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CALVIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHURCH POLITY.

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• Calvin did not originate the principles of ecclesiastical polity which he describes in his writings and which he endeavored to establish in Geneva. Having repudiated utterly the whole man-made polity of Rome, he carried men back to the New Testament for the God-given polity of the Church. He tried to draw from the apostolic writings the divinely given principles of church government, and to apply these principles in the government of the church of Geneva.

Accordingly, in order to have clearness in the treatment of the subject assigned us, we shall attempt, first, to indicate, very briefly, the nature of the government given of God to the church in the apostolic age; second, to show, very briefly again, how far the church apostatized from the divinely-given type of government; and third, to set forth the part of Calvin in exposing the apostasy and in leading back the church toward the pattern shown in the mount of New Testament teaching.

First, then, of the nature of the government given to the New Testament Church.

The government of the New Testament church is easily distinguished from civil government. They

differ in their instruments, aims, and ways of regarding God. The instruments of civil government include amongst them physical force, the sword being the emblem of its power. The aim of civil government is to conserve justice between man and man and to secure the temporal well-being of the governed. God, as regarded by civil government, is regarded in the aspects and relations of Creator and moral Governor of the universe. The instrument of New Testament church government, on the other hand, was not the material sword, not physical force, but the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. The aim of the New Testament church government was to further the spiritual, and, chiefly, the eternal welfare of the governed. It aimed not at the conservation of justice, but at the moral and spiritual improvement of the governed. It regarded God as Redeemer as well as Creator and Governor of the universe.

The distinction between the two kinds of government had long been before God's people in a more or less vague way; but was clearly developed by our Lord and His apostles. Not only was the distinction between them clearly developed; the separation of the two governments, in fact as in law, was brought about by the teaching and providence in the apostolic age. An independent and self-governing church, under God, came to stand out over against the civil power as embodied in the Graeco-Roman Empire. Christian people found themselves in actual relations to two commonwealths, one ecclesiastical and spiritual, the other, the world power of Rome; the one using the word of God, the other using the sword material; the one seeking spiritual harmony with God and eternal well-being, the other seeking temporal order and tem-

poral well-being; the one regarding God as in Christ redeeming and saving His own, the other regarding God, if at all, merely as the Creator and moral Governor of the universe. At the end of the apostolic age and during the next two centuries, Christian people found these governments struggling with one another—found the civil government trying to destroy all the representatives of the ecclesiastical commonwealth; found the ecclesiastical commonwealth trying to win the heart's allegiance of all men, while leaving them to become better citizens of a state rendered inhostile to the church.

The peculiar power with which the church was dowered, was, in part, that of bearing witness to Christ and to His teaching, and, in part, that of authoritatively governing its members from the smallest to the greatest, by the application of the Scriptures which are the rightful constitution of the ecclesiastical commonwealth. According to the New Testament, the members of the church severally are to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel, and severally are to rule themselves and others, so far as they can, by teaching and admonition, in consonance with the same truth; but the church as a whole is to govern itself with all its members through chosen and ordained organs—through a “plurality of chosen representatives,” officers organized into the form of courts or parliaments. It is also to teach through such courts, but generally through certain of these representative officers acting singly. These representative rulers, in the New Testament, are called indifferently elders or bishops. In the apostolic writings every elder is a bishop and every bishop is an elder. These scriptural representative church rulers—presbyter-bishops—existed in the

later years of Paul in two classes, viz.: a class of bishops called to rule only, and a class of bishops called to labor in word and doctrine as well as to rule—the passing away of the apostles having necessitated the development of representative teachers, and that development having taken place naturally within the sphere of the eldership.

A plurality of these representative rulers was to be elected by every local church; and they, after organization under a moderator, or president, were to govern that church on the principles set forth in God's word. When a matter of general concern should come before them, they were to convene with representatives of the church elsewhere, and with them deliberate and conclude concerning the matter; as may be seen from the example of the presbyter-bishops of Antioch carrying the question, whether or not the Gentile converts should be circumcised, to the synod at Jerusalem. Thus the church was to govern itself, under God, and in the light of His word by a graded series of courts, made up of chosen representatives of two classes.

To summarize still more briefly: Ecclesiastical government, according to the New Testament, is a government in which the power is purely spiritual—a power of interpreting, declaring, and applying the will of Christ, the Head of the church, as that will is revealed in the Scriptures. This power is used by the members of the church in choosing their representative officers. It is applied in governing by pluralities of chosen representatives of two classes, teaching elders, or teaching bishops, and ruling elders, as they may be called indifferently, organized into courts, or parliaments, or congresses, or synods, or assemblies, or presbyteries, and these courts so related as to real-

ize the idea of unity. There is neither democracy nor monarchy in the New Testament church government. The principles of that polity are those of the spiritual republic—the principles of perfect representative government according to a divine constitution.

Second, of the Church's Apostatizing from the type of government set up by the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles.

