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I.

CALVINISM AND CONFESSIONAL REVISION.*

OUR brethren in America cannot sufficiently realize to what an extent they have excited the interest of the Dutch Calvinists by their efforts to reach a revision of their ecclesiastical symbols. There are three causes to which this interest is due. First of all, the remembrance of the ever-memorable fact that the first Reformed Christians to set foot on American soil embarked for the New World from the Netherlands. On this account Dutch Calvinists still feel a most intimate bond of sympathy with the Reformed in America, and thank God for each token of brotherly affection by which the latter country has so repeatedly strengthened this deep-rooted attachment. In the second place, the Dutch Calvinists have hailed with great enthusiasm the development of American Church-life as called forth by the principle of a *Free Church*, and emulate their brethren in America in their strenuous efforts to make this only true principle victorious in the Old World as well. To which must be thirdly added that the Dutch Calvinists fully share the conviction of their American brethren, that the symbols of the sixteenth century were the product of a battle of spirits somewhat different from that in which the Church is engaged at present, and cannot consequently inspire us with the same enthusiasm with which they stirred the race of our fathers. For such reasons we feel ourselves closely allied with our American brethren as fellow-members of the one great international Reformed Church, and when tidings of revision are being wafted across the sea, we cannot help reflecting prayer-

* [Our readers are indebted to Prof. Geerhardus Vos, Ph.D., of Grand Rapids, Mich., for the translation of Dr. Kuyper's paper.—EDITORS.]

fully on what has become to us a matter of almost personal interest.

For the unity of this international Reformed Church does not lie in the fact that most of our Churches are organized on the Presbyterian principle. Such an assumption would be a purely external and superficial judgment. Even Unitarians at times organize their society on Presbyterian lines, and still they have nothing in common with our Reformed Churches. On the other hand, there are Reformed Churches in Germany and elsewhere that are prevented by the civil power from fully exhibiting their Presbyterian character. And how could form of government ever determine the character of a Church, when the latter's calling consists in "showing forth the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light," while the *form* of the Church is only one of the *means* by which it seeks to attain this end? On the battlefield not those battalions fight on the same side that resemble one another in point of tactic formation; but such regiments, however differently formed, as have a common banner floating over their bayonets. But for the "hosts of the living God," and hence also for the Reformed Churches, what could this banner be but the common confession? For however much the French and the Swiss, the Dutch and the Scotch, the Bohemian and the Westminster Confessions may differ among themselves in form and arrangement, still it is one spirit, one deep-seated conviction, the consciousness of one sacred calling, that finds expression in all these creeds. They are branches of one tree, brooks issuing from one spring, and in view of their forming one body our fathers observed the excellent custom of publishing them as one *corpus* or *syntagma confessionum*. Often a Church would send its creed for subscription to another Church; and it was owing to this historic consciousness that at the Synod of Dort, in 1618, foreign theologians were invited to meet with the Dutch delegates, and that at Westminster the foreign Churches were asked for their judgment, in order that as a single man and as members of one body, all might protest against the intrusion of Arminianism and Episcopalianism. The *catholicity* of the Church was not to be surrendered to Rome. The Reformed Churches were not to be allowed to degenerate into petty national bodies. Wherever they arose, they presented no less a claim than that of being a manifestation of the one body of Christ. From this they derived their authority to preach *his* word and to administer *his* sacraments in the name of Christ, our common King. By renouncing these high claims at any time or in any manner, they would have lowered themselves to the rank of private societies founded not on a divine but on a purely human right.

