

Calvin's Attitude to Public Worship.

AN examination of Calvin's teaching with respect to Public Worship forces one to the conclusion that no man appears to have been more generally misunderstood by both adherent and opponent than this eminent leader of the Reformed Church¹ in the sixteenth century. For Calvin has long been popularly regarded, with approval by some and with disapproval by others, as the iconoclast of the Reformation, who, when he gave his attention to the task of reforming the worship of the Church, unsympathetically and even ruthlessly swept away the whole liturgical tradition of the ages, and, disregarding all precedent and Catholic practice, substituted a severe and barren cultus devoid alike of any warmth or beauty. But as Professor Doumergue,² his distinguished biographer, has pointed out, in all this Calvin has been grievously misapprehended and wronged. He was no mere destroyer and innovator. On the contrary, he had a profound regard for the Catholic principles of worship, and while anxious to reinterpret them and give them meaning, he was concerned also to guard them with great care. He did wish to remove many of the mediæval accretions which had made the Services of the Church unintelligible to the great mass of the people, but this was only that their true meaning might shine forth the more clearly. And certainly he cannot justly be held responsible for many of the curious irregularities practised by some who claim to follow him to-day. Even the slightest scrutiny of his writings makes that clear.

1. Consider, for example, his view of ceremonial. It is true that he was in no way favourably disposed towards the elaborate ceremonial which had developed in the mediæval Church: "The less there is of ceremonies the better," he writes in the twentieth volume of his '*Opera*'³; "... Ceremonies exist only for the sake of decent propriety."

¹ By 'Reformed Church,' I mean the Churches which allied themselves to the Swiss reform movement, as distinguished from the Lutheran and Anglican.

² Doumergue, '*Calvin*,' Vol. ii., chapter 4.

³ Calvin, '*Opera*' xx., p. 424.

But although he expresses his disapprobation of ceremonies for the sake of ceremony, he does not allow himself to fall into the error of summarily debarring all ceremonial as having no place in the Reformed worship. If the worship is to be conducted with decency and orderliness, some ceremonial will still be required. Ceremonies are not forbidden, but they are to be used in extreme moderation, and only in accordance with "*une honesteté (decorum) civile.*" In another volume of the '*Opera,*'¹ he further reveals his mind when he asks "Do not unlearned persons require some ceremonial to alleviate their ignorance?" and answers, "It is only fit and right to help them in this way, but I insist that we must be moderate in their use." 'Moderation' and 'decent propriety,' then, are the principles to be observed. The acts and ceremonies used in the conduct of worship are to be restricted to those which add 'reverence' to the divine mysteries, to those which fittingly adorn the action (*ad ornatum actionis congruentem*), and to those which contribute to 'edification.' By which it should be evident that he does not advocate bareness in worship, but simplicity, a simple worship which is decently adorned by suitable, decorous, and meaningful acts, a worship dignified and enlightening (*dignitas quae claritati constat*), a worship beautiful in its dignity and simplicity. And to achieve this end, certain necessary ceremonies must be retained.

(a) One of these dignified and illuminating ceremonies which Calvin counts it no less than sacrilege to abolish is kneeling for prayer. Have we here a human tradition which we may accept or ignore as we please? "I should say," he replies, "it is to such an extent human that it is also (*simul*) divine." And he goes on to assert with some vigour that kneeling for prayer or shrouding a corpse are things which may be neglected without committing a crime only when it is a material impossibility to do them.² In Calvin's eyes the modern habit so prevalent in many branches of the Reformed Church of sitting at prayer would be not only irreverent and slovenly, but it would be criminal. Those are strong words, but they are Calvin's own, and at least they absolve him from any responsibility for this indecent innovation too frequent in present-day Reformed worship.

(b) Another matter arising out of the right use of

¹ '*Instit. chrét.,* IV., x., 11-14.

² '*Instit. chrét.,* IV., x., 30.

ceremonial is the question of the proper place from which to conduct public worship. This is a question of some importance, for there has been, and still is, a deplorable confusion here.