Unhappily the church did not long maintain its divinely given type of government. Churchmen thought they could improve on the divine plan. Under the influence of the current civil government—that of the empire—which had displaced the old Roman republic to the seeming advantage of the governed; and in the presence of many foes, internal and external, it was deemed best to have rule by one strong presbyter-bishop rather than by a body of presbyter-bishops. It was thought that one man—a dictator—could act with more dispatch than a collective body; and that he could more easily and effectively stifle heresy in its first outcroppings, or throttle schism in its nascency. Accordingly, here and there, even before the end of the second century, the prerogatives of the presbytery, in certain congregations, in part were concentrated in the hands of one presbyter; and to him the name of bishop was more and more restricted. Thus came into existence congregational monarchs—the bishops of the Middle Ages in the first stage of their evolution. A little later, some congregational bishops, partly by the cession of further prerogatives on the part of the presbytery, and partly by usurpation of still other parliamentary functions, grew into diocesan stature. Toward the end of the third century, certain diocesans

grew by similar means into the stature of archbishops. In the early part of the fourth century, a few of the greater archbishops approached the patriarchal rank. During the Middle Ages, the Pope of Rome came to be, according to the papal theory, of right the absolute monarch of the whole church. Actually he ruled as an oppressive tyrant over the whole of western Christendom for centuries prior to the Reformation, though not without various rebellions and insurrections against his rule, some of which seriously threatened his overthrow.

Meanwhile, along with the centralizing drift into monarchy, the people were stripped by degrees of the elective franchise. They had chosen their officers in the apostolic church. After the development of the old catholic bishop into his full-grown diocesan maturity, he began, in the west, to appoint presbyters and deacons who should labor in his bounds, taking the right of electing them out of the people's hands. Mindful of their ancient privilege of electing their officers, the people sometimes anticipated action by the clergy on occasion of a vacancy in the bishopric, by a more or less tumultuous calling of the man of their choice. But such popular action became rarer with the passing centuries; and, ere the depths of the Middle Ages had altogether ceased. A vacancy in the episcopate was filled by the choice of the cathedral clergy. The bishop elect after obtaining the sanction of the pope, might be ordained by the other bishops of the province. Powerful civil rulers, throughout many decades and over wide regions, bent this papal mode of filling offices in the church, so as to place therein their favorites; but, in general, after 1073, and thence down to the

Reformation, the papal theory found widespread application.

Not only did the church forsake the representative type of government for the monarchical, and the elective rights of the people for the papal method of filling offices, but it essentially changed the nature of ecclesiastical power. According to the New Testament, church power is, as has appeared, declarative and ministerial. The church has the power only to find out, declare, and do, the will of Christ. But in the Middle Ages the church claimed a power magisterial and legislative. It not only claimed the right; it assumed to exercise the power of sole authoritative interpreter of Scripture, and forced its faulty interpretations as the truth of God on the protesting consciences of multitudes. Moreover, to Scriptures it added traditions, which it made of superior authority to Scripture, since it bent the word of God by the superimposed traditional rubbish.

Not only so; the church of the Middle Ages joined to the magisterial and legislative power, which it had substituted for the ministerial and declarative power of the New Testament church, the power of state—physical force. It merged its peculiar character as a kingdom whose one weapon is truth.

Once more; amongst these changes, the ministry of the New Testament, mere officials in the spiritual commonwealth, had given place to a special priesthood, whose functions were not primarily to teach, to rule, or to serve tables, but to offer sacrifice and administer sacraments.

Thus, while still retaining the names of the officers of the New Testament church—bishops, elders, and deacons,—the church of Rome had changed the genius

of her government from representative to monarchical, stripped the covenant people of the right of electing their officers, perverted the nature of ecclesiastical power and joined to it the power of state; and substituted a special priesthood for the simple officers of the New Testament church.

In the remarks just made, we have given only the meagerest sketch of the apostasy of the Romish church, from the type of government set up by our Lord and His apostles; but the limits of our time allow nothing more; and the sketch clears the way for,

Third, the discussion of our real subject, Calvin's contributions to the church polity, or, the part of Calvin in exposing Rome's apostasy and in expounding a type of church government closely approximating the New Testament type, and in leading a portion of the church back to it.

That member of a farmer's household contributes not a little to the production of a good crop, who does the most to clear the ground in which it is to be grown, of obnoxious growths, breaks it up and makes it ready for the reception of good seed; and that one of the great reformers whose exposition of the falsity of the Romish system was most radical and effectively published did not least to contribute to the correct polity. It is to be doubted whether any reformer really contributed more by this sort of preparatory work, toward a rectified church polity, than Calvin. Calvin's abilities to gather the facts of Scripture teaching and to throw them into system was so pre-eminent that we ordinarily think of him as an incarnation of constructive genius. His genius for the destruction of the false and vicious was not less great. The work of demolition had been done, in part, indeed, in the gen-

eration before Calvin. Luther had been stalking among the fabrications of Rome. He had shattered the columns and the walls. But it was given to Calvin to crush into fine dust the foundations. Luther with the flail of a Titan, had bruised, crushed and beaten down many noxious Roman growths. It was left to Calvin, with mattock keen as a scimitar, to uproot them. Luther had swept off the huge tubercular ulcers which bespoke the vanishing spirituality of the Romish body,—had swept them off as if with a great two-handed sword. It was left to Calvin to go after the roots and the rootlets of the ulcers with a scalpel.

