JOHN CALVIN'S VIEW OF REVELATION

JUST herein lay the genius of Calvin—that out of the confusion and turmoil, out of the extravagances which followed upon the initial disruption from the Mother Church of Rome, he was able to bring to the light a statement of the Christian faith so fresh and eloquent (one writer calls the *Institutes* a continuous oration) so penetratingly logical and coherent, but withal so warm (because it welled up from his throbbing heart) that his own and subsequent times have owned him as "the theologian" of the Reformation.

By natural constitution and the fullness of time, he was to be for Protestant Christendom as inevitably its systematiser as were Augustine and Aquinas in their respective centuries the organisers of the Catholic Christian faith. In this sense then, he can be classified only with them. Upon him, as we look back, we can clearly see that the prophet's mantle had come to rest.[1]

Apart from the fact that both Luther and Zwingli were, as compared with Calvin, pioneers in the Reformation movement, and that Calvin therefore found the fruits of their lives' labours at hand as a foundation to build upon, Calvin possessed a characteristically French organising genius, nourished to its full power through his legal studies, which put him, in relation to the Reformation movement of thought, in a place entirely by himself. The prince of Reformation theologians—this is the title allowed to John Calvin almost universally.

But in thus relating him with Aquinas, we should not have it understood that he was in any sense the promulgator of the scholastic method in theology. The lineal descendant of that method within Protestantism, in as far as a succession can be truly traced at all, is Martin Luther. He it was who carried with him into his thinking scholastic forms and conceptions, let alone the large appropriation of phraseology which he took word for word (*pene ad verbum*) from the scholastics.[2] Not that

[1] Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. III, p. 260, says:
"Calvin . . . easily takes the lead among the systematic expounders of the Reformed system of Christian doctrine. He is scarcely inferior to Augustine among the fathers, or Thomas Aquinas among the schoolmen, and more methodical and symmetrical than either. Melanchthon, himself the prince of Lutheran divines and "the Preceptor of Germany" called him emphatically "the theologian.'"

[2] Doumergue, E. "Jean Calvin, Les hommes et les choses de son temps," Vol. IV, p. 21. Note 2, where the author quotes Melanchthon's testimony with regard to the scholastic influence imbibed by Luther.

Calvin was not versed in scholastic lore, nor that the stiff logical reasoning processes which, in spite of the empty results, scholasticism nevertheless left as a legacy to after times, had escaped Calvin. On the contrary there can be no doubt that Calvin everywhere in his writings "betrays his philosophic training; but nowhere has he ever presented a philosophy."[1] No judgment is so far from the truth as that which declares Calvin's theology to be a system of metaphysics of a highly speculative sort. If there is anything he was not it is that he was a philosopher first and a theologian only afterwards.

If he used reason and dialectics, he did so in vindication of a world-view to which he had come independently of them—namely, through his own Spirit-wrought experience of the truth of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the sole rule for faith and practice. As a theologian Calvin was first and always a Biblical theologian, and consequently allowing Scripture to determine his views, he was always most positive in his convictions, and uttered them as being not his own, but as those of the Holy Spirit, whom he acknowledged as their author, and who brought him certainty, not primarily in his intellectual views, but first of all in the experiences of his heart. In his great *Institutes*, for example, "La partie spéculative manque presque complétement : le premier livre repose sur l'observation du cœur humain et sur la Bible, et non sur l'analyse de l'Etre absolu. . . . L'Institution n'est pas une œuvre scientifique, au sens actuel du mot. . . . Calvin veut atteindre un but pratique ; il vise à un résultat immédiat et détermine ; il veut former des Chrétiens ; son intention est plus éducative que scientifique."[2]

His object being, as we have thus seen, practical in the highest degree, rather than speculative, "par une explication magistrale des Ecritures, il en déduit un organisme de conceptions purement religieuses."[2] Scripture itself, therefore, did not weigh with compelling power upon Calvin as ultimate authority, because it was perspicuous from the intellectual standpoint. Indeed, Calvin acknowledged much in Scripture as beyond his mind's comprehension, but took it as revelation, because the testimony of the Holy Spirit impressed upon him as a believer its divinity. Admirably does Schaff sum up what we have thus

[1] Quoted by Doumergue (*ibid*), p. 21, from Th. Krücke. "Die Entstehung und Bedeutung von Calvins Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion," in the *Reformirte Kirchenzeitung*, 1898, p. 229.

[2] Quoted by Doumergue (*ibid*), p. 22, from Dielthey, the well-known Berlin philosopher.

far observed. "Calvin's theology," he says, "is based upon a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He was the ablest exegete among the Reformers, and his commentaries rank among the very best of ancient and modern times. His theology, therefore, is biblical rather than scholastic, and has all the freshness of an enthusiastic devotion to the truths of God's Word. At the same time he was a consummate logician and dialectician. . . . He built up a body of doctrines which is called after him, and which obtained symbolical authority through some of the leading Reformed Confessions of Faith."[1]

