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**THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE
OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
AND CALVIN'S.**

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THE PRE-REFORMATION CHURCH IN ENGLAND.

THREE is a popular belief, sedulously promoted by some English Churchmen, that the Church of England, even before the Reformation, had claimed and insisted upon its independence of the Papacy, and that the Reformation was no more than the effective assertion of this independence. The substratum of fact beneath this popular belief is that English monarchs from Henry II onwards had fought against the growing power of the Papacy and its ever-increasing stranglehold upon the laity, a hold maintained by the twofold grasp of absorption of wealth and administration of the Roman Canon Law. The defeat of Henry II by Becket "led to the enforcement of practically the whole body of Canon Law in England,"¹ and the sonorous "*Libera sit Ecclesia Anglicana*" of Magna Charta meant liberty from the Crown at the expense of subservience to the Pope. The Pope's interest in the war against King John was not purely unselfish. Steadily Papal aggrandizement increased in spite of the Statutes of Mortmain and Provisors. While English wealth was drained by Provisions of Bishoprics and livings for foreigners, while appeals to Rome increased the expense of litigation beyond endurance, the Statute *de Heretico comburendo* laid the life of every English subject who dared to question Church doctrine at the mercy (and oh ! what mercy it was !) of ecclesiastical Courts—Courts which recognized none of the legal rights most dear to an Englishman, especially the right of trial by his Peers. The Church of England was no independent spiritual body protecting English interests, but a drain by which English wealth passed to Rome or Avignon, and the administrator of a legal system which was alien to English notions of justice.

Nature is said to grow poisons and their antidotes side by side. The same intercommunication of *personnel* and thought which assisted Papal domination in England contributed also to the spread of anti-Papal teaching at home and abroad. The doctrines of Wycliffe found their way to Bohemia ; Colet and Erasmus dined together in the Hall of Magdalen College, Oxford (for Universities were a great international union of scholars, facilitated by the common use of Latin among all educated men) ; and the doctrines of Luther found their way readily to England. Henry VIII's refutation of Luther gave the Reformer all the notoriety that an expensive

¹ Pollard's *Wolsey*, p. 356, note 5.

advertisement in the popular press would confer on a "best seller" to-day. England was at once drawn into the vortex of the Reformation movement.

THE LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH.

Our concern here is not with Luther's doctrines generally, but with his doctrine of the Church. This doctrine has two forms—one before, the other after, the Peasant War.

(1) *Before the Peasant War.*

Confronted with a Church in which the spiritual hierarchy, defined by claim of Apostolic succession and submission to the Papacy, was so self-sufficient that the laity were almost a superfluity, and had no right or duty but that of obedience, Luther began by insisting on the doctrine of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ. "In virtue of their common faith in the Word and their mutual and active love, believers form a spiritual community or people."¹ This community is the very opposite of the Papal. Being based on faith in the Word, it is essentially spiritual and invisible. Yet it is not so distinguished from the visible as to be another Church. The invisible and visible are one Church considered in two aspects, the unbelieving adherents being tolerated after the fashion of the mixed multitude in the camp of Israel.

This Society is theoretically free from State Control, though willing to accept the co-operation of the State. But it is a Society without rules except such as may be derived from the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. The Canon Law Luther detested. He called it the work of the Devil, and burnt a copy of it along with the Papal Bull. Nor would he have anything to do with the Common Law, or with any form of law having State sanction behind it. His belief was that law was made only for the lawless and evildoers, and that as the progress of the Gospel enlightened the world, law would become unnecessary.

(2) *After the Peasant War.*

Unfortunately these hopes were shattered by the Peasants' Revolt (1520-5). Luther was confronted with horrible lawlessness. He gave up his original ideal of a self-governing Christian community on somewhat democratic lines, and called upon the territorial Princes to undertake the reformation, each within his own domain. Without altogether abandoning the distinction between the temporal and spiritual spheres, he preached the Divine right of the secular authority, and to him the secular authority was the princely authority. Accordingly, in 1527 the Elector of Saxony appointed four visitors, giving them instructions and commands for their guidance. He disclaimed indeed the right to teach or exercise spiritual rule, but he gave Church Orders, which formed alike a directory of spiritual worship and a scheme of educational reform. Luther protested, but he had nothing better to offer. He

¹ MacKinnon's *Luther*, Vol. III, p. 281.

was no ecclesiastical statesman. As Dollinger said: "He was the founder of a religion rather than of a Church." His ideal was that of the pastor going out to preach the Word and drawing to himself converts so truly converted as to need no laws. Government he left in the hands of the State.

