real question, then, is: Did Calvin make a bad use of doctrine? Or has he put doctrine to a legitimate use?

## (b)

We remark, in the first place, that for Calvin, the doctrine that is true is a practical doctrine. "God," he says, "sets forth a practical doctrine." "The doctrine which God commands us to publish in His Church, is given us with a view to reform and regulate our lives, so that we shall serve Him in all holiness." Finally, "a doctrine is true in so far as it is practised, and the criterion of right thinking is utility for salvation." "If a doctrine is not profitable," he says, "it is mere foolishness." "If I do not procure the edification of those

who listen to me, I am but a sacrilegious person." "In order to be good theologians, we must live holy lives." "The word of God is not meant to teach us to babble, or to render us eloquent or subtle, but to reform our lives." And so, in a word, he teaches that as doctrine is given us to purify our practice, so right practice helps us to understand doctrine—so inseparable are the two things, doctrine and practice. "It is necessary then, that practice should be conjoined to doctrine, for, otherwise we cannot comprehend what is being shown us and taught us."

Surely, we are here at the antipodes from intellectualism. If there is a doctrine that is useful and necessary for our times, it surely is doctrine in Calvin's sense.

(c)

We observe, next, that for intellectualism, or for dogmatism, there is no important difference between one doctrine and another. That is the Roman Catholic conception, as the Pope has just recalled to our mind by his Encyclical of April, 1928, "Mortalium animos:" "An illicit distinction," says the Pope, "is that which some have thought good to introduce between the Articles of the Faith called fundamental, and those called non-fundamental, the former to be admitted as binding upon all, the latter to be left to the free assent of the faithful."<sup>1</sup> For the Roman Catholic Church, all articles of the faith, if formulated by the Holy See, are of equal importance. Now this "illicit" distinction between articles that are fundamental and articles that are of secondary importance is a very notable point in Calvin's conception of things. In his *Christian Institutes*, he writes: "All the heads of true doctrine are not of the same kind. There are some doctrines the knowledge of which is so necessary that no one ought to doubt them, no more than we should doubt the fixed and first principles upon which Christendom is based: for instance, that there is but one God; that Christ is God, and the Son of God; that our salvation depends upon the mercy of God, and the like. There are other doctrines which are the subject of controversy among the churches, a controversy which, nevertheless, does not destroy their unity; for instance, that souls are carried directly to heaven, or, again, that they live in God, without determining the place."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *La vie intellectuelle*. Oct., 1928, p. 33.

These are the very words of the Apostle : " Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded ; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you " (Phil. iii. 15).

(d)

Let us observe next, that notwithstanding his care in working out a complete system of doctrine, Calvin combats an irrational reverence for mere words. He asks for a singular sobriety of expression in defining even the most fundamental doctrines. Without doubt, he affirmed and defended the doctrine of the Trinity. His attitude towards Servetus, to which we refer again later on, is pretty well known. But it is with regard to that doctrine of the Trinity that he writes : " We must be careful that neither our thoughts nor our speech pass the limits of the Word of God. We must seek nothing of God, save in His Word ; think nothing, save in His Word ; speak nothing, save in His Word."

It would seem, then, desirable to explain the mysterious doctrines of the Gospel, keeping to the very words of the Bible. And yet that is not a reason why we should " find fault with words that signify nothing save what the Scriptures certify as true." There is all the more reason for saying this, that it was the heretics that compelled the Church to have recourse to non-Biblical terms, in order to make more precise the thoughts of the Bible. It was found necessary thus to take away from those evil persons their subterfuges. The Fathers have formulated, as they did, the doctrine of the Trinity in order to denounce and refute the ambiguities under which Sabellius and Arius concealed their heresies. They denounced their " seditious " trickery. How, then, can we accuse the Fathers of having " troubled the calm of the Church for one little word " ? That little word—and it was not even a little word, but a single letter—showed the difference " between true Christians, and heretics."

And here Alexandre Vinet, the celebrated father of anti-intellectualism, as the Modernists admit, the man whom Modernists sometimes claim as their patron, is so much in agreement with Calvin that it is said that he copied him : " The theologians of Nicæa were of the people, and their immediate followers," says Vinet, " were something better than martyrs for a diphthong."

<sup>1</sup> See the whole passage and the whole article which constitutes Vinet's Theological Testament. It is reproduced at the end of the volume: E. Doumergue, *Le Christianisme est-il chrétien ?* Appendix p. 189.

In reality dogma, that abhorred name by which to-day doctrines are called, is before aught else the negation of an error, of heresy. It is that that gives dogma its relative value and importance. Such, in fact, is the judgment of a theologian whose soundness in the faith no one will question, I mean Athanasius, the father of orthodoxy, as he is sometimes called. "If," he says, "it is not given us to comprehend God, we may nevertheless declare what He is not. Although we are by nature at too great a distance from the Son of God, so that we should be capable of comprehending Him, nevertheless, we can, and that easily, refute the words put forward by the heretics, and to say, in respect of them—That is not the Son of God."