As far as men would submit to his surgery, Calvin could take out the uttermost rootlets of these putrid and cancerous ulcers. What he could do, he did. His exposition of the unscriptural character of the Romish church was thoroughgoing, complete and effective with all the lovers of the truth who pondered it. The warfare which he made against the Roman scheme of church government was, indeed, incidental to his establishment of his own system. Naturally, therefore, he attacked the Roman scheme now in one of its aspects and now in another of them, the point of attack being determined in every case by the corresponding truth, of his own system, which he was just then inculcating. But if his attacks were incidental, and against peculiar tenets, they were nevertheless radical, reaching to the innermost springs of the open sores.

Hear this impeachment of the Romish church government of his day—an impeachment which he, by previous exposition, had justified: “Now if anyone will closely observe and strictly examine this whole form of ecclesiastical government, which exists at the present day under the Papacy, he will find it a nest of

the most lawless and ferocious banditti in the world. Everything in it is clearly so dissimilar and repugnant to the institution of Christ, so degenerated from the ancient regulations and usages of the church, so at variance with nature and reason, that no greater injury can be done to Christ than by pleading his name in defense of such a disorderly government. We (they say) are the pillars of the church, the prelates of religion, the vicars of Christ, the heads of the faithful, because we have succeeded to the power and authority of the apostles. They are perpetually vaunting these fooleries as if they were talking to blocks of wood; but whenever they repeat these boasts, I will ask them in return, what they have in common with the apostles. . . . So when we assert that their kingdom is the tyranny of Antichrist, they immediately reply, that it is that venerable hierarchy, which has been so often commended by great and holy men. As though the holy fathers, when they praise the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or spiritual government, as it had been delivered to them by the hand of the apostles, ever dreamed of this chaos of deformity and desolation, where the bishops, for the most part, are illiterate asses, unacquainted with the first and plainest rudiments of the faith, or, in some instances, are children just out of leading strings; and if any be more learned—which, however, is a rare case—they consider a bishopric to be nothing but a title of splendor and magnificence; where rectors of churches think no more of feeding the flock, than a shoe-maker does of ploughing; where all things are confounded with a dispersion worse than that of Babel, so that there can no longer be seen any clear vestige of the administration practiced in the time of the fathers.” Thus speaks Calvin in Book



Calvin Refusing the Lord's Supper to the "Libertines."

IV, Chapter 5, Section 13 of the Institutes, a chapter under the heading: "The Ancient Form of Government Entirely Subverted by the Papal Tyranny,"—a chapter in which he has shown that all the "rights of the people had been entirely taken away,"—"Their suffrages, assent, subscriptions, and everything of this kind"; a chapter in which he shows that the electors of the clergy, whether canons of the cathedrals, as in the case of bishops, or bishops in the case of lower clergy, are governed by considerations far different from those held forth in I Timothy iii. 2-7, since, instead of choosing to office persons, "blameless in character, monogamous, . . . apt to teach, . . . not brawlers," they chose, commonly drunkards, fornicators, gamblers, Simoniacs,—persons who force "themselves into the possession of a church, as into an enemy's farm," who obtain it "by a legal process, who purchase it with money, who gain it by dishonorable services, who, while infants just beginning to lisp, succeed to it as an inheritance transmitted by their uncles and cousins, and sometimes even by fathers to their illegitimate children,"† and persons who cannot be present with the flock to which they are chosen even if they would, having already many benefices,—canonries, abbacies, bishoprics, it may be.

In Chapters VIII, X, and XI, of Book IV of the Institutes, he shows in the same thorough way the papal and prelatial, licentious and cruel perversion of church power; that the hierarchy, throwing off the role of teachers and ministers of the divine will as revealed in God's word, have assumed to make and impose laws of their own. Having exposed the per-

† Institutes, Book IV., Chapter 5, Section VI.

version and contemplated the fruits of this usurped legislative power, he asks: "How can they vindicate themselves, while they esteem it infinitely more criminal to have omitted auricular confession at a stated time of the year than to have lived a most iniquitous life for a whole year together; to have infected the tongue with the least taste of animal food on Friday, than to have polluted the body by committing fornication every day; to have put a hand to any honest labor on a day consecrated to any pretended saint, than to have continually employed all the members in the most flagitious actions; for a priest to be connected in one lawful marriage, than to be defiled with a thousand adulteries; to have failed of performing one vow of pilgrimage, than to violate every other promise; not to have lavished anything on the enormous, superfluous, and useless magnificence of churches, than to have failed of relieving the most pressing necessities of the poor; to have passed by an idol without some token of honor, than to have insulted all the men in the world; not to have muttered over, at certain seasons, a multitude of words without any meaning, than to have never offered a genuine prayer from the heart? What is it for men to make the commandment of God of none effect, if this be not?"*

Calvin was not less careful in his criticism of the church because of its having joined the power of the sword with the power of the church and the Pope's having become an earthly sovereign. In Book IV, Chapter 10, of *Institutes*, sweeping back over his previous teaching, he says:

"While the Romanists boast of their spiritual juris-

* *Institutes*, Book IV., Chapter 10, Section X.

diction, it is easy to show that nothing is more contrary to the order appointed by Christ, and that it has no more resemblance to the ancient practice than darkness has to light.