LUTHER'S DOCTRINES IN ENGLAND—WILLIAM TYNDALE.

Luther's doctrines on the State reached England through William Tyndale, memorable for all time as the translator of the Bible into English, to whom we are indebted for no small portion of our Authorized Version. Tyndale wrote a book on *Obedience*, which so captivated Henry VIII, that he declared that a copy of it should be in the hands of every monarch. "The King," said Tyndale, "is in the room of God, and his law is God's law; and one King, one law, is God's ordinance in every realm." Thus there was no room for the priests' several kingdom; and "if the King executed those whom he judged not by his own law, he did so to his own damnation." Henry VIII, as has been said, was captivated by the book, and its inspiration may be traced in every Act of Parliament that led up to the Royal Supremacy. "Whereas," wrote Brynklow in 1543 of Tyndale and other Protestants, "the King before was but the shadow of a King, or at the most but half a King, now he doth wholly reign through their preaching, writing, and suffering."¹ It must be borne in mind that Tyndale was no asserter of the rights of Parliament. His *Obedience* was not a plea for liberty, but for power in the hands of Princes to suppress false doctrine and the Church of Rome. On the relation between Church and State he was Lutheran to the core, Lutheran, that is, in the style of Luther after the Peasant War. He had the same belief that the knowledge of the Word would make an end of all false doctrine, and that it was the duty of each King in his own kingdom to suppress all teaching contrary to that Word.

The fruit of these theories was the Tudor Church of England; Anglo-Catholic (to use modern terminology) under Henry VIII, Protestant under Edward VI, Papal under Philip and Mary, and once more Protestant under Elizabeth, but Protestant under new conditions which were due mainly to Calvin's doctrine of the Church.

How strangely might the course of British history have been altered, if John Knox had accepted the Bishopric of Rochester offered to him by Edward VI. He would presumably have been burnt with the other martyr Bishops by Mary. The Reformation, if it had reached Scotland at all, would have reached it under other influences. Or, even more probably, Mary Queen of Scots might have dethroned Elizabeth and established the Counter Reformation under a united England and Scotland. It has been said that John Knox played Lenin to Calvin's Marx—an unpleasant saying, but so far true that Knox gave practical effect in Scotland on a national scale to the doctrines of Calvin, tested hitherto only in small cantons, and found for those doctrines a home of the greatest importance at a

¹ Pollard's *Wolsey*, p. 359.

momentous historical crisis. Without Calvin's doctrine of Church and State it is hard to see how the modern political world could have come into existence. Luther threw his weight into the scale of absolutism ; Calvin into that of ordered freedom. Yet, paradoxical as it sounds, Luther was all for freedom, Calvin for the strictest discipline.

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH.

In the *Institutes* Calvin says of the Church :

" First of all we believe in the Holy Catholic Church, that is, the whole number of the elect—whether angels or men—and among men—whether dead or living ; and among the living—in whatever country they are found, and among whatever nations they are scattered. And this Church or society has Christ as its Lord, its chief and its Prince." . . .

And again :

" It is important that they recognize only one King, the Saviour Christ, and that they be governed only by the law of Christ, that is, by the holy truths of the Gospel."

CHRISTOCRACY THE KEY TO CALVIN'S CHURCH DOCTRINE.

Christocracy is the inflexible and central note of the Church ; all forms of authority which obscure the Kingship of Christ, or intervene between Him and the government of His Church, are absolutely excluded from the Church of Calvin. Of course the question rises whether the Church so ruled is simply the Church of the elect, known only to God, or is there any visible and external Church ? What, for instance, has Calvin to say to Bellarmine, who holds that "the Church is an assembly of men as visible and palpable as the Kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice, not asking of its members any internal qualifications, but only the external features of profession of the faith and participation in the Sacraments" ? Has Calvinism any external and visible Church ? Calvin's answer is this.