In the main, this confusion has been the result of the failure to comprehend the origin of Calvin's Sunday Morning Service. The main diet of worship with Calvin does not have its source in the Daily Offices or Choir Services as has been frequently supposed; nor does it find its origin in the Prone, as Brightman has been led to affirm.¹ It is derived from the Eucharist. The descent can be clearly and incontrovertibly traced through the '*La Forme des Prieres et Chantz Ecclesiastiques, &c.,*' Strasbourg, 1545, and the Genevan (?) edition of 1542 to Diebold Schwarz's translation and adaptation of the Roman Eucharist in 1524.² Calvin's Sunday Morning Service is not Morning Prayer as in the Book of Common Prayer, but it is the Eucharist without Communion. There are parallels to this Service in the mediæval '*Missa sicca*' and in the Service provided for in the Book of Common Prayer by the first rubric after the Communion, which is as follows, "Upon the Sundays and other Holy days (if there be no Communion) shall be said all that is appointed

¹ Cf. '*The English Rite,*' Vol. i., also Vol. ii. Appendix: "Bidding of the Bedes." The Prone was a short Service inserted into the Mass, and gathering about the Sermon. It was in the vernacular, and was conducted from the pulpit. Its matter and form varied greatly according to the locality, but it usually comprised a singing, a Confession of Sins, a Bidding Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and in some cases the Apostles' Creed. In England the Bidding Prayer usually preceded the Sermon, but on the Continent the general practice was to have it follow the Sermon. Brightman suggests that a modification of this little vernacular Service was adopted by the Swiss Reformers as their Sunday Morning Order of Worship. Though this suggestion is inviting and is admirably presented, M. Doumergue's investigations have made it clear that the Morning Worship in the Reformed Church was derived directly from the Eucharist. The Reformers did not go into the by-ways when they compiled their Services, but followed the main stream of the Christian tradition. They simplified the old worship, but they remained Catholic. This cannot be too much emphasised.

The word 'Prone' is derived through the French and Latin ('pronaus') from the Greek word *πρόναος*, meaning a "porch, vestibule, or portico of a temple." The Service came to be called the 'Prone' because it was conducted from the pulpit, which was outside of the chancel or apse. The Prone would seem to have been fairly common in the late mediæval period, and to-day there is still a short vernacular Service interpolated into the Mass. Usually the Epistle and Gospel are read again in the vernacular, certain short prayers are said for the dead, and the Lord's Prayer said after the priest has come to the pulpit, and before he begins his sermon.

² Cf. Doumergue, '*Calvin,*' Vol. ii., chapter 4. Schwarz's adaptation was quite independent of Luther's.

at the Communion, until the end of the general Prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth together with one or more of these collects last before rehearsed, concluding with the Blessing." That is precisely what Calvin's Service is, and it is of major importance that this be realised.

For observe, Choir Services are properly conducted from the choir at a prayer desk; the Prone properly belongs to the pulpit; but the Eucharist is conducted from the Holy Table. And that, in point of fact, was Calvin's practice, at least until he may have been prevented by the iconoclastic opinions of the people of Geneva created under Farel. We know this from more than one source. In Volume I. of Herminjard's '*Correspondances des Réformateurs . . .*'¹ there are to be found a number of contemporary descriptions of early Reformed and Lutheran worship, and in each case it is clear that the Services are conducted from the Lord's Table.² Further, a rubric in '*La manière de faire prières aux églises francoyses . . . 1542,*' which represents Calvin's use at Strasbourg before his return to Geneva, provides additional evidence. After the opening prayers, during a singing, we read, "The Minister goes into the pulpit. . . ." The Minister (not a Reader) had been conducting worship up till this point, but from where? From the Communion Table, says Professor Doumergue, giving his considered and scholarly opinion. The Communion Table has been the focal centre of Christian worship from the earliest times, and Calvin desired no change. With him, in harmony with Catholic and primitive precedent, the Lord's Table was the centre

¹ Cf. especially pages 411-412. "*Mensa prostat in patenti loco templi, ut ab omnibus conspici possit; altare non vocant, quòd non nisi illis tale quiddam putetur qui ex Christi cœna sacrificium fecerunt; tamen nihil distat a vulgatis altaribus. Ad mensam illam accedit minister, sic tamen ut faciem conversam ad plebem habeat et non posteria. . . .*" (From this place are read the prayers and Scripture, then the Minister preaches from the pulpit.) "*Absoluta sermone, ad mensam redit. . . .*" This describes a Reformed Service in Strasbourg in 1525. At this time the Eucharist was celebrated every Sunday there. Herminjard's volumes are in the University Library, Edinburgh.