As a result, Calvin has declared: "I am not so boorish and extreme as to stir up great strife for mere words."

An episode in the life of Calvin throws light on his attitude on the matter before us. Calvin, like Farel, was accused of Arianism by the strange individual called Caroli. A conference was held at Lausanne, in 1539. Calvin, somewhat irritated, cried out: "You will not find anyone who affirms the Divinity of Christ more clearly than I do. I ask then, by what right am I accused of Arianism? I insist on being delivered from that infamy, nor will I suffer a suspicion so undeserved to lie on me."

It was at the signing of the Symbol of Nicaea. Calvin refused to submit to Caroli's demand, and, in one of his Tracts, he accounts for his conduct in this way: "All they refuse (i.e. Farel and himself) is that by their consent they should approve of this tyranny, that when the matter is clear, faith should be bound to words and syllables." One must respect certain scruples, even when they are out of place. But "one must not introduce into the Church this tyranny, that under pain of being held as heretical, one is bound to repeat the words uttered by another."<sup>1</sup>

(e)

The reader cannot fail to have noticed this: each step we take removes us far from intellectualism, from what is dry, rigid and abstract, and brings us near to what is living, full of feeling, and which circulates everywhere. What difference is there between "the doctrine of practice" and experience? Calvin

<sup>1</sup> Defensio, etc. . . . Opera VII, p. 311-314-319. See, on this episode, *Jean Calvin*, iv. p. 94f.

writes: "This active knowledge of the Son, which lies in practice and in experience, is far more certain than any mere idle speculation." "The best proof will be from our own familiar experience." In keeping with this sentiment, he speaks of the Divinity of Christ, "such as we have learned it through a sure and godly experience."

Anticipating Pascal and his famous maxim, on the reason that reason does not know, Calvin writes: "It is, then, such a persuasion as requires no reason, nevertheless, such a knowledge as is based on a very good reason."

We thus come to his celebrated doctrine touching the Testimony of the Holy Spirit—a doctrine which, nevertheless, has been so much distorted, so much misused. It is enough for us, however, that, contrary to the Modernists, we should note that Calvin does not separate the Testimony of the Holy Spirit and the Testimony of the Word of God. It is the same Spirit, a Person of the Trinity, that speaks in the Scriptures and in our own hearts. "It is needful that that same Spirit, who spake by the mouth of the prophets, should come into our hearts and touch them to the quick." There cannot, then, be a contradiction or difference between these two.

Conclusion: It is mysticism abounding. Faith is "the mystical union"; faith in Christ is "a communication," "a conjunction," "a sacred marriage," by which "we are made flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bones." It is a "grafting." We are "engrafted in Christ." "Not only is there the conformity of following His example, but there is a secret conjunction, by which we are so united to Him that He makes His own virtue pass, and, as it were, flow into us. Not only do we draw vitality, and, as it were, the marrow of life, from Him, but we pass over from our own nature into His."

(f)

After all that we have said, in the light of all these ideas, and sentiments, and reasonings, and experiences, we must now ask ourselves: What, then, is Calvin's method?

Calvin's *Institutes*, that is to say, the Dogmatics of Calvin, open with this declaration: "Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts; the knowledge of God, and of ourselves." "It is not easy to determine," he says, "which of the two precedes,



and gives birth to the other." "It might be held," says Calvin, "that one should begin by knowing oneself." "Our feeling of ignorance, vanity, want, weakness, in short, depravity and corruption, reminds us that in the Lord, and in none but in Him, dwells the true light of wisdom, solid virtue and exuberant goodness. So man is not only spurred on to know God, but also he must be led as by the hand to find Him."

On the other hand, it may be held that the effect can be well known only through its cause, the reality through the ideal. And how can we come to know the holiness of God through our humanity, which is so utterly defiled?

To which of these two methods, the choice of which determines the school to which a theologian belongs, the *a posteriori* or the *a priori*, the inductive or the deductive, the experimental or the scholastic method, does Calvin adhere? The fact is that he has chosen both. He constantly mingles the observation of facts, and the discussion which logically deduces, from these observations, consequences or postulates.

It is only after he has studied, in the First and Second books of the Institutes, the subjects of God and of man, it is only, in fact, at the end of the Third book—the last book of his Theology in the strict sense, for the Fourth book is devoted to the doctrine of the Church—that his dialectic issues in his final conclusion—Predestination.

(g)

We thus arrive at a very important fact, a conclusion that, in one sense, is the most important of all, in order to our judging the thought of Calvin aright. It is that that thought has the character of an antinomy.