On this account even at the present day no strong movement can

be started in any part of the Reformed Churches without sending a thrill of sympathy through all the other members, and making all feel an equal interest in the results to which such a movement may lead. Among us, too, the needs that produce it are felt; the same impelling forces are at work in our midst; by us also the principles that should shape its course are recognized as authoritative and binding in a spiritual sense. As long as we remain fellow-members of this one Reformed catholic international Church, we have but one common fate in all that pertains to the confession of our Churches. The common creed can be tampered with in no part of the world without the words "*Tua res agitur*" passing through all the ranks of the entire Reformed camp. Political divisions and the difference in language may prevent *official* coöperation between the other Reformed Churches and those of America, in the matter of agreeing upon one common line of action in this vital question; but the work undertaken in America still imposes a duty on the Reformed elsewhere. They will have to note the events in the New World in their bearing upon their own Churches, and must make clear to their own minds to what conditions among themselves a revision of the common creed would be subject.

The following paper will be an attempt in this direction. In making it we shall presume that our American brethren may possibly be interested to learn to what terms the Reformed in the Netherlands would bind a revision of their creed. Our task will be best performed by answering the following four questions: 1. Has a specific tendency, which, like Calvinism, leads to a separate Church organization, a right to exist in the Church of Christ? 2. What specific tendency does Calvinism represent in the Christian Church? 3. In what manner has this tendency found its expression in the ecclesiastical symbols? 4. To what conditions is the revision of these symbols, in the case of a progressive development of Calvinism, to be bound?

I.

The most deeply cherished ideal of God's people would be realized only if the Church of Christ, being one and indivisible as the mystical body of her Lord, would also reveal herself in absolute external unity. One confession, one form of Church government, one liturgy, one volume of sacred song, one tendency of mind, even one language in all the Churches of Christ throughout the world! Such a condition were indeed heavenly, and can be realized in heaven alone.

Actual life, as we live it for the present on earth, excludes this ideal state. Whosoever, like Rome, tries to conjure up this vision and to clothe it with reality may succeed in mechanically contriv-

ing some sort of ecclesiastical union, but no one will ever be able organically to evolve it from life. Of all such attempts the result will be to suppress the vigorous development of a true national spirit in a most objectionable manner. One need only compare Catholic South America with the United States, Spain with England, Catholic Austria with Prussia, to feel impressed with the fatal effect of such obtruded unity. We do not say that the ideal should ever be abandoned, nor do we deny that its inspiration should always make us respect the claims of Christian Irenics. But we must submit to the decree of divine Providence, which positively excludes the realization of this ideal during our present dispensation. Nature itself displays a twofold unity. There is a unity of the uniform as in the meadows, where every blade of grass has the same color, shape and size. But there is also a unity of the multiform as in the flower-garden, where, notwithstanding the endless variety of hues in stem and leaf and blossom, yet the harmony of what is dissimilar gives rise to a higher beauty. And though this latter unity may not reveal itself for the present, with the plants only half-grown and the blossoms in the bud, still the discerning eye will far prefer its hidden unity to the uniformity that the grass-plot can boast of at each stage of its development. The unity of the Church for which we pray is of this higher nature. It too will prove to be a unity born of the harmonious multiformity of life. And in order to attain this glorious unity in its full-grown state, the Church must begin with being dissimilar, heterogeneous and disproportionate in its parts. Harmony can only arise from contrast, and contrast requires diversity of nature. If it be objected that eighteen centuries ago the Church commenced its career in absolute unity, we reply that this is a feature of the flower-garden as well. Diverse kinds of seed having been entrusted to the soil, the unity is at first complete in every respect. But no sooner does one grain after another begin to sprout, than a difference appears in respect to rapidity of growth and structure of stem. Even so it has been observed in the Church of Christ. During the first joyous days of her existence she shone in undisturbed unity, but no sooner had she entered upon her pilgrimage through the world than Peter proved to be different from Paul and John unlike James.