A peer amongst theologians, he was not such by virtue of being a spiritual son of any of the mediæval scholastic prophets, who in turn were sons of the great Aristotle, and who passed on to modern philosophy the learning of the ancient philosophers. Rather, Calvin struck into a long neglected road in the fashioning of his system of theology—namely, that of the pure grammatico-historical exegesis of the Word of God, which with him was the one and only task of the Christian theologian. The result of the systematic application of this rule to the Scriptures resulted in the creation of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in 1536, which, though in after years was filled out in greater detail, was intact as a system from its first appearance. Beza, his biographer, says, "In the doctrine which he delivered at first, Calvin persisted steadily to the last, scarcely making any change."[2] Hence Schaff puts it, "His *Institutes* came like Minerva in full panoply out of the head of Jupiter."[3]

Nor was it for his own immediate day only that it was to serve as the text-book of Protestant theological thought. It was to serve as a powerful stabilising force during several centuries of subsequent political, economic, intellectual, and religious upheaval—the very creator of a singular and unique culture and civilisation in Europe and America which is with us even today in a larger measure than we realise. Concerning these *Institutes* in the form in which they last came from the hands of Calvin in the edition of 1559, Stähelin has declared: "In dieser letzten Gestalt hat das Werk die dogmatische Entwicklung der reformierten Kirche fast zwei Jahrhunderte lang vollständig beherrscht und ist zugleich mit seiner reichen exegetischen Begründung und

[1] Schaff, Philip, *ibid*, p. 261.

[2] Schaff, Philip, *ibid*, p. 262, quoting Beza in note 2.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 262.

seiner scharfsinnigen Widerlegung der römischen und der Schwarmgeistischen Irrtümer die hauptsächliche Rüstkammer gewesen aus der die reformierten Theologen, besonders in Frankreich sowohl für ihre praktischen Aufgaben wie für ihre Polemik die geeignete Aufleitung holen konnten."[1] To study Calvin's theology, then, means to study the source of the controlling theological thought in Europe until the rise of rationalism in the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Nowhere is it more obviously true than with Calvin, that the view which a theologian assumes on the subject of revelation, not only colours, but determines in the most vital way his entire theological system. One cannot miss observing this with reference to Calvin, because in the very first nine chapters of his *Institutes* he places as the indispensable ground for his entire subsequent construction, a comprehensive exposition of the sources and guarantee of the knowledge of God and divine things. Accordingly we find here given " the plan of a complete structure of Christian Apologetics."[2]

The starting point of Calvin's entire system as worked out in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*[3] is that " the end for which all men are born and live is to know God " (Bk. I ; III. 3) and that all men everywhere and at all times have been endowed with the capacity to understand and develop an acquaintance with God. This is the *semen religionis* which is inherent in the very constitution of human nature. (I, II and III.) " We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of a Deity. For that no man might shelter himself under the pretext of ignorance, God hath given to all some apprehension of his existence (Rom. i. 20) " (Bk. I ; III. 1).

But " while experience testifies that the seeds of religion are sown by God in every heart, we scarcely find one man in a hundred who cherishes what he has received, and not one in whom they grow to maturity, . . . but all degenerate from the true knowledge of him," and that partly because of ignorance and partly because of intentional wickedness. But even this ignorance

[1] Stähelin, R., art. " Calvin," in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*," p. 671.

[2] Warfield, Benjamin, " Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God," p. 131, in *Calvin and the Reformation.*

[3] The edition of the *Institutes* (E.T.) which I shall use throughout this exposition is that of John Allen, sixth American edition, revised and corrected, published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1921.

does not excuse one from guilt, because it, too, has its roots in pride and vanity, so that the result is that instead of receiving or accepting the representations God gives of himself, men form conceptions of God according to their own presumptuous imaginations. Ignorance of God as he really is, then, grounds itself in man's presumptuous attempt, through the human reason to fashion his own notion of God, from which it follows that " they worship not him, but a figment of their own brains in his stead " (Bk. I ; IV. 1). Men should rather recognise that " the Divine Will is the perpetual rule to which true religion ought to be conformed ; that God ever continues like himself ; that he is no spectre or phantasm, to be metamorphosed according to the fancy of every individual " (Bk. I ; IV. 3). Yet for all this presumptuous idolatry which men engage in, " that seed, which it is impossible to eradicate, a sense of the existence of a Deity, yet remains ; but so corrupted as to produce only the worst of fruits " (Bk. I ; IV. 4).

Still, " as the perfection of a happy life consists in the knowledge of God, that no man might be precluded from attaining felicity, God hath not only sown in the minds of men the seed of religion, already mentioned, but hath manifested himself in the formation of every part of the world, and daily presents himself to public view, in such a manner, that they cannot open their eyes without being constrained to behold him " (Bk. I ; V. 1). Whereupon Calvin enumerates some of the evidences of God's power and wisdom as displayed in outer nature, as that " there is not an atom of the world in which you cannot behold some brilliant sparks at least of his glory, . . . for the exact symmetry of the universe is a mirror, in which we may contemplate the otherwise invisible God " (Bk. I ; V. 1).

Nor is this all, for " some philosophers of antiquity have justly called man a microcosm, or world in miniature ; because he is an eminent specimen of the power, goodness, and wisdom of God, and contains in him wonders enough to occupy the attention of our minds " (Bk. I ; v.3). " Whence we conclude this to be the right way, and the best method of seeking God ; not from presumptuous curiosity to attempt an examination of his essence, which is rather to be adored than too curiously investigated ; but to contemplate him in his works, in which he approaches and familiarises, and, in some measure, communicates himself to us " (Bk. I ; V. 9), and what is more necessary and

fruitful still, to " descend into our own selves, and consider by what means God displays in us his life, wisdom, and power, and exercises toward us his righteousness, goodness, and mercy " (Bk. I ; V. 10).