“Though we have not said all that might be adduced for this purpose, and what we have said has been condensed within small compass, yet I trust we have so confuted our adversaries as to leave no room for anyone to doubt that the spiritual power arrogated by the Pope and all his hierarchy, is a tyrannical usurpation, chargeable with impious opposition to the word of God, and injustice to his people. Under the term spiritual power, I include their audacity in fabricating new doctrines by which they have seduced the unhappy people from the native purity of the word of God, the iniquitous traditions by which they have ensnared them, and the pretended ecclesiastical jurisdiction which they exercise by their suffragans, vicars, penitentiaries, and officials. For if we allow Christ any kingdom among us, all this kind of domination must immediately fall to the ground. The power of the sword, which they also claim, as that is not exercised over consciences, but operates on property, is irrelevant to our subject; though in this it is worth while to remark, that they are all consistent with themselves, and are at the greatest possible distance from the character they would be thought to sustain to the church. Here I am not censuring the particular vices of individuals, but the general wickedness and common pest of the whole order, which they would consider as degraded, if it were not distinguished by wealth and lofty titles. If we consult the authority of Christ on this subject, there is no doubt that He intended to exclude the ministers of His word from civil dominion

and secular sovereignty, when He said: "The kings of the earth exercise dominion over them; but it shall not be so among you."* His criticism is a demonstration that the ecclesiastic, as such, should not wield the power of the sword. On a kindred subject, the proper relation of church and state, Calvin was not indeed prepared for an adequate criticism, as will appear in the sequel. Believing that the church should not possess the power of civil coercion, he believed, nevertheless, that it was "the part of pious kings and princes to support religion by laws, edicts, and judicial sentences."†

In irrefutable fashion, he showed that the Romish church had substituted for the officers of the New Testament church, a special priesthood; showed that the monkish priests,—the mendicants and a few others excepted,—spent their time in the cloister either in chanting or muttering over masses, as if it were the design of Jesus Christ that the presbyters should be appointed for this purpose, or as if the nature of their office admitted it; he showed that they did not administer sacraments or execute any other branch of public duty, whereas the New Testament presbyter must tend his flock. He showed, also, that many of the secular priests were mere mercenaries, who hired themselves to labor by the day in singing and saying masses; and that the vast majority of the priests were not at all doing what God requires of the presbyter, viz., feeding the church and administering the spiritual kingdom of Christ. He showed that, in his day, there was in point of character, no body of men more infamous for

* Book, IV., Chapter II, Sections VII and VIII.

† Book IV., Chapter II, Section XVI.

profusion, delicacy, luxury and profligacy of every kind; that no class of men contained more apt or expert masters of every species of imposture, fraud, treachery and perfidy; that nowhere could be found equal cunning and audacity in the commission of crime; that there was scarcely one bishop, and not one in a hundred of their parochial clergy who, if sentence were passed upon his conduct, according to the ancient canons, would not be excommunicated, or, at the very least, deposed from his office.

Thus Calvin showed the world of his day, so far as it had eyes to see, that the government of the Romish church was wholly unscriptural and not only unscriptural but morally nasty and against reason and nature.

In all his criticism of Rome, in revealing her cancerous growths, he was controlled by intensest honesty, desire for correspondence with the objective facts. And in this criticism he did great service to the cause of true ecclesiology. Men who are not aware that they have putrid organs are not inclined energetically to seek surgical aid. Men who do not feel the rottenness in the political life around them are not wont to seek its cleansing. Recognition of the evil of the Romish polity—a clear vision of it,—was needed, that men might turn with adequate energy and persistence to a nobler form of church government.

But his work nowhere stopped with the destruction of the false, the vicious and the monstrous. His was pre-eminently a constructive genius. From his very nature he must take the elements of truth accepted by him and throw them into a system. Accordingly, as early as the summer of 1536, he expressed his wish that preachers, bishops, and elders should be chosen

according to scriptural method and given their scriptural functions; and by the year 1542 he had the system fully developed and in partial application in Geneva. It is but just to observe here that it was in the sphere of church polity that he did his constructive work with least of aid from previous teachers this side the apostolic age. When building his doctrine of trinity, he wrought in the light of Athanasius and Augustine. In setting up his doctrine of Christology, he worked in the light of Leo I, and of the Chalcedon council. In the realm of anthropology, Augustine had laid out and graded the way. On the doctrine of the atonement, Anselm had thrown a great light. On the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, Ratramnus and Berengar. On justification by faith, Lefevre and Luther. But if Calvin got suggestions touching the Biblical form of church polity from Lambert, and Oecolampadius, he got little more. With little help, he derived his system of ecclesiastical government, for the most part, from the scriptures of the New Testament,—a system forming the approximately Biblical counterpart of his theological system and helping to conserve that system whenever adopted by a body of God's people, an ecclesiastical system which insures the largest individual liberty compatible with order and common well-being, suggests analogous civil governments and has been a powerful factor making for free representative government in the state.

In this was his greatest contribution to church polity, his eduction from the scripture of so many elements of the New Testament plan of church government.