² A rubric near the beginning of the Sunday Morning Service in Poullain's '*Liturgia Sacra*' of 1551 (copy in British Museum) confirms this. Knox's practice seems, however, to have been to conduct worship from the pulpit, and that on the grounds that the Service was not audible or the Minister visible to the people if conducted from the Holy Table. (Cf. '*The practies of the Lorde's Supper yewsed in Barvike-upon-Twyed by Johne Knoxe. . . .*') Some at least of the early Puritans in England conducted worship from the Holy Table; cf. Baird, '*On Liturgies,*' p. 140. The evidence might be multiplied.

of devotion and fellowship; and from it the worship was conducted. For it is a reasonable and legitimate inference¹ to conclude that, having gone to the pulpit to preach, the Minister would normally return when the sermon was finished to the Holy Table for the General Prayer ("prière longue") of thanksgiving and intercession, which followed the sermon according to both the Reformed and the ancient use.

The true *Calvinistic* tradition and use, then, is in complete accordance with Catholic practice. When the Minister acts in his prophetic capacity and addresses the people in the name of God, he goes to that place in the church specially constructed and set apart for that purpose, the pulpit; but when he acts in his priestly capacity, presenting the worshipping company's praise and prayer to God in the name of the people, he stands or kneels at the Holy Table, the earthly counterpart of the heavenly Mercy Seat. The Lord's Table is the symbol of divine life and sustenance made available for us by sacrifice on the part of God, and on our part by commemoration, reception, and self-offering. At the Table of Communion Christians have gathered from earliest days for prayer and praise, and they still do so (at the main worship of the day at least), if they have not allowed "their principles to become blurred"² by prejudice or misunderstanding. The Holy Table, not the pulpit, not the prayer-desk, is the centre of the Christian fellowship with God and in God.

2. Passing now from ceremonial to other phases of worship, we encounter much equally illuminating counsel from that "famous and godly learned man." There is the matter, for example, of the use of an Absolution (not a mere prayer for pardon) pronounced by the Minister after the general Confession of Sins. In the Reformed Church this practice has been for the most part considered unsafe, and a prayer for pardon, or certain supplications, has usually been substituted for it. But Calvin appears to have preferred a definite ministerial Absolution. I quote from his 'La manière . . . 1542.' After the general Confession, the Minister quotes certain passages

¹ There is no rubric to guide us in this, but the argument from silence while often dangerous seems warranted here, because we have the whole weight of Catholic tradition for 1500 years behind our deduction.

² To use Moffatt's words in another connection.

of Scripture to sooth the consciences of the people, and then says this Absolution as follows: "Un chascun de vous se recognoisse vrayement pecheur s'humiliant devant Dieu, et croye que le Pere celeste luy veult estre propice en Iesus Christ. A tous ceux que en cest maniere se repentant, et cherchent Iesus Christ pour leur salut, *ie denonce l'absolution des pechez* estre faicte au Nom du Pere, du Filz, et du saint Esprit. Amen." This same Absolution is found in the Book of Common Prayer in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick rendered most beautifully by Cramner. The quotation is from the 1549 edition: "Our Lord Iesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolue all sinners, which truly repent and beleue in hym: of his great mercy forgeue thee thyne offences: and by his autoritie committed to me, I absolue thee frō all thy synnes, in the name of the father, and of the sonne, and of the holy gost. Amen." It is true that when Calvin came to Geneva he was forced by the scruples of some there to exclude it from his Service, but, he writes in the plainest of words, "there is none of us but must acknowledge it to be very useful, that after the general Confession, some striking promise of Scripture ("*insignem aliquam promissionem*") should follow, whereby sinners might be raised to the hope of pardon and reconciliation. And I would have introduced this custom from the beginning (in Geneva), but some fearing the novelty of it would give offence, I was over easy in yielding to them. And so the matter was allowed to remain." ¹