" But, notwithstanding the clear representations given by God in the mirror of his works, both of himself and of his everlasting dominion, such is our stupidity, that always inattentive to these obvious testimonies, we derive no advantage from them. For, with regard to the structure and very beautiful organisation of the world, how few of us there are, who, when lifting up their eyes to heaven, or looking round on the various regions of the earth direct their minds to the remembrance of the Creator, and do not rather content themselves with a view of his works, to the total neglect of their Author ! " (Bk. I ; V. 11).

Man's mind being prone, then, to remain by the creatures, rather than ascending to the contemplation of the Creator, we can understand, says Calvin, how it is that men have reared each his own peculiar ideas of God, according as he pretended to find in nature and the world what he wanted to see. This accounts for the endless diversity of ideas with regard to the Deity which men, particularly philosophers, have held (Bk. I ; V. 11 and 12). The conclusion with regard to the need of revelation which follows hereupon is that " since, then, the following of the custom of a city or the consent of antiquity, in divine worship, is too weak and frail a bond of piety, it remains for God himself to give a revelation concerning himself from heaven " (Bk. I ; V. 13).

In the next chapter (VI) we are told that in Scripture God has given us this revelation concerning Himself from heaven. For it " must be considered as a fixed principle, that, in order to enjoy the light of true religion, we ought to begin with the doctrine of heaven ; and that no man can have the least knowledge of true and sound doctrine, without having been a disciple of the Scripture " (Bk. I ; VI. 2).

The reason why this additional manifestation of Himself in a fixed record was necessary, can be seen " if we consider the mutability of the human mind—how easily it lapses into forgetfulness of God ; how great its propensity to errors of every kind ; how violent its rage for the perpetual fabrication of new and false religions " (Bk. I ; VI. 3).

Scripture, then, even considered for the present apart from the " doctrine of faith and repentance, which proposes Christ

as the Mediator" (par. 2), was necessary even to give us "a just and lively description of God as he appears in his works" (par. 3) together with an estimation of his presence there, in accordance with "the rule of eternal truth" (par. 3) and not in accordance with "our depraved judgment" (par. 3) which latter factor accounts for the conflicting diversity of views of God as held by men who do not follow the Scripture. "Scripture," then, "discovers God to us as the Creator of the World, and declares what sentiments we should form of him, that we may not be seeking after a deity in a labyrinth of uncertainty" (Bk. I; VI. 1).

It being established, then, that Scripture is the audible voice of God which is the key to the understanding of nature itself, for that God "opens his own sacred mouth" (par. 1), it remains to discuss in just what sense Scripture is the Word of God, and just how it is authenticated to be such.

This question—how Scripture is proved to be the Word of God—Calvin answers at once when he declares that "it obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard the very words pronounced by God himself" (Bk. I; VII. 1). In short, Scripture is self-authenticating in the heart of the believer, and needs no ulterior proof of its divinity.

Whence it follows that Calvin repudiates the opinion "that the Scriptures have only so much weight as is conceded to them by the suffrages of the Church; as though the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended on the arbitrary will of men" (Bk. I; VII. 1), and he bases his answer to this contention of the Catholic Church upon the consideration that the Church itself was "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets" (Ephesians ii. 20) which "must have been certain, antecedently to the existence of the Church" (Bk. I; VII. 2).

Then, realising that the favourite Catholic argument for the contention that the Church must determine the validity of Scripture, or at least interpret it, hinged upon the passage in Augustine where he said that "he would not believe the Gospel unless he were influenced by the authority of the Church" (*Contra Epistle Fundam.* Chap. 5), Calvin seeks to point out that if Augustine's statement here be taken in conjunction with the context, it will be seen that Augustine, arguing against the Manichæans, urges the authority of the Church not as ultimate and final, but as confirmatory of the truth of Scripture. And

he lays such emphasis upon the Church for the reason that he himself, while still an alien to the truth of Scripture, was brought into an understanding of Scripture through the agency of the Church. Wherefore "the Church is an introduction to prepare us for the faith of the Gospel" (Bk. I; VII. 3). But for Augustine (such is Calvin's insistence), the final goal is the Scripture truth itself, of which the Church is but the custodian. Wherefore, it is false to say that it is necessary to have recourse to the decree of the Church to be persuaded of the divine origin of Scripture, "for the Scripture exhibits as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black things do of their colour, or sweet and bitter things of their taste" (Bk. I; VII. 2). Scripture is self-authenticating.

Forthwith, Calvin proceeds to argue that even though, if necessary, Scripture might, by means of reason be shown to be the utterances of "the Divine Speaker,"[1] . . . "yet it is acting a preposterous part, to endeavour to produce sound faith in the Scripture by disputations." The assurance, then, which is essential to true piety, can be implanted in the heart of man only by the "testimony of the Spirit," which is superior to all reason. "For, as God alone is a sufficient witness of himself in his own word, so also the Word will never gain credit in the hearts of men, till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit" (Bk. I; VII. 4). "Let it be considered, then, as an undeniable truth, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit, feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence, and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason; but it obtains the credit which it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit. For though it conciliate our reverence by its internal majesty, it never seriously affects us till it is confirmed by the Spirit in our hearts." . . . Wherefore, "let it be known here, that that alone is true faith which the Spirit of God seals in our hearts" (Bk. I, VII. 5).