To appreciate this contribution we must bring before ourselves the main features of the plan of govern-

ment which he constructed, and which, with modifications he applied in the Genevan church, viz.: The self-government of the church under the headship of Christ; the stress laid upon the ecclesiastical discipline of all the members from the smallest to the greatest; the exercise of the power of governing by a consistory, or parliamentary court, consisting of elders of two classes, viz.: ruling elders and elders who not only rule but also labor in word and doctrine; and the restoration of the bishop, presbyter, and deacon, to New Testament dimensions and functions.

Taking up these features in their order:

First. *The self-government of the Church under the headship of Christ.*

Calvin taught that men may not "enjoin upon the observance of the church anything that they have invented themselves, independently of the word of God"; that "this power was unknown to the apostles and so frequently interdicted to the ministers of the church by the mouth of the Lord, that it was a marvel that they have dared to usurp it, and still dare to maintain it, contrary to the example of the apostles and in defiance of the express prohibitions of God's word." He taught that everything pertaining to the perfect rule of a holy life, the Lord has comprehended in His law, so that there remains nothing for men to add to that summary; and that He has done this, firstly, that since all rectitude of life consists in the conformity of all our actions to His will, as their standard, we might consider Him as the sole master and director of our conduct; and secondly, to show that He requires of us nothing more than obedience"—obedience to the divine will. Turning, in heaven-born wrath from the

pernicious and impious ecclesiastical constitutions, the traditions of men, "after the rudiments of the world," "which were making the commandments of God of none effect,"—constitutions, which as he said, "absolved in adultery and condemned in meat, that allowed a harlot and interdicted a wife,"—and that were so contrived as to have a "show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body," petty inventions fitted to lead the minds of the vulgar, the weak and the worldly-wise, captive,—turning from these, Calvin taught that Jesus is King in Zion; that He gives the spiritual kingdom a complete constitution in accord with which it is to govern itself; that that law, once given to the church, remains forever in force,—that law which reads "Whatsoever thing I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto nor diminish therefrom"; that the Lord's kingdom is not to be taken away from Him, which is done when He is worshipped with laws of human invention, as when the church teaches, "for doctrine, the commandments of men," or binds burdens on their backs by rule not of Him; that church order, indeed, includes a variable element, as well as a fixed, the variable to be determined by the power in the church to make regulations; but that in regard to such regulations care must be taken that they be not considered necessary to salvation, and so imposing a religious obligation on the conscience, or applied to the worship of God, and so represented as essential to piety that this power of making regulations only about circumstances so standing around enjoined actions that the divinely enjoined actions cannot be separated from them, or at least cannot be separated from them without loss of decorum or order,—that this power is limited to mak-

ing such regulations, for example, as, that certain hours shall be appointed for public worship, quietness and silence shall be observed under sermons, days shall be fixed for the observance of the Lord's Supper, and decorum observed in the administration of it, and regulations for the preservation of discipline, as catechising, ecclesiastical censures, fasting and everything else that can be referred to the same class,—regulations touching *ceremonies, rites, or discipline and peace*; and that in making of these the church must conform to the general rules divinely given.* He teaches that these regulations are to be regarded for the sake of order and decorum and not for God's authority in them. He thus teaches that the government of the church is to be by divinely given constitution; that it is the Lord's kingdom and to be governed by His law.

As is implied in what has been said, Calvin distinguished sharply between civil government and ecclesiastical government. He taught that the church has no power of the sword to punish or to coerce, no authority to compel, no prisons, no fines, or other punishments, like those inflicted by the civil magistrate; that the object of ecclesiastical power is not that he who has transgressed may be punished against his will; but that he may profess his repentance by a voluntary submission to chastisement; that the difference between church and state is very great, the church not assuming to itself what belongs to the magistrate, and the magistrate being unable to execute that which is executed by the church. This particular he illustrates by the following example: "Is any man intoxicated? In a well regulated city he will be punished by im-

* Book IV., Chapter 10, Sections XXIX, XXX, XXXI.

prisonment. . . . With this the laws, the magistrate, and the civil judgment will be satisfied; though it may happen that he will give no sign of repentance but will rather murmur and repine against his judgment. Will the church stop here? Such persons cannot be admitted to the sacred Supper without doing an injury to Christ and His holy institution. And reason requires that he who has offended the church with an evil example, should remove by a solemn declaration of repentance the offence which he has excited."

But, while Calvin distinguished thus clearly and sharply between church and state, holding that they were independent of one another, each in its domain, he saw no propriety in their separation. On the contrary, he believed that every civil government should profess the true religion; that *it should* "by punishment and corporeal coercion, purge the church from offences;" and that it should support and further its good work as the first object of its own existence.

Here was a mistake of Calvin's. He believed that God in Christ is head both of church and state; that the office of civil government extends to both tables of the Decalogue. This was a conception of his age, inherited from the ages back to Constantine the Great, which he was not able to shake off. But the logic of the position is persecution by the state for that which it esteems to be religious heresy. If the state has the right to profess Christ as its head and to propagate His religion, then it has the right to protect it from heresy, the right to punish heresy with the forces at its command. Duties are correlated with rights. Naturally we find the Geneva state punishing with fine, imprisonment, banishment or death, such men as Gruet, Bolsec and Servetus. God has given to no

Christian state such a right—the right of corporeally “punishing for heretical opinion.”