Starting from each fact, Calvin constructs his system, logically, with a rigorous logic, which nothing checks and, rising from consequence to consequence, from postulate to postulate, this rigorous logic, which nothing checks, issues in a series of antinomies.

What do we mean by an antinomy? It is an apparent, temporary contradiction, which is not real, or such as is deeply laid in the nature of things; it is a contradiction for ignorant man, whose intelligence is limited, but it is not a contradiction for God, the omniscient and infinite Being.

The consequences and postulates of the liberty of man belong to the one side, the consequences and postulates of the

sovereignty of God belong to the other side. There we have an antinomy.

The consequences and postulates of theory belong to the one side, the consequences and postulates of feeling belong to the other side, another antinomy—without our speaking of the antinomy between particular grace and general grace; of the antinomy between asceticism and enjoyment; nor of the two great antinomies of the Divinity and the humanity of the Word that became flesh (Jesus Christ) and the word that became a book (the Bible). Naturally, there has happened what it was easy to foresee would happen. Out of the series of these antinomies which we have mentioned, each historian has taken the texts which appealed to him, or the texts which displeased him and, with texts in hand, has portrayed, or caricatured, in the most contradictory fashion, our Reformer. With texts in hand some have made him an ultra-intellectualist, others an ultra-mystic; some have made him a blind reactionary, others a frightful revolutionary; some have made him the natural product of Catholicism, others have made him a precursor of Modernism; some have made him an extreme ascetic, others an eater and a drinker, and the fabricating of such portraits, of such caricatures, still goes on. But in reality, our Reformer was, in everything and for everything, an average man, however astonishing this affirmation may appear. He held the two ends of the chain, even if he was not able to find the intermediate link which assured the connexion or the continuity of the two parts of the chain.

(b)

To sum up and, if possible, make clear all the preceding reflections, we are now going to take up a final example of Calvin's thoughts, but it is the most famous of all—his doctrine of the bondage of the will, and of Predestination.

Starting from the fallen nature of man, from sin and from heredity, Calvin, on the basis of these facts, comes to his doctrine of the bondage of the will; starting from the sovereignty of God, and what that implies, he comes to his doctrine of Predestination. In order to convince ourselves that Calvin arrives logically at his conclusions, that he has risen up to these ideas, and does not come down from them, it is sufficient that we, for a moment, consider the several editions of his *Institutes*. In the first edition, that of 1536 (?), the doctrine of

Predestination is not dealt with as a special topic. It appears as it were accidentally, in three or four passages—in connexion, that is, with the negation of human merit, with the certainty of salvation, the honour of God.

The first direct exposition of the doctrine appears in 1537, and then as the development, *a posteriori*, of a fact,<sup>1</sup> and in the form of an answer to the question: Why men do not accept the preaching of the Gospel?

In 1539, the *Institutes* contain a chapter consecrated to Predestination, the eighth chapter out of a total of seventeen.

This doctrine, then, meets with objections, and these, in turn, call for developments and more exact statements. Calvin thus arrives, in the last edition of his *Institutes*, in 1559, at his doctrine of a double Predestination, that of the good and that of the wicked.

Here we must not omit to make mention of the recommendatory Preface which Calvin, in 1546, prefixed to a French translation of the work of Melanchthon, the *loci theologici*. Melanchthon did not profess Calvin's ideas about the bondage of the will, and Predestination. He does not offer a "full resolution which he expects will please all," and Calvin in particular. Nevertheless Calvin does not hesitate to enter a plea on his behalf, and even to defend him. "He has preferred," he says, "to touch only upon that which it is necessary to know." "I believe that nothing that it pleased God to reveal to us in the Scriptures should be suppressed, come what may. For all that, he who endeavours to teach his readers to their profit deserves, indeed, to be excused, if he is content to say only what he is assured of."<sup>2</sup> Calvin writes thus to excuse Melanchthon at the very time that he declares that "free will is a cold invention," and that "the secret Counsel" of God disposes of all things, and that "this decree is fitted to appal us."<sup>3</sup>

Yes! "the will of God is the essential part in all things."

Only, it must be added that Calvin at the same time proceeds with not less vivacity, but rather with more vivacity still, to combat those who maintain that they are not responsible for their actions, who maintain that they are under a necessity

<sup>1</sup> *Instructions, and Confession of Faith*, of which use is being made by the Church of Geneva. *Opera*, xxii, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Opera*, ii, pp. 847-850.

<sup>3</sup> *Jean Calvin*, iv, p. 377.