But strongly as Calvin insists that the truth of God's Word impresses itself upon us only when there is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to illumine our hearts, he carefully guards

[1] Such "rational proofs to establish the belief of the Scriptures" is what Calvin offers in Book I, chap. viii. Yet it is always important to note that whereas such proofs of reason are useful to maintain the dignity and authority of the Scriptures "in the minds of the pious," and also useful to vindicate it against "the subtleties of calumniators," such arguments "are not sufficient to produce firm faith in it, till the heavenly Father, discovering his own power therein places its authority beyond all controversy," which he does through "the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit" (I, viii. 13).

against the mysticism or spiritualism of some who claim to be " taught of the Spirit " and who thus forward the claim to have come into possession of truth which supersedes and supplants that contained in the " dead and killing letter " of Scripture (as they call it). (Bk. I , IX. 1.)

For if the claim of these so-called Spirit-taught men is that the Spirit they possess is the Spirit of Christ, how can they presume to dissociate themselves from Scripture which itself was held in the highest reverence by " the Apostles of Christ, and other believers in the primitive Church " ? (par. 1). Would the Spirit of Christ so contradict Himself as to speak one thing in the hearts of the first believers and another thing in the hearts of these professed spiritually-taught men ? It is impious to think so. On the contrary, the Spirit which was promised to the Church, it was declared would be the Spirit which would " not speak from Himself," but " he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you " (John xvi. 13 and 14). Consequently " the office of the Spirit . . . is not to feign new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new system of doctrine, which would seduce us from the received doctrine of the Gospel, but to seal to our minds the same doctrine which the Gospel delivers " (par. 1). " God did not publish his Word to mankind for the sake of momentary ostentation, with a design to destroy or annul it immediately on the advent of the Spirit ; but he afterwards sent the same Spirit, by whose agency he had dispensed his Word, to complete his work by an efficacious confirmation of that Word " (par. 3).

Magnificently does Calvin conclude the treatment of this subject, when he says : " A very different sobriety (than that exhibited by these mystics) becomes the children of God ; who, while they are sensible that, exclusively of the Spirit of God, they are utterly destitute of the light of truth, yet are not ignorant that the Word is the instrument, by which the Lord dispenses to believers the illumination of his Spirit. For they know no other Spirit than that who dwelt in and spake by the Apostles ; by whose oracles they are continually called to the hearing of the Word " (par. 3).

In the nine opening chapters of Book I of the *Institutes*, of which we have now given an exposition, the line of argument was : (1) that all men are by nature endowed with a " *semen religionis*," whereby they can know God, and that (2) God has

given ample evidence of Himself as Creator and Preserver of all things in nature, so that man could discover Him as a powerful divine Creator there, (3) but that because man wilfully chose to abuse his native capacities, his knowledge of God even as Creator was surrendered and he became lost in the creatures, rather. (4) Consequently it became necessary for God to come to man's rescue with a direct revelation which came into crystalisation in the dealings He had with the Jewish people which, according to His plan, became documented in Scripture, and that this is God's Supreme Word for man, where He is clearly taught to be the Creator of all things, and where men are shown just how His relation to all things is to be rightly conceived. (5) But that the help offered to man might be complete, God not only presented man with this supreme objective evidence of Himself in Scripture, but by means of the same Spirit which acted as the Author of the Scriptures, He enlightens men's hearts and minds to comprehend, understand, and appropriate to themselves this revelation of Himself. Revelation is complete, then, when there is, due to the Spirit's inworking, a conscious assimilation of the Word into our lives.

But (and now we pass on to a still larger truth in this matter of revelation) the intention of God in the giving of the Scriptures to man was not just that he might know how to think of God as Creator and Preserver of things. To stop here would leave the work of redemption incomplete, for since the original intention of God for man was that man might love Him—i.e. have intimate fellowship with Him, as children with a Father—God must needs again make possible this necessary relationship if man is to be wholly restored. This His character as Father, therefore, God has revealed in Christ the Mediator (Bk. II; ch. VI). In Christ, therefore, God has made such an approach to mankind as again to assure man that He is the Father. Hence, " it is not without reason that Christ is called ' the image of the invisible God ' ; but by this appellation we are reminded that unless God reveal Himself to us in Christ, we cannot have that knowledge of Him which is necessary to salvation " (Bk. II ; VI. 4). And " the hope of the pious," even in the Old Testament dispensation, " has never been placed anywhere but in Christ " (Bk. II ; VI. 3).

Concluding the exposition of the things declared about Christ in the Apostles' Creed (which occupies the whole of Book II), Calvin says : " Since we see that the whole of our

salvation, and all the branches of it, are comprehended in Christ, we must be cautious not to alienate from Him the least possible portion of it. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the name of Jesus, that it is in Him " (Bk. II ; XVI. 19). The sum and substance of Book II, therefore, is that in Christ and His work we have God's self-manifestation as a Father in the interest of our complete redemption.