3. Calvin is not less explicit with respect to Auricular Confession. In a letter to Farel he writes: "I have often told you that I should have thought it unwise to abolish Confession in our churches, unless the rite which I have lately introduced be established in its place." That rite was a private interview with the Minister previous to each Communion. Manifestly, in many of the larger parishes to-day it would be impossible to perpetuate this practice. But parishioners should be encouraged more than they are to have regular personal interviews with the Minister. No doubt the open Confessional which is at present being restored in many of the parish churches in England would

¹ Calvin, 'Opera,' Xa, p. 213.

have met with Calvin's complete approval. Not that there was not then disapproval in some quarters, as there is to-day; that is evident from what follows: "It is no new thing that pious souls should fear our falling back into superstition, whenever they hear of our establishing anything that has even a remote similarity to popish inventions. Although I cannot expel these doubts from their minds, for we have not the means of so doing, I may express the wish that they may be somewhat careful to separate the good wheat from the chaff and tares."¹ The most helpful way in which to cope with the disapproval, Calvin felt, was if possible not to abolish the private interview, but to educate the people to its value and meaning. Calvin was a builder, not a destroyer.

4. In the third volume of his 'Tracts,' Calvin again appears as the champion of Catholic usage, this time defending the restoration of the rite of Confirmation. "We should like," he writes, "to see that rite everywhere restored, by which the young are presented to God, after giving forth the confession of their faith."² And in the 'Institutes,' he definitely declares his wish that the laying on of hands be revived: "This laying on of hands which is done simply by way of blessing, I commend, and would like to see it restored to its pure use at the present day."³ It is of great interest, in this connection, to find the laying on of hands being used at Confirmation in some branches of the Reformed Church in our day.⁴

5. King James VI. of Scotland bears witness to Calvin's mind and practice concerning yet another matter, the observation of the Christian Year.⁵ In his address to the Assembly in August 1590 he said (among other things not so much worth repeating) that "The Kirk of Geneva keep Pasch and Yuille," while the second Helvetic Confession, which was accepted by Geneva as by the other Reformed Churches, is further witness to the observation of the Christian year by those of the

¹ Quoted by Henry in his 'Life of Calvin,' i., p. 142.

² Calvin, 'Tracts,' iii., p. 288.

³ Calvin, 'Instit.' IV., xix., pp. 4-13.

⁴ This is done in some of the churches in the Church of Scotland, and at the last General Council of the United Church of Canada (1928) permissive authority for the laying on of hands at Confirmation was given.

⁵ Scott, 'Narration,' p. 57—quoted also by Calderwood and Spotswoode.

Calvinistic tradition, for in it is definitely mentioned the keeping of the five main feasts.¹

6. Of even greater interest at the moment are Calvin's views on the reservation of the consecrated elements at Communion. Here, once more, we find him consistently constructive, and at one with primitive practice. In a letter to Zulger on 29th August 1558 he expressed himself as follows: "That the Communion is not distributed to the sick, also displeases me; and it is not on my account that this consolation has not been accorded to those who are quitting this life. But because a different custom has prevailed, and because a change could not be brought about without great discussion, I have preferred peace. . . . I should have wished, however, to witness to those who will come after us, what I should have desired." I think it is clear that Calvin is not here pleading for private celebrations, but rather for the carrying of the reserved elements from the Church to the sick, according to early Catholic practice, recorded for example in the second century by Justin Martyr, who tells us that "distribution is made to each one of his share of the elements which have been blessed, and to those who are not present it is sent by the ministry of the deacons."²

7. Calvin was also true to Catholic precedent in his observance of the proper order of communication at the Communion, the Minister receiving first, and the people in order after him. We see this by the rubric before communion in the 1545 edition of his '*La manière . . .*' in which his practice is clearly set forth. After the Prayer of Consecration and Exhortation, "*le Ministre ayant adverty le peuple qu'on vienne à la sainte Table avec reverence par bon ordre et modestie Chrestienne, il reçoit le premier le pain et le vin, puis le donne au Diacre et consequemment à toute L'église . . .*"³ and in the modern Genevan '*Liturgie*' the ancient order is still preserved.