(the Pelagians, the Manicheans, the Anabaptists). The divine justice, although hidden, is none the less irreproachable. Those predestined to perdition are not "unworthy of being predestined to such an end." Their fall is "just and equitable." "The cause and matter of their perdition lies in themselves." The glory of God is inseparable from His "justice." Man "errs through his own fault." "All that God created was very good." "Whence then comes man's perverseness, if it be not that he has turned away from his God?" "By his own wickedness, man has corrupted that good disposition which he received from the Lord." And herein lies the mystery. "In respect of things which it is neither possible nor lawful to know, ignorance is learnedness, and the crave to know them is a kind of madness."

In his preaching Calvin was still more explicit. "Evil is ours, our conscience leaves us in no doubt about that." "Is not the fact that we are convinced that we sinned of our own will, enough to close our mouth?" "Our Lord does not punish us straight off. He waits to see what we shall do, even until He sees that it is plain that there is hopeless obstinacy with us." "He desires to draw us to repentance." "God hardens the heart, and, nevertheless, the blame of that hardening does not attach to Him. The blame is man's, and no evil can or should be imputed to Him."

In a word: "God does not desire a servile and forced subjection. He desires a free willingness, not that of a slave, or what is of compulsion." "The Scripture has these expressions—I exhort you, I pray you."

And, "if we do not fully understand, that is not a reason why we should deny. We shall understand one day." "Let us learn to give this honour to God. He is just and equitable in all His doings." "They are but toads, who set themselves against God." "We should realise that God has a good reason for all He does. We shall understand this when we have put off this mortal flesh."

(2)

Here it is time to stop. . . . It is possible to protest, and affirm that "antinomy" is but an invention of the Sophists; that predestination, in particular, is a pure and simple contradiction, a radical and gross contradiction of human liberty and responsibility. Let us not reason nor discuss,

let us state the facts. Higher than words and reasonings are facts: history judges of reasonings and facts.

People tell us that to preach free will is to preach liberty, responsibility, morality. To preach the bondage of the will, and the eternal decree, is to drive those who accept these ideas to fanaticism, to amoralism, to immorality. But what has history to say in this connexion? The men of free will, from Pelagius to the Jesuits, have been men of an inferior morality, casuists. The men of the bond will have been the men of incorruptible moral ideals. With free will has been associated human merit, and the setting forth of a low type of morality, so that it seems to be within the reach of all to attain to all that could be expected of them, yea, and even to reach beyond that to works of supererogation. With the bond will, there has been the negation of human merit; that is to say, those who were of this opinion held a moral standard so high that not only could they not overpass it, but they could not come up to it. We are told that the men of the eternal decree can only be men of apathy. If everything is determined from all eternity, what good is there attempting to alter anything? We have only to let things slide, we are helpless.

But what has history to say in this connexion? The men of the eternal decree have been men of action above all others, men of incessant action, men of heroic action, and of a marvellous ardour and energy. They transformed the religious and the social world. If we cannot understand, is that a reason why we should not state it?

When Bucer, then in his youth, heard Luther for the first time preach the doctrine of the bondage of the will, he quivered with enthusiasm, it was liberation to him. When the martyrs of Chambéry in their prison learned that some in Geneva were denying predestination they shuddered for grief and terror. It was that predestination that had given them their unshakeable strength, that gave them the certainty of salvation, the guarantee of their final triumph. What would become of them?

Antinomy is not only an affirmation in face of another affirmation, apparently its contrary. The two terms of the antinomy exercise an influence the one upon the other, and the sense of each is modified and changed. The horizontal architrave, the flat lintel, is void of strength; it can support only small and low buildings. The antinomy is the pointed arch,

with its two arcs opposing one another, and containing one another. Their opposition is their strength, and they rise and rise, raising the vault of the sanctuary higher and ever higher, even unto heaven.

## THE SECOND PART

### *The Character of Calvin*

AFTER the thought we arrive at the character. Not that the latter is independent of the former; on the contrary, the character is only the reflection of the thought in life. As is the thought so also is the character.

(a)

What are the leading traits in Calvin's character? We allow, at the start, and immediately, that few men have been so hated as Calvin, both in his lifetime and since his death.

His bitter adversary, O. Douen, has said of him that he was "cold, sour, implacable, violent, hot-tempered, and anti-human."

On one of these faults we do not require any accusation on the part of his adversaries. It is Calvin himself who speaks of his own irascibility, of his choler, "that wild beast that he could not tame." He also relates that one day, when he could not find something again, he experienced a crisis of anger, with the result that he was sick after it, and had to go to bed. It would be possible to refer to several such acknowledgments of irascibility.

He could also be savage and violent in his language. In his sermons he can use such expressions as "spitting in their face," "gouging out their eyes."

But, without censuring, either what was personal to Calvin, or what in him was part of the rude manners of the sixteenth century, we hasten to add that, if Calvin was one of the best hated of men, he was also one of the best loved.