In Book III we move on to the work of the Holy Spirit as God the Sanctifier, where we are shown how, by the secret operation of the Holy Spirit what has above been declared concerning Christ is rendered profitable to us, for " it must be remarked, that as long as there is a separation between Christ and us, all that He suffered and performed for the salvation of mankind, is useless and unavailing to us. To communicate to us what He received from His Father, He must, therefore, become ours, and dwell within us " (Bk. III ; I. 2), and the act by which there is established this bond is called faith, because faith " is a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit " (Bk. III ; II. 7).

Moreover, " what our mind apprehends by faith is absolutely infinite and . . . this kind of knowledge far exceeds all understanding " (Bk. III ; II. 14), because it is " a testimony which God gives of His own goodness " and " does not proceed from every man's imagination " (Bk. III ; II. 31). When the Spirit thus illumines the mind of the believer and strengthens his heart with a powerful assurance, the confidence born of faith " does not float on the surface of the brain " but " takes deep root in the heart " (Bk. III ; II. 36). In short, faith transforms the Word of God into a living, throbbing reality of assurance and peace in the heart of the believer—all accomplished through the operation of the internal working of the Holy Spirit.

We now have Calvin's connected view of Revelation before us. Its logical consistency cannot have escaped us. It hangs together. But we now address ourselves to a consideration of what the present writer conceives to be two characteristic features of Calvin's revelation concept, which also brings into relief its uniqueness among theological constructions. We would first make some observations on : (1) General and special revelation and their relation to one another, as viewed by Calvin, and then

consider (2) The testimony of the Holy Spirit and the question of the objectivity and subjectivity of revelation as seen by Calvin.

It must have struck the reader's attention in the above exposition of Calvin's view of revelation that for him there is in a real sense a natural revelation. It is the theme of chapter III of the first Book that " the human mind is naturally endued with the knowledge of God." From the start he lays it down " as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct (*naturali instinctu*) possesses some sense of a Deity (*divinitatis sensus*) " (Bk. I ; III. 1). And it is a " seed, which it is impossible to eradicate " (Bk. I ; IV. 4) in spite of all attempts to smother or eradicate it by the criminal darkness of iniquity. Human experience itself " testifies that the seeds of religion are sown by God in every heart " (Bk. I ; IV. 1). Whence it is that the doctrine of God is " not first to be learned in the schools, but every man from his birth is self-taught, and which, though many strain every nerve to banish it from them, yet nature itself permits none to forget " (Bk. I ; III. 3).

Calvin quotes Cicero as saying that " there is no nation so barbarous, no race so savage, as not to be finally persuaded of the being of a God " (Bk. I ; III. 1). And " since there has never been a country or family, from the beginning of the world, totally destitute of religion, it is a tacit confession, that some sense of the Divinity is inscribed on every heart " (Bk. I ; III. 1). The very phenomenon of idolatry is turned into an argument by Calvin when he says of the idolater that " his preference of worshipping a piece of wood or stone, to being thought to have no god, evinces the impression of a Deity on the human mind to be very strong, the obliteration of which is more difficult than a total change of the natural disposition " (Bk. I ; III. 1).

But not only is each man by nature in possession of this seed of religion which he has never been known to be able wholly to eradicate, but the common, or general grace of God even extends to the production of virtues which are " not the common properties of nature, but the peculiar graces of God, which He disperses in great variety, and in a certain degree to men that are otherwise profane " (Bk. II ; III. 4). But the extent of the operation of God's general revelation is made most obvious in a passage where Calvin declares that there is no reason " for inquiring, what intercourse with the Spirit is enjoyed by the impious who are entirely alienated from God. For when the

Spirit of God is said to dwell only in the faithful, that is to be understood of the Spirit of sanctification, by whom we are consecrated as temples to God Himself. Yet it is equally by the energy of the same Spirit that God replenishes, actuates, and quickens all creatures" (Bk. II; II. 16). It is for this reason that he admonishes Christians not to despise physics, logic, mathematics, and other arts and sciences, but to make use of them, "lest, if we neglect to use the blessings therein freely offered to us by God, we suffer the just punishment of our negligence" (Bk. II; II. 16).

Wherefore Doumergue with justice observes, "Il faut donc bien s'entendre il y a diversité d'objet, mais pas diversité de cause. Il n'y a pas de dualisme. Dons de la grâce qui s'adresse aux élus seuls, dons de la grâce qui s'adresse aux méchants, comme aux bons, tout est don, et même, en un sens, tout est don direct et personnel. La grâce générale, qui ne fait pas de distinction entre les bons et les méchants, fait distinction entre les individus'."[1] And, as regards the relation between this natural and revealed religion—general and special revelation, the same writer again observes that, "Il est bien évident toutefois que pour Calvin il n'y a aucune opposition entre la religion naturelle et la religion révélée. La religion naturelle aussi est un germe (*semen*) plante par Dieu, auquel Dieu donne l'accroissement. Avec Bavinck il y a lieu de parler de revelation generale, celle qui est faite a bons les hommes, y compris les paiens: c'est la religion naturelle; et de révélation particulière, celle qui a été faite aux juifs et aux chrétiens pour conduire la religion naturelle à son complet et universel développement: c'est la religion révélée proprement dite. Ou encore nous pouvons nous exprimer ainsi: Il y a trois manifestations ou révélations principales de Dieu: 1°. la nature, 2°. la conscience, 3°. la Bible."[2]