" Personally each of the elect may be sure of his own election. Of others he cannot judge since the number of the elect is known only to God. But the Lord, seeing that it is expedient that we should know who are His children, has so accommodated Himself to our capacity that in place of the certitude of faith He has given us the judgement of charity, according to which we can recognize as members of One Church all those who by profession of faith, by example of good life, and by participation of the Sacraments confess the same God and the same Christ that we confess."

While, therefore, the elect form a mystical body known only to God, the assembly of the faithful is an earthly organization, submitted to our senses, circumscribed in space, established in a place.

DIVERGENCE BETWEEN LUTHERAN AND CALVINISTIC CHURCH DOCTRINES.

Up to this point there is no great divergence between Luther and Calvin, except that as yet Calvin seeks no aid from the State. How, then, does he secure order and good living in the Church ? Entirely by discipline and the cure of souls, which are so indispensable that

the Church can no more exist without them than the body can exist without nerves and sinews. Here is the fundamental difference between the Lutheran and Calvinistic Churches. When Lutheran Hamburg complained that it had a parish with 30,000 souls, the Faculty of Theology at Leipzig replied that Jonah in Nineveh had 120,000 souls assigned to him, and that he could not possibly have looked after each of his hearers. The Lutheran parish is a geographical area in which a pastor preaches and administers the Sacraments. The Calvinistic Church is an organism constituted by watchful discipline and mutual responsibility of the members for the spiritual welfare of the whole.

This note of distinction between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches is so important that an extract from Köstlin, the biographer of Luther, will be useful to corroborate what has been already said. The Reformed, that is the Calvinistic, Churches, says Köstlin, surpass the Lutheran in this, that

"in order to be reckoned a community of the faithful and elect, (a Church) must have the assurance that the institutions of salvation and means of grace are acting well, are penetrating the life of the community, are exercising their influence on unbelievers. This assurance of the reality of saving action which the Lutheran faith assigns to the spontaneous influence of the Spirit of the Word, the Reformed obtain by the exercise of discipline, which, by the fact that it is exercised, guarantees that the Word and Sacraments have the effect necessary for salvation—namely, sanctification. The importance of the Church for the Reformed consists not only in its being the organ of the Word of Salvation, but in its striving to maintain salvation on earth in the forms of an organized society. . . . The exercise of discipline is an essential element in the cure of souls. . . . Domiciliary visitation presents itself in a form quite different from the Lutheran. For the visitor the visit is obligatory : his conscience is troubled with remorse if he neglects a home, a soul. . . . This strong insistence on the duty of exercising surveillance over each one, the preoccupation, not only with religious needs, but with the whole manner of life, this examination of its attitude not only to the religious society, but to society in general in all its domains—all this, making part of the cure of souls, penetrates the life of the faithful in a way quite different from that of the Lutheran Church. . . . And so, on the Reformed soil there was developed in the community not only a Christian sentiment, but an ecclesiastical sentiment, a sentiment of ecclesiastical duties, of solidarity of the members, entirely different from that which is in Lutheran regions."

CALVINISTIC CHURCH ORGANIZATION.

The Church of Calvin is an organized community, not organized after the Papal fashion of a hierarchy, a sacred caste, ruling an obedient laity, but on the basis of a society of equals charged with a variety of duties. In the Church of Calvin there is no essential distinction between clergy and laity. There is a complete equality between all members of the Church, but the discipline of the Church calls for ministers of the Word and Sacraments, elders or rulers associated with ministers in surveillance of morals, doctors or teachers responsible for education, and deacons who have the care of the poor. These various duties are charges from God : those who have a charge receive it from God. Nevertheless, charges are

regulated by the community, and it is the community that elects by its vote the persons invested with a charge.

" Ideally," says Calvin, " it is the vote of all which designates either pastors or elders. Thus we have an independent society, self-governed, of which the most essential character is the combination of the right of God, the authority of God with the action of all members of the society all equal one with the other." ¹

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY.