It has been said that he lacked "that warmth of heart which rendered Luther so lovable." And far be it from us to deny any of those amiable, charming, poetic qualities which the character of Luther presents us. But, speaking of the German Reformer, we must admit that he had few very intimate, loyal, friends. Melancthon himself does not appear to have lived on terms of perfect familiarity with Luther. Calvin, on the other hand, is surrounded with friends, whose affection, familiarity, harmony, were of a character at once profound, constant, and far-famed.

There are, to begin with, Farel and Viret, who, with Calvin, formed the famous "tripod." And there is Beza, whose filial affection towards Calvin was as great as was his admiration for him—not to mention a group of disciples who were in very deed, his children, his sons, and to whom he really was a father.

Here is another fact which is not less significant. Wherever he stayed, Calvin made himself friends; yea, and such friends as were ready to quit their native land, in order to go and live in Geneva, and not only in the same town as Calvin, but in the same quarter of the town, and in the same street as Calvin. They came from Noyon, from Paris, from Orleans, from Bourges, from Poitiers. Few men have exercised such an attraction. Must he not have been lovable, to have been so much loved?

It is time to say that, if Calvin made frequent use of the term, *doctrine*, he also often made use of the term *heart*. It is one of his favourite words. "The inner Master," he says, "the Holy Spirit, works in our *hearts*." "Faith is the confidence and certainty of the *heart*." "What the understanding has received must be planted in the *heart*." "The consent of faith is rather a matter of the *heart* than of the brain, of the affections than of the mind." "Its root must be in the *heart*."

In his well-known Preface to the Psalter, in the second last paragraph, the word *heart* occurs six times in a few lines. "Every evil word," he says, "perverts good manners, but, when these evil words are set to music, they affect the *heart* much more strongly. The poison of corruption thus trickles down into the very depth of the *heart*. . . . On the other hand, spiritual songs can be well sung only from the *heart*. Now the *heart* needs the mind; after the mind must follow the *heart* and affections."

It would be easy to cite proofs of this *cordiality* which charmed those that approached him, and which disclose to us in his disposition a sensitiveness which is ever awake, a sensitiveness which might be termed feminine—such as the meticulous care with which he observed regularity in writing to his friends. But now I touch upon a more general trait and, doubtless, one that is more significant.

He was unwearied in rendering service, not only to his friends, but to all his acquaintances, and to all who appealed to him. It would take many pages to tell with what good will this man, who

was so busy—busy with a prodigious correspondence, busy with the religious, ecclesiastical, and political affairs of Geneva, of Switzerland, of France, of Germany, of Great Britain, this man, worn out, not only by hard work, but by the series of mortal diseases to which he was a martyr—found not only the time but the strength, and the will, to be busying himself with everything and for everybody, finding homes for children, arranging girls marriages, busy about a doctor, a bookseller, a chemist, advising people to support the construction of furnaces (a new invention) intervening in petty domestic matters, reconciling a husband and his wife, a father and his son, supervising the education of a youth, etc., etc. One of his friends writes to him from Italy: “You are eager to know the minutest things with which your friends are occupied.” Another friend writes to him from Poland, “in order to keep him posted in all his actions, even the least important, and the most minute.”

## (b)

With such a susceptibility for the needs of others, with a capacity for much loving kindnesses, could Calvin have been so unfeeling as some would make him out to be? Could he be “frugal to excess,” “an enemy to all pleasures, and every kind of recreation, even of art and of music,” “the embodiment of an inhuman dogmatism”? Yet such is the classic portrait of the Reformer. But it would serve no good purpose to go over the calumnies, and exhibitions of ignorance, of which Calvin has been the subject.

Nevertheless, this legend enjoys such authority that it may be worth while to show by a few facts how little deserving of credit the legend is.

We begin by saying that, if Calvin had been frugal to excess, he would have had a specially good excuse for that. A man who suffered continually from a bad stomach, and almost continually from headache, from tertian and quartan ague, from gravel . . . is not necessarily to be regarded as excessively abstemious if, at the moment when he is suffering from a renal cholice, he does not sit down to table to enjoy a good dinner. The truth is that Calvin was, in reality, the sworn enemy of Stoicism. “Think you,” he asks, “that it is a fault to sigh, or to weep? That is a cruel idea. We are not a log of wood, nor a stone, nor brute beasts.”



This man who was sensible to all forms of suffering was sensible also to all forms of legitimate enjoyment.

*Intellectual enjoyment* afforded by "the liberal arts, which so polish a man that they make him really human."<sup>1</sup>

There you have the dogmatician, the anti-human type! The contradiction is apparent even in the terms.

Among the liberal arts there is first of all eloquence, the art of speaking well. Calvin set such a high value on this attainment that his detractors reproached him for it, as though he had put too high a value on it, that he had cultivated it over much, and that he had been vain of it. "The sermon that is not only pure and brilliant in diction, but also artistic, sufficiently attests that eloquence may at times serve the interests of faith." "The liberal arts are," he says, "the excellent gifts of God."