To be sure, Calvin does not allow that the knowledge which comes to us through nature and conscience is sufficient. These avenues are found to be inadequate, however, not because they are wrong in and of themselves, but because the corrupt and perverted human will makes misuse of all that comes within its power, natural revelation always remains inadequate for coming to a full knowledge of God. Yet, it is not a matter of the extinction of the knowledge of God, but of its corruption. And men

[1] Doumergue, E. "Jean Calvin," etc., Vol. IV, p. 50. [2] *Ibid*, Vol. IV, p. 43.

are without excuse for this corruption of the knowledge of God which could have remained intact and unsullied, just because that corruption is due to wilful pride and presumption. Indeed it is not too much to say that in Calvin's opinion, " the several manifestations in the history of religions (of the god idea) are conceived not as stages in the gradually advancing evolution of the religious consciousness, but as inexcusable, sinful aberrations, as wilful perversions and defacements of the inborn idea of God."[1]

Natural religion, or God's general revelation, then, is only a propædeutic to lead us to the revealed religion, or His special revelation, disclosed in Christ, who is the heart of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. But special revelation gains its significance and meaning only in relation to a general revelation which has already laid the groundwork for the later construction. There is not between them a difference of opposition —a contrariety, but one makes good what the other by default failed to bring about. With Calvin and the Reformed theologians after him, then, natural religion obtained " its true meaning and validity as the fundamental condition and presupposition of Revealed Religion, which they always regarded as only adding a needed higher radiance to the dim light of nature. They saw clearly that these two elements of all Theology are ultimately one ; that they become equally false and onesided when separated from each other ; and that their union and consummation in a complete harmonious system must contain all the truth possible to human reason concerning God."[2]

Common grace, a general revelation, then, was not a concession on the part of Calvin, but it was in very deed a doctrine which he made special pains to state unequivocally, and which has always been made central in the Calvinistic stream of theology, and which may be seen in the writings of two eminent exponents of Calvinism in Holland of just a few years ago. I refer to Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper.[3] In their works " the whole life of man in society, or state, or church, is represented

[1] Warfield, B. B. *Calvin and the Reformation*, where Warfield discusses " Calvin's doctrine of the Knowledge of God," quoting in note 9, p. 228, from F. C. Baur, in " Die Christliche Lehre von der Dreieingkeit," etc., III, 1843, p. 14.

[2] Hastie, W., *Theology as Science and its present position and prospects in the Reformed Church*, pp. 80-81.

[3] Bavinck, Herman, has written a book entitled *De Algemeene Genade*, 1894 (Universal Grace), and Kuyper (Abraham) has worked out a complete system of dogmatics, in three volumes, centred about this concept, and to which work he has given the title *De gemeene Gratie* (Common Grace).

Note : For an interesting study of Herman Bavinck see *The Princeton Theological Review*, VI, October, 1908, p. 529 ff.

as a service of God, a standing and walking always in the light of His presence."[1] And in this, these theologians are merely carrying out the conception as brought into prominence by Calvin, that no part of human life is secular, but all has the potentiality of being sacred and becomes such when related to God. So it is that Calvin is never found to despise mundane sciences, but recommends their use, and even grants that the proficiency in these things which heathen peoples have gained is not to be separated from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God (Bk. II ; II. 13, 14, 15).

Man, in Calvin's system, never is viewed as having sunk to the depth of degradation to which some modern psychologies represent him as having sunk.[2] Man, in Calvin's view, is never as bad as he can be. There is a general misconception regarding Calvin on this point, due perhaps to the false emphasis which his later followers may have placed upon his doctrine of depravity. But we are sure that Calvin's doctrine was not that of utter depravity, so that there is not a whit of good left in him at all. His doctrine is rather that of total depravity, which declares that though man's being still remains intact after the fall, his nature has been so corrupted that his being is constantly put to wrong uses.[3] God's special revelation, therefore, works such a renovation of his nature, that his being is now directed to an end which no longer dissipates its power, but conserves it for the highest ends. That man actually exercises himself in a moral way, and promotes the civic good even in his unregenerate state is never denied by Calvin, but specifically stated (Bk. II ; II. 13).

In thus clearly enunciating this doctrine of general revelation, this naturalness or innateness of religion as a primary, universal and indestructible element in human nature itself, Calvin stood in clear and distinct opposition to the antagonistic view of the contingency and externality of religion held and advocated in the age of the Reformation by the Romanists, the Socinians, and the Lutherans. For, "the Romanists, Socinians, and

[1] Article mentioned in above note, p. 539.

[2] The reference is for one, to the "Freudian" psychology which drags one's view of man to a sickening nasty level, such that one who believes it, can have only disgust for human nature itself.

The other psychology we have in mind is Behaviourism which reduces man to a mere machine, thereby relegating all man's high achievements to the chance collocation of atoms, robbing men of any conscious efficiency in bringing them about.