Next to Calvin's conception of the organized community of equals co-operating for the sanctification of the whole we may rank, for its fruitfulness and historical importance, his doctrine of authority. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were groping after unity of government which should supersede the medieval medley of custom, and variety of independent authorities, a unity which should give expression and force of action to the growing spirit of nationalism. They were feeling their way towards the State which should break down the world of privileged classes, and bring all the nation under the rule of positive law. They were seeking for a " King of kings and Lord of lords " other than the Pope, and the idea of rule, based on Divine authority other than that of the medieval Empire and Papacy, was the great object of their political quest. The Tudor and Stuart monarchies met this demand with the conception of a hereditary monarchy owning the kingdom as a property, which could be disposed of by will, provided always that the legitimate heir could be ascertained—a loophole of which Parliaments and lawyers were eager to avail themselves. But the legitimate heir being found, it was his duty as well as his right to maintain the true faith and to make all provision for the national security. The Divine right of the Tudor monarch left very little room for ecclesiastical or civic right not derived from the crown and revocable at its will. In the search for an authority which should repel the Pope and suppress popular risings, England was threatened with an absolutism such as was actually established in France and Spain.

Calvin's political principles are the corollary of his theological and ecclesiastical, and the whole system is completely thought out, and so thought out as to have had the utmost historical importance. For in the end ideas rule the world. The theology, then, of Calvin

" levels all earthly sovereignties, places sovereign and peasant on the level of sinners, who can only be saved by the sovereign and unmerited grace of God. This grace may give to the peasant a position superior to all hereditary titles. On the other hand, the Prince called by God to his office has a position which no earthly title could give him." ²

This call may take the shape of a Parliamentary recognition of his title. It may justify the rule of a Cromwell, a Charles II, or a William III. The authority of a Sovereign is Divine, his designation to the throne is popular.

¹ Doumergue's *Calvin*, V, p. 389.

² Doumergue's *Calvin*, V, p. 387.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM CALVIN'S WRITINGS.

Two notable passages from Calvin's own writings will confirm the foregoing paragraph, and establish clearly his conception of the relations between Church and State. Calvin asks : " Why did God establish magistrates and police ? First, that we might live, as St. Paul says, ' in all piety.' What does piety mean ? It is the honour of God, the extension of one pure and holy religion. Thus magistrates are warranted in using the sword against those who are troubling the Church, all heretics and propagators of false and erroneous opinions, and those fanatics who have such an idea of the Holy Spirit that they give license and impunity to those who try to upset the truth, to those who dissolve the unity of the faith and the peace of the Church, so that they are manifestly fighting against God, and are evidently incited thereto by the Devil. For we hold that it is the Holy Spirit Who declares by the mouth of St. Paul that God commands magistrates to maintain pure religion. . . . (If they destroy God's order), are they worthy to be exalted ? Who is the mortal being who could dare to attribute to himself that he is in the place of God, in the seat consecrated to His Majesty ? See, it is God Who puts this honour on creatures, Who stretches out His hand and says to them, I would have you to be My lieutenant." (Sermon on 1 Timothy, ii. 2.) At first sight, and standing by itself, this passage seems to place the magistrate in a position similar to the Lutheran. He is to maintain true religion and to suppress heresy. The difference lies in this—that in Luther's Church the minister is subordinate to the magistrate, in Calvin's the magistrate is partner with the minister in a holy alliance, as the following words abundantly indicate :

" Let us take note that God governs all earthly governments, in such wise that it is His Will that there should be Kings, princes, magistrates and men pre-eminent by their dignity, who preside over others and bear the sword for use as God has ordained. On the other hand, let us know that He has constituted in His Church a spiritual government, that of preaching the Word, to which all ought to submit, and against which no rebellion is tolerated. All men of whatever condition they be ought to allow themselves to be ruled as sheep by the shepherd, hearing His voice alone, and following wherever He calls them. These two orders constituted by God are not repugnant one against the other, as fire and water, which are contrary to each other, but they are two things so conjoined that, if one be removed, the other suffers, just as if one injures one eye the other is affected to the quick by the blow, and so are all other members of the body : just as if one arm is cut off, the other suffers much, and is not by itself sufficient for the work of both. It was then an excellent social order when Saul co-operated with Samuel, prophet of God and teacher, to set before him the doctrine of salvation ; and on the contrary, when he separated and started to do anything by himself, all that he did was unfortunate and detestable."¹

CALVIN ON THE MINISTRY.

