

SP08

Calvin;

in John V. Shaner.

The work of John Calvin -- His ideas concerning the Relationship of Church and State.

In John Calvin we have what may be rightly called an educational reformer. His influence on his times and upon the whole reformation movement was tremendous. His "Institutions" became the creed of the reformers. The man himself was consulted on nearly all questions of reformation church policy. His educational policy gave to the whole movement a trained ministry and set the fashion for an educated ministry. Especially were Protestant France and Scotland influenced by his form of church organization. Under him Geneva became a safe refuge for the persecuted protestants of all Europe. The university of Geneva was the center of Reform Theology. Without a doubt Calvin's work in Geneva is an important item in any study of the Reformation.

In this field we see the reformation in its creative aspect. To of us revolts our senses that there is a new burst of freedom, the old controls are gone and the result is an era of license. That the reformation had something definite to offer, is largely due to John Calvin. Here was his genius; not a revolutionary, but a rebuilders. This is especially true of his work in Geneva. He arrived on the scene just as that free city had decided to become protestant. There was definitely need for strong re-organization. Guillaume Farel, that fiery & fearless reformer had discovered himself equal to the task. Liberty was giving way to license. It was Calvin's hour.

Geneva had accepted the Reform faith. It was far from a total victory for the reformation however. The acceptance had been the result of Geneva's struggle for freedom. In the past that city had been governed by a Bishop, a Count and the Syndics of the people. The reforms were limited more or less satisfactorily. Until 1444 Geneva had a long heritage of loyalty to the Bishop. At this time the House of Savoy - then holder of the Dukedom, became heir also of the Bishopric. The people revolted. To their aid came Friburg and later Bern; the former a Catholic and the latter a Protestant state. Bern took advantage of the alliance to attempt to convert the reform faith to the city. Farel was sent to Geneva but for fear of Friburg he had to move quietly. Public disputations were held in which the Romanist defenders were definitely surpassed. Finally the Bishop attacked the city with the House of Savoy. The middle party in Geneva, not too ready to abandon the Roman position thought it better to do so in the interests of free Geneva. In 1535 the council stood for Protestantism. That same year Bern came to her aid and had no difficulty in dispossessing the enemy. Geneva was free and at least nominally Protestant.

In 1536 an inconspicuous scholar arrived in Geneva en route to Italy from France. He had been forced to flee Paris because there he had dared to defend his slandered, if Protestant friend. This quiet Frenchman was John Calvin.

Farel immediately prevailed upon him to stay. He gave several quiet lectures on the Epistles. Finally he drew attention to himself. His a 2 reputation at Geneva, with no preparation he spoke with such authority and complete knowledge on the church fathers that all became interested. This was the beginning. Calvin went on to organize the church in Geneva. They had torn down the old episcopacy, what was to be put in its place?

In January 1537 he produced his memorandum. Here he discussed the nature of the new church. It is decreed that the Holy supper be celebrated at least once a week. However until the people get accustomed to it, once a month would have to suffice. It was to be celebrated after solemn preparation. No unworthy person was to approach the table. It was to be kept pure. Men were set aside to point out these offenders to the ministers and they were to be warned not to attend. As part of the worship, congregational singing of the Psalms was to be inaugurated. Until these were learned, children, boys were to be used as instructors. There was to be a catechism for the children in which they were to be thoroughly tested. Marriage laws were simplified and the Banns were to be announced for three successive Sundays before the wedding.

Calvin also published his ordinances. Here he outlined his ideas of church government. They were not adopted at this time however and after much discussion back and forth the council finally adopted a Confession of faith that was sworn to by all the people. This however must be considered as a great advance considering the character of the middle party. Calvin's power in the city can be seen to be growing. He is constantly at variance with this group. It is anxious enough to preserve the freedom and independence of Geneva but it is more anxious to follow this Frenchman in all things.

Soon after Calvin had begun his work in Geneva, Bane sought to get all the reformed churches in her territory or allied territories to conform to one usage. A synod was held to which Calvin and Farel were in attendance. A common usage was agreed upon. However Bane communicated with the council in all these matters. Certain members of the council were afraid of this foreigner's growing power in the city. As has been said the middle party was never too enthusiastic for his presence or activity. The council took this opportunity to order the Geneva church to conform. Both Calvin and Farel were ready enough but wished to proceed more slowly. With the proper functioning of the church council to decide its own fate. Calvin opposed what he saw to be an infringement upon the jurisdiction of the church. His enemies took this opportunity to have him exiled. The majority of opinion in the council was such as to make this possible in 1538.

The head of the Geneva church was not long gone before he was missed. He had done more than was realized to stamp off that moral

collapse which almost inevitably follows revolution. Geneva began to suffer, her energies dissipated because there was no single loyalty to claim a following. Her moral life broke down again. Religion was a purely political affair and resulted in small moral control. Calvin was needed in Geneva. By 1539 they were asking him to come back.