[3] For this distinction between "utter" and "total" depravity the author is indebted to his former teacher, Professor John E. Kuizenga, up till May, 1930, President of Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan, but since September, 1930, Professor of Ethics and Apologetics in Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

Lutherans (are) agreed, from their different points of view, in denying that any natural religious knowledge was possible to man, and in making him entirely dependent upon external supernatural revelation for all his knowledge of God and divine things."[1]

For Calvin there is not the separation between the secular and the sacred which obtained in the Catholic Church, in the sense that a thing is sacred only by virtue of a *donum superadditum* conferred by a special grace.[2]

It means also that there does not obtain in Calvin's system the separation into two hemispheres (an inferior and superior) such as lay at the bottom of Luther's view, which, though a dualism of another nature than that of the Catholic Church, was in the end still a dualism.[2]

Calvin cut loose from both these types of dualism. " Il n'y a pas deux domaines dans la religion, le domaine de la religion naturelle, et le domaine de la religion révélée : il n'y a qu'un domaine religieux. Et il n'y a pas deux domaines dans la vie humaine, le domaine des rapports avec Dieu et le domaine des rapports avec la nature. Il n'y a qu'un domaine dans la nature et la société civile, comme en religion et dan l'Eglise : tout est relation avec Dieu, car la grâce est générale."[3] This is the great Calvinistic dogma—that of common grace.

But if Calvin's view of general revelation does not fall into the dualisms of either Catholicism or Lutheranism, neither does his conception of nature take on the form of either Deism or Pantheism.

In the edition of 1559 Calvin inserted a refutation of Pantheism (Bk. I ; V. 5), Doumergue thinks as a correction of Zwingli's views, for he had unduly stressed that " naturam esse Deum." If anything is certain, it is that " Calvin n'est donc pas panthéiste. Son Dieu est, au contraire, créatur et gouverneur."[4] This may be seen from a few curt phrases from his refutation. " The clamour of some, about a secret inspiration animating the whole world," he declares, " is not only weak,

[1] Hastie, W., *Theology as Science*, etc., p. 77. *Cf.* also *Princeton Theological Review*, VI, October, 1908, p. 538, where the same allegation is made.

An understanding of the distinction Luther draws between " lumen naturale," " lumen gratiæ," and " lumen gloriæ," as well as his teaching with regard to " Deus Absconditus " and " Deus Revelatus " as set forth in his " De Servo Arbitrio," amply substantiates this position.

[2] Doumergue, *ibid*, pp. 47 and 48.

[3] Doumergue, *ibid*, p. 49.

[4] Doumergue, *ibid*, p. 47.

but altogether profane. . . . Just as if the world, which is a theatre erected for displaying the glory of God, were its own creator! . . . It is dangerous . . . to confound the Deity with the inferior course of his works" (Bk. I; V. 5).

As little as he is a Pantheist, so little is he a Deist. "For what end," he declares, "is answered by professing, with Epicurus, that there is a God, who, discarding all concern about the world, indulges himself in perpetual inactivity? What benefit arises from the knowledge of a God with whom we have no concern?" (Bk. I; II. 2). In another place he writes in answer to some who strive "to banish all remembrance of God, which the instinct of nature is still suggesting to their minds," and who, though not denying his being, rob him nevertheless of his justice and providence, "shutting him up as an idler in heaven. Now, as nothing would be more inconsistent with Deity, than to abandon the government of the world, leave it to fortune, and connive at the crimes of men (which is just what Deism asserts) that they might wanton with impunity—whoever extinguishes all fear of the heavenly judgment, and indulges himself in security, denies that there is any God" (Bk. I; IV. 2).

Hence Calvin's natural religion is not the same as that of certain philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries —Herbert of Cherbury, Toland, Collins, Voltaire, and Rousseau. For "leur religion naturelle se présente comme une religion complète, indépendente de toute révélation, releguant Dieu dans le ciel froid du déisme, hors de l'histoire et du monde, et traitantant souvent le christianisme de superstition."[1] But with Calvin and Calvinism the expression "natural religion" does not denote such a separation between natural and revealed religion. Here they are a unit.

And it is well to note that it is in Calvin that this conception of the innateness or the naturalism of religion as a primary, universal and indestructible element in human nature, first clearly came to light in the modern world. "It seems to be very generally supposed that this principle was first introduced into modern Theology by Schleiermacher, in his celebrated *Discourses on Religion*, . . . and afterwards elaborated by him with more psychological precision in his great doctrinal work on *The Christian Faith*. . . . And undoubtedly Schleiermacher

[1] Doumergue, *ibid*, p. 47.

thus started the manifold recognition and psychological discussions of the subjective nature of religion, which have been a characteristic element in all the Scientific Theology of the nineteenth century. But in this he had been long anticipated by the Reformed Theology, and indeed he may be said to have derived this and many other valuable elements in his system from it. From the very outset the Reformed Theology not only gave consideration to the essential nature of religion in itself, but determined its innateness and potentiality as an original and inseparable element of human nature with the most remarkable definiteness, and deliberately made it the basis of the whole theological system."[1]

The truth of the above declaration has already become obvious to us, by reason of our observation that the dogmatics of Calvin and its apologetic character has all its essential elements laid down in those nine opening chapters of the *Institutes*, of which we have given a full exposition above.

We now turn our attention to what we consider to be the second characteristic feature of Calvin's idea of revelation, namely—The Testimony of the Holy Spirit, and the question of the Objectivity and Subjectivity of Revelation. A good way to get at this topic is to compare and contrast Calvin with Luther on this matter. We shall allow a Dutch writer to summarise for us Luther's view of Scripture as revelation, which we shall see bears directly upon the subject proposed.