It is evident that in Calvin's Church the ministry are not subjects of the civil authority, but a check upon it. Indeed, Calvin can

¹ Calvin, *Homilies on 1 Samuel*.

surprise us by the exalted terms in which he speaks of the ministry :

"Behold the power ecclesiastical plainly set forth which is given to pastors of the Church, by which they are constituted administrators. Boldly they dare anything, and constrain every form of glory, might, and worldly dignity to obey and yield to the majesty of God. By the Word they have authority over the whole world, overthrow the rule of Satan, feed the sheep and slay the wolves : by their teaching and exhortation lead the docile ; constrain and bind those who rebel and are obstinate : bind, loose, and destroy, but all by the Word of God."

What, we ask in astonishment, is the difference between this and the Papal claim of the sovereignty of the ecclesiastical over the civil power ? The difference is this : that the ministers are (1) elected by the whole Church, not appointed by the clergy ; and (2) that they are limited by the Word of God, by which the people and the elders especially are able to test the ministry, and to call to account ministers who are not true to the Word. The Divine authority of the ministry, great as it undoubtedly is, has behind it the election of the congregation and the Will of God expressed in His Word—to which Word the whole congregation has free access.

SUMMARY.

Here, then, is the contrast between the Lutheran and the Calvinistic conceptions of the Church. The Church of Luther takes shelter from Rome under the wing of the civil power, and accepts from that power instruction as to administration and order of worship, trusting to the Word and Sacraments to maintain spiritual life : the Calvinistic Church is a spiritual and highly organized, rigorously self-disciplined democracy, co-operating with the civil power, resisting its encroachments, and vigilantly keeping the civil power up to the mark in the discharge of its duty.

HISTORICAL RESULTS.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, or to be more exact, in the years 1559 and 1560, by God's good providence, it fell to the lot of the English and Scottish nations, in rejecting the Papacy, to make choice between these two forms of Protestant Church Government. England chose the Lutheran, Scotland the Calvinistic ideal. John Knox, by his "Blast against the monstrous Regimen of Women," had "banged the door" against his promotion to any bishopric in England. Nor did he covet any one of them. By his ministry to the English Church of exiles at Frankfort, he had sown seed which bore fruit in the Puritan efforts to control the Royal Supremacy by action of Parliament. Though England was not prepared to accept the Calvinistic Church Discipline, and entirely refused Christocracy by submitting to the Royal Supremacy, it did, more or less consciously, drink in from the Puritans the doctrine that the law of God, the supreme principle of right and wrong, was a law to which kings must yield obedience. It is not suggested, of course, that no other influence was at work than that of Calvin. Any such suggestion

would be wholly untrue. But it is suggested that Puritan principles directly derived from Calvin, and maintained in the form of a passionate demand for purity of worship and discipline accordant with the Word of God, were a most important contributory factor to the resistance of England against absolutism.

The story of John Knox and his work in Scotland is too familiar in its outlines to need repetition here. But the outlines give a very imperfect conception of the strength of the principle that underlay the Calvinistic model. The astute and prolonged machinations of King James VI and the heavy hand of his son, Charles I, the oppression of the English Commonwealth, the barbarities of Lauderdale, Turner and Dalziel, the persuasive accommodation of the saintly Leighton—all broke in vain against the immutable principles that Christ only is Head of the Church, and Christ only the Lord of conscience. Principles, however, need a convinced, resolute, and organized body of men to maintain them. That organization was found in the educated democracy of the Church of Scotland : educated on very narrow lines, if you will, and yet where in the world is a book to be found that contains such an education as is to be found within the covers of the Bible ? When Archbishop Leighton sent a picked commission to examine the Covenanters and discover, if possible, the secret of their tenacious resistance, his Commissioners came back amazed at the learning and reasoning skill of the peasantry, whom they had examined, and their defence of the principle of resistance to unlawful authority. We are proud to-day of our sound Biblical interpretation and of the historic insight on which it rests. But, when all is said and done, the Old Testament does not speak to us, the characters of the Old Testament do not live to us, the law of God in the Old Testament does not bind our consciences, as it bound the consciences and spoke with a living voice to the burghers and cotters of seventeenth-century Scotland. Calvin remains yet a Prince, if not the Prince of Commentators on the Bible, because he always looked for the Spirit in the Word, and the strength of his Church lay in the fact that it rested not on a dead tradition, but on a living Word, and that Word the Word of God. In spite of all the mistakes, the blunders, the cruelties and crimes, and even the hypocrisies that marred the development of the idea, was there ever a loftier conception of Church and State than that which bound a nation in a solemn Covenant with Jehovah ?