Calvin and his age were wrong in holding that it was a concern of the state to enforce the observance of the first table of the Decalogue; that the state properly could become Christian and make the protection, support and advancement of the church its highest aim; and that in the outworking of this aim it could use physical coercion.

But we have him to thank for distinguishing between the civil and ecclesiastical powers and governments so clearly; and showing that ecclesiastical government is of right only by the God-given constitution. We have him to thank, too, for the emphasis he laid on the duty of the church to *govern itself*. For while he believed in the propriety of the union of church and state, he was so convinced that the church should govern itself that he taught that it should do this at the cost of self-support, if necessary. That is, he taught that while the state should support the church, and allow the church to govern itself in accord with its divine constitution, yet, if it will not give this support while conceding freedom, then the church should forego state support that it may govern itself.

The first main feature, then, of Calvin's plan of ecclesiastical government was the self government of the church under the headship of Christ. In this teaching he was vastly superior to the earlier reformers; he planted seed that had fruited in the weakening of the connection between the church and the state throughout all reformed christendom; he is making to-day for the separation of the two powers in whatsoever quarters his influence has reached; he is developing the reformed churches by the process of self

government; and should more and more enthrone Christ as King *de facto* as he is King *de jure*, in the universal church.

The *second main feature* was the *emphasis laid upon ecclesiastical discipline, the ecclesiastical discipline of all the members of the church from the smallest to the greatest.*

Calvin valued discipline as second only to teaching. The effort to introduce discipline was the primary occasion of his expulsion from Geneva in 1538. He was hardly settled comfortably in the church of the strangers in Strasburg before he introduced it there. When recalled to Geneva in 1541, he proceeded at once to the work of establishing it firmly there. The importance of discipline he formally sets forth as follows (Book IV., Chap. XII., Section 2):

“As some have such a hatred of discipline as to abhor the very name they should attend to the following consideration, that if no society and even no house, though containing only a small family, can be preserved in a proper state without discipline, this is far more necessary in the church, the state of which ought to be the most orderly of all. As the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so discipline forms the ligaments which connects the members together, and keeps each in its proper place. Whoever, therefore, either desire the abolition of all discipline or obstruct its restoration, whether they act from design or inadvertency, they certainly promote the entire dissolution of the church. For what will be the consequence, if every man be at liberty to follow his own inclinations? But such would be the case, unless the preaching of the doctrine were accompanied with private admonitions, reproofs, and other means to en-

force the doctrine, and prevent it from being altogether ineffectual. Discipline, therefore, serves as a bridle to curb and to restrain the refractory, who resist the doctrine of Christ; or as a spur to stimulate the inactive; and sometimes as a father's rod, with which those who have grievously fallen may be chastised in mercy, and with the gentleness of the spirit of Christ. Now when we see the approach of certain beginnings of a dreadful dissolution in the church, since there is no solicitude or means to keep the people in obedience to our Lord, necessity itself proclaims the want of a remedy; and this is the only remedy which has been commanded by Christ, or which has ever been adopted among believers."

In accordance with the teachings of Christ, Calvin made three degrees of discipline, viz.: private admonition, admonition in the presence of witnesses, or before the church, and excommunication. Private admonition is to be employed universally when occasion demands, and by all. But pastors and presbyters, beyond all others should be vigilant in the discharge of this duty; being called by their office not only to preach to the congregation, but also to admonish and exhort in private houses, if in any instances their public instructions may not have been sufficiently efficacious, as Paul inculcates, when he says that he taught "publicly and from house to house" and protests himself to be "free from the blood of all men" having "ceased not to warn every man night and day with tears." Admonition in the presence of witnesses is to be employed against public offences of less heinousness and against private offences of an inferior sort when private admonition fails. Excommunication is to be employed only "for the correcting of atrocious crimes,"

such as "adultery, fornication, theft, robbery, sedition, perjury, false witness, and other similar crimes, together with obstinate persons, who after having been admonished even of smaller faults, contemn God and his judgments."

He represents the ends of discipline as: First, that those who lead scandalous and flagitious lives may not, to the dishonour of God, be numbered among Christians . . . for as the church is the body of Christ, it cannot be contaminated with such foul and putrid members without some ignominy being reflected upon the head." The second is, "that the good may not be corrupted, as is often the case, by constant association with the wicked; for such is our propensity to err, that nothing is more easy than for evil example to seduce us from rectitude of conduct." "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." The third end is, "that those who are censured, or excommunicated, confounded with the shame of their turpitude, may be led to repentance."

On no point does Calvin lay more emphasis than that discipline should be administered "with a spirit of gentleness," "For there is," he says, "constant need of the greatest caution, according to the injunction of Paul, respecting a person who may have been censured," "lest perhaps such an one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow; for thus a remedy would become a poison, but the rule of moderation may be better deduced from the end intended to be accomplished; for as the design of excommunication is that the sinner may be brought to repentance, and evil examples taken away, to prevent the name of Christ from being blasphemed and other persons tempted to imitation; if we keep these things in view, it will be

very easy to judge how far severity ought to proceed and where it ought to be stopped."