*Aesthetic enjoyment.* Here his adversaries seem to triumph. Not elsewhere does their passion against him let them assert such perversions of the truth.

O. Douen finds in him the type of an anti-artistic dogmatism, and maintains that his aversion to music was no less hurtful to the Reformation than his burning of Servetus at the stake. M. Münz, a member of the Institute, an acknowledged critic, after denouncing Calvin as "the greatest fanatic among the leaders of the Reformation, as the most implacable of iconophobes, who at one stroke, dried up soul and body," asks, "where or when does one find that the author of the *Institutes* manifested the least interest in any branch of art?" And the celebrated Brunetière, the defender of Catholicism, concludes thus: "Horror of art is, and was bound to remain, one of the essential and characteristic traits of the Spirit of the Reformation in general, and of the Calvinistic Reformation in particular." Witness, of course Louis Bourgeois, Goudimel, Rembrandt and others *galore*.

Now here, on the other hand, are Calvin's own declarations. In his Commentary on Genesis iv. 20, he writes: "Now, although the invention of the harp, and of similar instruments of music, may minister to our pleasures, rather than to our necessity, still it is not to be thought altogether superfluous; much less does it deserve to be condemned." "In truth we know by experience that singing has in it great power for moving and warming the hearts of men, in calling upon God, and in praising God with all the greater and warmer zeal." "Among the other things which

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary*, Corinthians i. 20.

are suitable as a means of recreation, and of giving pleasure, music has a primary place, and we must be of opinion that it is a gift of God deputed for this purpose. . . . Hardly is there in this world anything which can so move, turn, and bend, hither and thither, the manners of men. And in truth we know by experience (Calvin repeats that he speaks from experience) that music has a secret, and almost incredible power to move hearts."<sup>1</sup>

In his seventy-ninth sermon on Job (xi. 12): "The wicked sound the tambourine, the harp, and they rejoice at the sound of the organ." Calvin observes that Job does not condemn the use of these instruments. "The flute," says he, "and the tambourine, and such like instruments, are not to be condemned as essentially wrong in their very nature." And fearing lest he should not have been well understood, on the next day, in his eightieth sermon on Job, he says: "He has spoken of the flute, the harp, the tambourine, and other instruments of music. Let us note that these things, which are *good in their own nature*, ought not to be put to a bad use. Job does not condemn these things as if they were essentially bad, it is only on their abuse that he comments."<sup>2</sup>

One must be, too, astonished that the great adversary of Calvin, in the same volume in which he makes him the enemy of music, the type of anti-artistic dogmatism, has let this fine contradiction slip from him. "No one, since Plato and St. Augustine, save Luther, has spoken of music as has Calvin."<sup>3</sup>

*Enjoyment of the senses*, in luxuries or good cheer. Calvin speaks of extraordinary luxuries, of beds of ivory, perfumes, banquets, harps, lutes . . . and he adds: "All these things are good, created by God, permitted and even meant for the good of man. He has nowhere forbidden, either to laugh, or to eat one's fill, or to take delight in instruments of music, or to drink wine." These he regards as outward things, but what matters is the heart, "which may be proud, under a simple robe of fustian, as well as under velvet or silk."

Of all these enjoyments, the use is good, only the abuse is evil. No monastic asceticism! "We ought," he says, "without scruple of conscience, or trouble of spirit to use the gifts of God, and for such a use were they appointed. . . ." Naturally

<sup>1</sup> *Opera*, VIII, p. 469; VI, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Opera*, XXXIV. Sermons on the Book of Job, pp. 226, 227, 228.

<sup>3</sup> O. Douen, ii, 363.

enough, Calvin reckoned it lawful to feast with his friends, and that they should enjoy good cheer with one another.

Compare, in this connection, his commentary on Amos, chapter vi.

(c)

We now come to the darkest date in the life of Calvin—the execution of Servetus. Concerning this event, historians have redoubled their wrath, and their fury. In order to focus properly all that they have related, or distorted, or invented in this connection, it would be necessary to devote at least one big volume to the subject.<sup>1</sup>

But, as a sufficient guide through this labyrinth, it will be sufficient to know three things :

(1) Calvin had Servetus arrested when he came to Geneva, and appeared as his accuser. He wanted him to be condemned to death, but not to death by burning. On August 20th, 1553, Calvin wrote to Farel : “ I hope that Servetus will be condemned to death, but I desire that he should be spared the cruelty of the punishment ”—he means that of fire. Farel replied to him on September 8th : “ I do not greatly approve that tenderness of heart,” and he goes on to warn him to be careful that “ in wishing that the cruelty of the punishment of Servetus be mitigated, thou art acting as a friend towards a man who is thy great enemy. But I pray thee to conduct thyself in such a manner that, in future, no one will have the boldness to publish such doctrines, and to give trouble with impunity for so long a time as this man has done.”