For Luther, then, " even though a book is found in the canon, it is not therefore as yet inspired in the sense that it contains incontestable truth. Sometimes one can find along with 'silver, gold and precious stones,' also 'wood, hay and stubble.' In the assembling of the books much must needs be ascribed to human labours." " Everything which he found in the Scriptures he brought to the test of Christ, whose person and work he had learned to recognise as the chief import of Scripture. Hereby—he tells us in the preface to the letter of James—one can best test a book, namely, whether it preaches Christ or not." So that, " He (Luther) was already in possession of a canon before he made his canon. The gospel of the Scriptures, the word of salvation and eternal life through the crucified and risen Christ, whose comforting and sanctifying power he had learned to know by means of his own personal experience of

[1] Hastie, W., *ibid*, p. 76.

faith—this was his canon, long before he made the canon to be the occasion of his reflections and speculations."[1]

Now compare this view of Scripture with that of Calvin, first as he gives expression to it in his comments upon 2 Timothy iii. 16. The prophets "only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit. . . . We owe to the Scriptures the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it."[2] Elsewhere he declares that "our wisdom ought to consist in embracing with gentle docility, and without any exception, all that is delivered in the sacred Scriptures" (*Inst.*, I; XVIII. 4).

"Such, then, are the Scriptures as conceived by Calvin: sixty-six sacred books, 'dictated' by God to His 'notaries' that they might in this 'public record' stand as a perpetual special revelation of Himself to His people, to supplement or supercede in their case, the general revelation which He gives of Himself in His works and deeds, but which is rendered ineffective by the sin-bred disabilities of the human soul."[3]

Though for Calvin redemption in Christ is the key to Scriptures he never doubts at all but that the entire canon as accepted by the Church was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God for our instruction, in all that which we need for salvation. Hence, though Calvin, too, would not stop short of the necessity of the assimilation into experience of what existed there objectively in Scripture, he never lost confidence in any portion of the accepted Scriptures as capable (because initially inspired by the Holy Spirit) to bring about on its ground a saving experience by means of a second operation of that same Holy Spirit when that Word became applied to the human soul.

And it is tremendously important to understand this difference between Lutheranism and Calvinism. For in Luther's attitude to the Scriptures we can see a door left wide open for the entrance into its fold of the subjectivism and mysticism of

[1] Cramer, D. J., "De Roomsch-Katholieke en de Oud-Protestansche Schriftbeschouwing," i.e. "The views of the Scriptures of Roman Catholicism and early Protestantism," pp. 24, 26, 28.
Note: The translation in the text is that of the present writer.

[2] Calvin, John, Commentary on II Timothy, iii. 16. Edition of the Calvin Translation Society, 1856.

[3] Warfield, B. B., *ibid*, p. 163.

Schleiermacher and Ritschl, which could not attach itself nearly so readily upon the distinctively Calvinistic Churches. Calvin's doctrine of the Testimony of the Holy Spirit is not to be held responsible for the subjectivism of the Schleiermacherian type later imported into theology.

For the really important feature of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit as it bears upon the question we have proposed, of the objectivity and subjectivity of revelation, lies herein : that he never separated the Testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer from the Bible as the documentation of God's revelation in an objective form. By so doing, Calvin forever cut away the possibility of any subjectivism or mysticism which claimed, even by the inspiration of the Spirit, to have come into possession of truth which superceded or supplanted Scripture truth.

We have already sought to bring this into relief when we expounded Chapter IX of Book I, where Calvin answered the presumptuous claims of the Anabaptist mystics of his day on this very score, declaring in conclusion that " while (the children of God) are sensible that, exclusively of the Spirit of God, they are utterly destitute of the light of truth, yet are not ignorant that the Word is the instrument, by which the Lord dispenses to believers the illumination of His Spirit " (Bk. I ; IX. 3). Insistent, was Calvin on this matter, as being fully conscious of the disastrous consequences which would follow from a separation of the two. It was not hidden from his insight that the inevitable consequence of the separation of the Holy Spirit and the Word makes for the springing up, in different ways, of the tyranny of reason and natural fantasy, and in place of the historical Christ there would appear the Christ of the ideal, which is in the last analysis a fabrication of the human spirit, and to whom the human spirit could not look for life and salvation. He was aware of all the dire consequence to faith in Christ as Redeemer which would result from any attempt to separate the Spirit of Christ and Christ the historical personage disclosed in the record of the Scriptures.

In Calvin's view of revelation, therefore, all the elements of a complete polemic against a pantheistic, idealistic subjectivism which with the eighteenth century came more and more into prominence, are to be found. That is the extreme significance of Calvin—that he was not only perhaps the clearest exponent of

the view of revelation which the Christian Church has consistently held, but that in declaring this view, he also answered with the characteristic doctrine of the Testimony of the Holy Spirit, that view of revelation which had lived on since Neo-Platonism and Stoicism, which gave utterance to itself in the Mystics of the Middle Ages, of which the Anabaptists of Calvin's day were a branch, and which was destined to come to its most fearless, most influential expression in German Idealism, and thus come to influence hosts of people in Christendom at the very present moment.

A knowledge and appreciation of Calvin's view of revelation is not without most practical usefulness for the Christian Church today. And it is the hope of the present writer that this exposition and appreciation of Calvin's concept of revelation may somehow help to make clear how we should strike out today in making clear to our age what Christianity means by revelation.

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