He inculcates earnestly the duty of trying to win to a holy life the excommunicated. He made it the church's duty to receive into communion again, upon his repentance, one who had been excommunicated; and this also although the repentance were after a second excommunication. "Such," he says, "as are expelled from the church therefore, it is not for us to expunge from the number of the elect, or to despair of them as already lost. It is proper to consider them as strangers to the church, and consequently from Christ, but this only as long as they remain in a state of exclusion." He thought that the Anathema, or devotion of a person to eternal perdition, ought to be very rarely or never resorted to.* It was a principle of his that correction should be tempered with such moderation, as to be salutary rather than injurious to the body.

He endeavored to make the discipline of the minister of the gospel more severe than that of the people. Against the Romish church he vindicated, indeed, the minister's right to marriage, on the one hand, but on the other, denied his right to exemption from the civil courts, and taught that he should be afflicted with the same civil penalties as laymen for misdemeanors. And he held that as ensamples to the flock ministers were under special obligations to live an approvable life.

He proposed, in short, to realize as far as possible, the ideal of the church, without spot or wrinkle,"—to glorify God by the dominion of His word in the life of the church—by the application of the power of God,

* Book IV., Chapter XII, Section X.

as well as the truth of God ; although he knew that the church, while on earth, is mixed with good and bad, and will never be free from impurity."

Touching Calvin's views of the importance of discipline, its proper ends, and the spirit with which it should be administered, it would be hard to speak too praisefully. They have done not a little to develop the peculiar fibre of Calvinistic character.

Owing to the unhappy union of church and state in which he and all his age believed, he was not entirely happy in locating the power to be used in discipline ; but this brings us to the *third* distinctive feature of his policy.

That this power for discipline and for all the functions of government, is to be exercised by a consistory, or parliamentary court, consisting of elders of two classes, viz., ruling elders and elders who not only rule but labor in word and doctrine.

Calvin teaches that, in order to the preservation of the spiritual polity, God institutes a certain order ; that for this end, there were from the beginning judiciaries appointed in the churches to take cognizance of matters, to pass censures on vices, and to preside over the use of the keys in excommunication," that "this order Paul designates in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, when he mentions "government," and in the Epistle to the Romans, when he says "he that ruleth, let him do it with diligence"; that Paul is not here "speaking of magistrates, or civil governors, for there were at this time no Christian magistrates, but of those who were associated with the pastor in spiritual government of the church ; that in the First Epistle to Timothy, also, he mentions two kinds of presbyters, or elders, some who labor in the word and doctrine,"

others who have nothing to do with preaching the word, and yet, "rule well"; that "by the latter class, there can be no doubt that he intended those who were appointed to the cognizance of manners and the whole exercise of the keys;" for that this power of government "entirely depends on the keys, which Christ has conferred upon the church in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, where He commands that those who shall have despised private admonition shall be severely admonished in the name of the whole church, and that if they persist in their obstinacy, they are to be excluded from the society of believers. He argues that since the admonitions and corrections cannot take place without an examination of the cause, there is necessity of some judicature and order."

Men can to-day demonstrate, and more compactly than Calvin did, that the local church of the apostolic church was governed by a parliamentary court of elders, and that two or more churches united under a superior presbytery. But it was Calvin's part to open the way for this, and that way he opened.

In accord with these views, Calvin established consistorial (or presbyterial) government in the Genevan church. The Genevan consistory (or presbytery, as we may call it) embraced, in Calvin's day, five pastors and twelve elders. The duty of this body was to overwatch, and to apply the power of God to, every member of the Genevese church, from the least to the greatest, according to individual need. It was never to assume any of the rights of the civil power. In cases of discovered crimes against the state, of such enormity as to make corporal punishment necessary, it was simply to lay the circumstances before the civil government, "it belonging unto God to determine the

powers of both." The severest punishment which could be inflicted by the presbytery was excommunication from the communion of the faithful.

The civil government was long indisposed to concede the right of excommunication to the church court; and there were numerous appeals from the church court to the civil government; but after 1555 the church enjoyed, without opposition, the right to inflict this penalty.

Calvin's presbytery in Geneva was not, however, in all respects, a close approximation to the New Testament presbytery. He knew very clearly the Bible mode of inducting man into ecclesiastical office; and taught that the apostles ordained men to office in the church according to the suffrages of the members of the church to be served by them.* But in Geneva, owing to the connection of church and state, the members of the presbytery were not elected in the Biblical way. Of the twelve ruling elders, two were taken from the Little Council of the State, four from the Council of sixty, and six from that of the two hundred. They were chosen to their ecclesiastical functions by the Little Council of the State, and confirmed by the preachers.

The preachers were always elected first by the body of preachers already in existence; their election was then submitted to the Little Council for confirmation. In case the congregation had anything to object, it was made its duty to state its objection to the syndics that all might be satisfied with the choice.

It thus appears that the state had much to do with the appointments of the members of the presbytery.

* Commentary on Matt. 13: 47.