¹ While, in 1566, the Church of Scotland accepted this Confession "with the exception of Holy dayes" (cf. Hay Fleming: '*Reformation in Scotland*,' p. 259-260), this prejudice has long since disappeared, and in the '*Prayers for Divine Service*,' authorised by the General Assembly, there is an adequate section "For the Seasons of the Christian Year."

² '*Apol.*,' i. 6.

³ In Poullain's '*Liturgie Sacra*,' 1551, the Minister and his Assistant also receive their communion first, and afterwards it is delivered to the men, and finally the women.

Knox's 'Forme of Prayers . . .' is silent, as is also the Westminster Directory, and it may be due to that that the common practice¹ to-day among the English-speaking Reformed Churches (the Church of Scotland excepted) at home and abroad is for the Minister to receive his communion last of all, the idea seeming to be that this is more polite. It is unfortunate that the deeper meaning behind the early Reformed and Catholic order should thus be lost, and that the Minister, standing in Christ's stead, should not still continue humbly to set the example to Christ's people by first partaking of the sacred elements himself.

8. Nor should the fact be overlooked that Calvin approved very strongly of fixed forms of worship and of read prayers. His Service Book, '*La Manière, &c.*,' in its various editions was not intended to be a mere guide to public worship, as was the 'Westminster Directory' of 1644. And while Calvin expressly provided at certain points in the Service for extempore prayer² framed to suit the peculiar needs of the day, all else was precisely prescribed and departures were not permitted. We know this not only from the Service Book itself, but also from a letter which Calvin wrote to the Protector Somerset, in which he said: "*As to what concerns a form of prayer and ecclesiastical rites, I highly approve of it that there should be a certain form, from which the Ministers be not allowed to vary. That first, some provision be made to help the unskilfulness and simplicity of some; secondly, that the consent and harmony of the Churches one with another may appear; and lastly, that the capricious giddiness and levity of such as affect innovations may be prevented. To which end I have showed that a Catechism will be very useful. Therefore there ought to be a stated Catechism, a stated form of prayer, and administration of the Sacraments.*"³ If Calvin's counsel here were followed there would be no such laxity as that so unhappily present in many Reformed Churches to-day. Above all it is clearly evident that he would have had no

¹ This is done often in actual defiance of the rubrics in the Service Books of the various Churches, though in many cases there is no direction given. Some Ministers in all these Churches, however, have been faithful to the Catholic tradition.

² The Prayer before Sermon is a case in point.

³ Calvin, '*Epist. ad Protector. Angl.*,' p. 41. Bingham, '*Works*,' ii., p. 747.

patience with that most execrable practice presently admitted of allowing each Minister to follow his own fancy when ministering at the Lord's Table, often even to the point of ignoring entirely the authorised books of direction. Certainly we cannot fasten the blame for that kind of looseness on Calvin, and one earnestly looks towards the day when it will be finally forbidden by the courts of the Church.

9. In conclusion, we cannot do better than hear the peroration of Professor Doumergue's description of the Calvinistic cultus as it should be performed each Sunday morning. These are his words: "After these acts of adoration, these prayers said kneeling, the quickening instruction, the worship is completed by the chief ceremony, the holy Supper. . . . *For Calvin the full diet of worship is that at which the Holy Communion is celebrated*, and the complete Order of Worship on Sunday morning is the Order which embraces the celebration of the Eucharist. 'At least every Sunday morning,' he had said in his famous 'Articles' of 1537, before going to Strasbourg. 'At the very least, once a week,' he repeated in the last edition of the 'Institutes.' 'Of a truth, this custom which bids us have Communion once a year (only) is very definitely an invention of the devil (*certissimum est diaboli inventum*). . . . It is most needful that we should do otherwise. We should at the very least once a week dispense the Lord's Supper to the Christian congregation.'"¹

In Calvin's teaching concerning worship, it is very evident that we have a wealthy tradition too long ignored. It would mean much for the improvement of our Reformed worship and for the unity of Christendom if the Reformed Churches were as aware of their great Reformer's theory and doctrine of worship as they are conversant with his theology. Not in theology alone did he excel.

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¹ Doumergue, 'Calvin,' ii., p. 504.