Following much deliberation and only after the strong advice of his friends Calvin returned. He came back unwillingly in 1541. At this time his troubles began. Geneva had found that it needed him, but all its citizens were still not willing to give him all he desired. His ordinances were accepted, but with numerous that were made in a session of the council from which Calvin was excluded. However a constitution was thus given to his church. - There were four ranks of church officials. Pastors, teachers, elders and deacons. Those who became Pastors must have heard a divine call. This was to be tested by an examination of their knowledge of scriptures, their moral behavior and their preaching abilities; and supplemented by a call of his fellows in some church and a solemn institution into office. The ministry was to be well educated.

The other ranks of men were the elders. Here Calvin attempted to set up a church disciplinary body, but this place most of the changes were made by the council. Calvin had hoped that this body would be a church body, laymen and preachers chosen with the consent of the Pastors who would see to it that no unworthy persons could desecrate the table of our Lord. This body, the Consistory, was to have power of excommunicating any of its members. Here the Genevans disagreed. They had had enough to do with churches which excommunicated - which were "into realms" properly belonging to civil power. Calvin thought that by this method he would get the church to discipline and the civil government to carry out his decrees - especially with reference to excommunication. This the Genevans were unwilling to grant. Thus the Consistory was selected without consent of the ministers. The twelve laymen were selected out of the small council, the council of fifty and the council of two hundred. The Consistory was thus nothing more than a committee of council. At any rate it was given power only to admonish and warn. Thus the disciplinary system of Geneva Government was constitutionally very different from any other medieval state. The difference lay in the power of Calvin's personality. He used his personal influence to see that the ancient medieval habit of civil disciplining of private morals was put into practice. Not until 1555 is the Consistory given power to excommunicate and this after a long struggle until Calvin has rid the town of all but his earnest followers. Hinkley points out that even yet Geneva hadn't accepted Calvin's conception of church government in relation to discipline.

While this is true that Calvin did not get his way in all things he did have tremendous influence. The years from 1541-55 are the story of his slow struggle for victory. With the adoption of the revised ordinances there came into use a new service - well balanced with hymns and instruction. There was a new catechism. Education was improved and due to general improvements, trade improved. Calvin set about acting to improve public morals. He used what influence he had with what we have described as nearly a civil disciplinary body, to improve on the general morality of the city. For 5 months he even attempted a kind of temporary legislation. Laws were made concerning permissible baptismal names. Public morality was the interest of the state.

As his power grew Calvin clashed with the old school. This middle party, the true citizens of the city, alarmed at the rise of the power of the foreign refugees attracted to Calvin, and no doubt requiring somewhat under the strict discipline, grew in opposition to him. During these years there were several crises in each of which Calvin was victor. Finally the Libertine party was defeated in 1555 - Calvin was victor.

There was the controversy with Castellio, a man who applied for ordination but was opposed by Calvin because he questioned the inspirational character of the Song of Solomon. John was able to convince the council of the folly of granting him his wish. There were crises over the disciplining of members of the Libertine party. Especially the wealthy and influential. Finally one of these rebels against discipline was found to be harboring heretical books. - His subsequent execution was a victory for Calvin. The controversy with Balaac over predestination was a close call for Calvin. However he appeared to his congregation and thus won the Council. Then the controversy with Trolliet over the same doctrine Calvin won the day by threatening again to leave. Then there was the trial of Servetus in which the Libertine party lost face by supporting the unfortunate free thinker. Then in 1553 there came a crisis over Calvin's power to excommunicate. It was averted by the offender's timely absence at a service which Calvin threatened to stop if he did appear. This was still warm however when the Libertine party descended itself in a street brawl and riot. All leaders were captured and executed. Calvin had at least no longer any enemies in Geneva.

Thus in 1555 the power of excommunication was given to the consistory. The token system was introduced into the sacraments. An educational policy of unblemished quality was adopted. Free instruction was given in all grades. The University was founded in 1559. Many of the finest scholars of Europe were attracted to it. It became the centre of Reformation Theology.

It has been suggested that Calvin's views on the church and state were not those adopted by the City of Geneva. Rather the French protestant movement or in a lesser degree the Scottish church are following on his pattern.

Calvin was not ready, as was Luther to leave all but the preaching of the "Word" to the state. He did not see that the church, and church officials were subject to the state in matters of discipline. Medieval civil authorities were accustomed to meddling in private morals. Luther saw that that was fitting and right and sought to include the priests' morals in that category. However Calvin's church was not to surrender those powers of discipline to the state. As well as spread the word the church was to see that men obeyed it. Thus he had his regular meeting of ministers to point out each other's faults. No offender was to come to the Lord's table and spoil it. The church was to be able to say who would not come. Then the state was to enforce its decision.

In this ideal union of church and state. The church has dominion over the ethics as well as "spiritual lives" of the church. It makes the decisions and the state carries them out. However its greatest threat is one of excommunication. Nevertheless this element did mean that the reform churches as contrasted with the Lutheran churches maintained a gospel that had social significance. Calvin's view is the social Gospel in church doctrine.