Calvin did not, on this account, modify his own opinion, but he could not make it prevail. On October 26th he wrote again to Farel : “ Tomorrow Servetus will be led out to execution. We have done our best to change the kind of death, but in vain. I shall tell thee when we meet why we had no success.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, what Calvin is most of all reproached with—the *burning* of Servetus—Calvin was quite opposed to. He is not responsible for it. He did what he could to save Servetus from mounting the pyre. But, what objurgations, more or less eloquent, has this pyre with its flames and smoke given rise to, made room for ! The fact is that without the pyre the death of Servetus would have passed almost unnoticed.

<sup>1</sup> We refer readers to Vol. VI of our *Jean Calvin*, pp. 173-442.

<sup>2</sup> *Opera*, XIV, pp. 590, 613-657.

(2) But why did this death at all take place? The answer is that it was *the error of the time*, an error for which Calvin was not particularly responsible.

The sentence of condemnation to death was pronounced only after consultation with the Swiss Churches, several of which were far from being on good terms with Calvin. It was the outcome of that consultation, a consultation which Servetus and his friends claimed, that resulted in the sentence of condemnation. Besides, the judgment was pronounced by a Council in which the inveterate enemies of Calvin, the freethinkers, were in the majority.

This point of history, it will be easily understood, is, in this connection, of the highest importance. The enemies of Calvin have tried and are still trying to contest it, and to prove that it was not *an error of the time* and they quote five or six texts. It would be easy to show that they involuntarily falsify history. Two testimonies should suffice to put the truth of the matter in the clearest light.

The first testimony is that of Servetus himself. After all, Servetus ends by supporting exactly the theory of Calvin. He declares that if he had said or written what he was reproached with he would be altogether worthy of death, but he did not say it. Between him and Calvin there was no difference of principle, there was only a difference of the evaluation of a fact. Servetus writes: "These are horrible and accursed things. If I had said that, and not only said but written it publicly, to corrupt the world, I should condemn myself to death."

The second testimony is, if that were possible, still more significant. It is that of the worst enemy, at that moment, of Calvin, of one to whom the adversaries of Calvin set up busts as to the chief of Modernism and the esteemed apostle of toleration. I refer to Sebastian Castillion. And we will not deny that Castillion has written some beautiful lines on the subject of toleration but, after all, what theory has he upheld? It was just that of Calvin. Calvin did not condemn every heretic to death. He condemned only the conscious and obstinate heresy which he called blasphemy; and, on his side, Castillion did not extend his toleration to all heretics—he excluded therefrom certain heretics and in principle they were the same as Calvin excluded. "If," wrote Castillion, "any magistrate retains them in chains in order to see if possibly they may be brought to a right

mind, the magistrates do not appear to me to act in disaccord with Christian clemency," and again: "Calvin describes for us in the case of his heretic a monster such as I, far from being ready to defend, freely admit that they should be put to death. I mean such as openly teach the forsaking of the only God. But I do not believe that those who differ in opinion from Calvin and whom Calvin holds as heretics are to be so regarded."

Thus, once more, there is disagreement about the application of the principle but perfect agreement as to the principle itself. It must have been that the error was *the error of the time*, for it was acknowledged by those who ran the risk of suffering under it; by those for whom it cost their life.

(3) And finally, this apology, however legitimate and important it is, is not meant as a *justification*. It is what the most faithful and the straightest disciples of Calvin himself have thought it their duty to proclaim in the face of the world. At the time of the 350th Anniversary of the execution of Servetus at Geneva, at Champel, on the very spot where Servetus suffered, Calvin's "respectful, grateful sons"—so reads the inscription—solemnly erected an "expiatory monument"—I am still quoting from the inscription.

They have been keenly criticised. There was a tense struggle, the various incidents of which we were allowed to follow. Some would have it especially that it was a monument in honour of Servetus against Calvin—the thought was a commonplace one—the "respectful and grateful sons" of Calvin without attacking Servetus, were anxious to acknowledge the fault of their father to expiate it in the way in which a man may expiate a man's error—that is by regretting it, disowning it. In that consists the originality of the monument of Champel.

From all times men have raised monuments in expiation of the errors and faults of their adversaries. It is not rare for victims to protest against their executioners. There is, in Paris, the expiatory chapel for the crimes of the Jacobins, raised by Catholics. After the monument of Champel was raised, Modernists and freethinkers and atheists have raised a series of monuments against Calvin and in honour of Servetus, as at Annemasse, at Paris, at Vienna, but an expiatory monument raised by the "respectful grateful sons" wishing to expiate the error of their respected and beloved father—there is only one of that character—that at Champel. That is what the distinguished

Italian Minister of Finance, Luidgi Luzzati, said: "The Calvinists of Geneva have wished to be the first in this memorable enterprise of redemptive expiations." It is what the celebrated Professor Aulard, celebrated for his radicalism and for his free-thought, has said: "The ceremony of Geneva is an event and a novelty in the history of human civilisation."