Under the circumstances this was natural. The state had adopted the church. The court of the church was, in one of its aspects, the state's court to handle its ecclesiastical business, and the state was exercising its prerogatives in electing these, its own, officers. Practically, however, this mode of filling ecclesiastical offices was an infringement on the autonomy of the church—a principle of which Calvin made much in theory; and it was out of harmony with Calvin's own representation of the mode of filling offices in the apostolic church. For he teaches, as has already appeared, that in the apostolic church the apostles ordained those whom the whole multitude of believers, "according to the customs observed in elections among the Greeks, declared by the elevation of their hands "to be the object of their choice." *

The moderator of the Genevan presbytery was a syndic, an executive officer of the state, an arrangement which helped to express and to further the union between the church and the state.

The dependence of the church upon the state for support prevented the full development of the great beneficent functions of the church court, in maturing and supporting plans for the church's expansion.

A sort of subsidiary organ of ecclesiastical rule was the Venerable Company, constituted of all the ministers of the city and district of Geneva. It took the general supervision of all strictly ecclesiastical affairs, especially of the education, ordination, and installation of ministers of the gospel; but as has appeared, no one could be admitted to the ministry and installed without the co-operation of the civil government and the assent of the citizens.

* Book IV., Chapter III, Section XV.

In regard to this presbyterial feature of Calvin's polity, it must be said, that in both theory and practice, he gave to the communicant church members, too little power in the choice of their rulers. He gave too much power to the state.

He did not develop all the several functions of the church court. Had he gotten rid of the belief in the propriety of the connection of church and state, or had he been forced to make a practical separation of the church from the state, he would probably have followed the Biblical plan in bringing into being the organ for the government of the church—the presbytery composed of representatives of God's people chosen by the people, and consisting of two classes, elders who rule only, and elders who also labor in word and doctrine.

The fourth main feature of Calvin's polity is his *restoration of the bishop, the presbyter, and the deacon, to New Testament dimensions, and functions*. He saw clearly, with the reformers generally and with leading Catholic and Anglican doctors, that the New Testament bishop is the New Testament elder, and that the New Testament elder is the New Testament bishop; and he stripped the bishop of all diocesan functions and made him an elder in his theory of him. He also saw what many reformers did not see, that of the bishops or elders in the apostolic age, there are two classes,—elders that rule only and elders that not only rule but also labor in word and doctrine.

For centuries previous to Calvin's day, the ruling elder had been extinct. Calvin brought him back into existence and vindicated, as has appeared, his place in the presbytery. He also showed that the mediaeval deacon,—who was a priest in the tadpole stage of his

development,—was not a Biblical officer; and restored the deaconate of the New Testament church—the organ of the communion of the saints in things temporal,—an administrative office under the general oversight of the presbytery.

In this constructive work of Calvin—in his exhibition of the church as of right self-governing under its head, Christ; in his exposition of its right to govern in accord with its divinely given constitution, all the members from the smallest to the greatest; in his exposition of the aims, means and proper spirit of discipline; in his restoration of the presbytery,—the divinely appointed organ of church rule, according to the New Testament; in his reduction of ecclesiastical offices “to their New Testament character”—we have a contribution to church polity not equalled since the days of Paul. The errors in his system, including union of church and state and the incoherencies in his system springing from this error about the proper relation of the church and state, were to be expelled from his system by the truth in it.

To occasional successors, such as James Henley Thornwell, it has been given to deepen and broaden Calvin’s correct ecclesiastical teachings in certain aspects; but for the most part, it has been necessary for them to walk in paths blazed by Calvin, unless they would abandon God’s word when diverging from Calvin’s track. His pioneer work in the sphere of polity was so ably done, that the direction has been fixed for the unbiased student of God’s word.

One thing more should be said: Though Calvin had done work of such value in the sphere of polity, he did not overrate the work or the sphere. He believed in a God-given polity as in a God-given doc-

trine; but he did not regard doctrine and polity as of equal value. He recognized as a church of God every society claiming to be a church, which held the essential doctrines taught in the scriptures, whether the body had a presbyterian organization or not. He saw in the Lutheran bodies, with or without bishops, churches of God, and in the Anglican church, with its bishops, a true church of Christ. He would have recognized our Baptist and Methodist churches as true churches of Christ, notwithstanding their imperfect forms of polity.

In speaking thus, we must not be understood to represent Calvin as rating church polity as of small value. He considered it necessary for the well being of the church, though not to the bare being of the church. The cart-horse is a horse; he has all the essential marks of a horse; but the Arabian courser, worth two, three or four, ten thousands of dollars, has, we know, other marks, not essential to the bare being of a horse, but of capital value nevertheless. Calvin believed that the Arabian courser among the churches must have representative government,—government by courts of presbyter bishops.

He not only gave to polity an approximately Biblical form, but estimated its relative value Biblically.

In his masterly exhibition and deadly criticisms of the mediaeval Roman Catholic polity, he served the church well. In his discovery in the Bible, and deduction therefrom, of the principles of representative church government, he made practical the realization of "The noblest, the manliest, the equalist, the justest government on earth,"—a government through the best,—the true governmental counterpart to the most humbling and exalting, the most gracious and most ethical theology, ever drawn from nature or revelation.