I wonder if strict Calvinists could have rendered to their father any homage more loyal for themselves and more glorious for him than by disavowing him with such solemnity. Is it not supreme loyalty to repeat face to face with Calvin, to the detriment of Calvin, the very motto of Calvin, *Soli Deo gloria*?

(d)

After the darkest page, comes, in conclusion, the brightest page, that of his mortal illness.<sup>1</sup> His sufferings were protracted. They lasted for months, in fact for about a year, from May, 1563 to May, 1564. It was a series of death struggles.

Calvin suffered from headaches, from stone in the bladder, from piles, from gout, and from aggravated consumption. His movements became difficult. He was sometimes so weary that he could walk only two or three steps. There remained to him only the use of speech, and yet, he could not even speak for long "because of shortness of breath."

Nevertheless he continued working, finishing works which he had begun, busying himself in all his affairs. When his friends tried to stop him, he would reply: that he did "scarcely anything." He asked that he might be permitted to be found of God ever watching, i.e. waking, and engaged in his work up to the last breath. It was a case of bodily anguish co-existing with the perfect life of the spirit. From the month of March he became too weak to write. He dictated his last letters.

On April 27th, he bade farewell to the Town Council, and thanked them "for having borne with him in his over vehement affections, in which he displeased even himself."

On the following day, April 28th, he bade the Pastors farewell, with a degree of vigour which astonished them. He characterised his mortal illness in these terms: "I am quite unlike other invalids for, when they draw near the gates of death, their senses grow faint, and wander. As for me, it is true that I feel very stupid. But it seems that God wishes to draw

<sup>1</sup> See *Jean Calvin*, VII., LIV, V. chap. ii, p. 443.

in all my spirits, and enclose them within me. I think I shall have much trouble and that it will cost me dearly to die, and that I may lose my power of speech, and yet retain my senses."

Let us observe in this speech to the Pastors, among so many surprising traits, one particularly surprising trait. Calvin speaks in it of his own natural timidity. "A poor scholar," says he, "and timid as I am, and have always been." Beza tells us that he repeated the following words two or three times: "I assure you that I am naturally timid and fearful." Moreover, in his Preface to his Commentary on the Psalms, he had already written: "Being of a disposition somewhat shy and bashful, I have always loved shade and retirement."

Thus we see that this prodigy of energy, and of public activity who braved all forms of opposition, and all obstacles, came from a temperament that was timid, and shy, that loved quiet and peace. No instinct, no natural inclination; only a marvellous, continuous moral tension.

What is official is now finished. Calvin belongs henceforth entirely to his friends. A French lady, whom he had not seen for thirty years; an old man, whom he had not seen since he was himself young, came to Geneva to bid him farewell, and he received them. "In order to rejoice honourably, while waiting for God's will," he sometimes invited a few friends to supper. His friends, his disciples, in presence of their "father" suffering to such a degree, and yet, at the same time so tranquil, felt at once their grief and their admiration grow from hour to hour. On May 24th, Beza writes: "Little by little this faithful servant of God is being withdrawn from us, and brought nearer to God." And Calvin's patience did continue to grow in his sufferings.

His last experience of mortal pain commenced on May 2nd. His voice was choked with asthma. His eyes, which up to the very end remained clear and brilliant, were lifted up towards heaven and his whole countenance showed that he was praying ardently and with his whole being.

But, May 19th was the day on which the Pastors met for reciprocal brotherly criticisms, and for a common friendly meal. Calvin insisted that they should meet in his house and dine there too. At the fitting moment, he had himself carried on a chair from his bed-room into the room where dinner was served.

On arriving he said : " Save this once, I shall not appear again at table." He said the prayer, and did his best to make them rejoice. But he could not eat, and he was carried back again into his bedroom, saying as he left with the most joyous expression he could command : " A wall between two will not prevent my being ever with you in spirit."

After that he was completely bedridden ; and on May 27th, he gave up the ghost, so peaceably that there was not once a rattle in his throat, and he was able to speak intelligibly up to the very moment of death, in full possession of his judgment, and without his having moved once hand or foot, so that he seemed rather to be asleep than dead. To quote Beza once more : " After having given us formerly the pattern of an upright life, he now gives a noteworthy example of a brave and Christian death."

The most important action in a man's life is his death. It is the manner in which a man dies that reveals, in the most authentic and veracious way, the manner in which he lived.

It seems now that we know all that we need to know of Calvin in order to pass upon him a sure and exact judgment.

Montauban, France.

E. DOUMERGUE.