The unity of the Church is firmly rooted in the unity of the Holy Spirit, but in the spirits of men it will ramify. The facts of history show how the Church manifests itself differently in different centuries; that it becomes modified in character in eastern as well as western countries; that it exhibits a specific type in each of the several regions of these countries; that it is differentiated into a variety of forms according to the habits of life and thought of indi-

vidual men. Unto the Greek it becomes a Greek, unto the Jew a Jew, unto the Scythian a Scythian. It would be all unto all. Even with persons of one and the same city or village it speaks to the child in a child's language, addresses the man in manly tones, and with soft accents whispers its message into a woman's ear. Though our eye may not be able to discover the harmony in all this multiformity still it is there. But for the present it must remain an object of faith: "I *believe* in a holy, catholic, Christian Church."

We need not enlarge any further on the multiform garb in which the Christian Church appears. The question only remains to be answered whether this variety leaves room for specific *tendencies of thought*. Christian charity adjusting and adapting itself to every age and rank in life, to every exigency and need, does not necessarily imply that the mental life of the Church shall move in various currents. This pliability of mercy will rather have to reveal itself in the working of each local Church, and a minister of the Word, who is an utter stranger to it, surely does not know the mystery of "serving love." Nor can this difference in tendency be derived from a difference in temperament and character, nor can it be explained from the diversity of currents, that have come to the surface of human life during successive ages. A tendency of thought based on principle has this peculiarity, that it takes hold of every temperament and character, and leaves its impress on the spirit of every age with which it comes into contact.

By "specific tendencies of thought" something else is meant, such as can arise only from the necessary disposition of *human consciousness*. They reach down to the very root of consciousness and for this reason necessarily control every phenomenon of life springing from consciousness. Our grasp is so limited and the capacity of our consciousness is so universal, that never more than a part of its slumbering powers can be brought into action at a time. One man must supplement another, and by the very necessity of doing this no individual can avoid being one-sided in his range of thought. Thus the stupendous task which the human mind has to accomplish is naturally and almost imperceptibly divided among mankind. A single finger cannot play upon all the strings, only the ten fingers combined succeed in calling forth sweet harmony from the chords. In this manner by "division of labor" we are protected from wasting our energies on what lies beyond our power. As in social life one ploughs, a second spins, and a third sails the sea, and out of the interaction of these divided labors the full rich life is born, even so it is in the world of thought. And this division is not left to arbitrary choice, but is effected by that inclination of our talents which of itself determines the bent of our mind. Furthermore, since such

inclinations possess continuity in each individual and produce a sort of spiritual kinship between several persons, the love and predisposition for a tendency of this character are transmitted from nation to nation, and from age to age, and in this manner a general tendency of spirit in human life originates. Thus in general human life there is a tendency directed towards the ideal, and another that in preference seeks the real. There is a tendency diving into the depths of mysticism, and another that loves the clearness of the surface. There is a practical and a theoretical tendency. And likewise a tendency reaching back into history, and one that prophetically stretches forward to catch glimpses of the future.

For the very reason, however, that this differentiation of our mental life lies within the general domain of human nature, it cannot give rise to any specific tendencies in the Church of Christ. To be sure, like all that is human, these shades of difference will exert their influence upon the Church also, and will develop in some a historical turn of mind, in others habits that are more practical and active, in still others more prophetic inclinations. But even this does not create a division into such tendencies of thought as are peculiar to the Christian Church, and compel it to assume different organizations. In the Church, as belonging to the sphere of religion, tendencies of thought in order to be exponential of principle, must spring from the essence and nature of *religion*. That which makes Peter and Paul part ways is a difference in distinctness of view as to the divine law. James differs from Paul by emphasizing another side of the connection between faith and works. John and Matthew diverge, because each sees Christ under his own aspect. Thus it was in the beginning, and thus it has remained in the Christian Church. Never on her territory has the parting of the one river Nile into the seven branches of its Delta proceeded upon other than religious lines. Temperament and character, climate and nationality may have exerted an indirect influence; but the main force that made these waters seek their own channels has for the Christian Church always lain in the principle of religion.

This admits of even closer definition. The motive that compels the Church to enter upon a division cannot be drawn from religion in a general sense, but only from the *Christian religion* in particular. A single glance at the multiformity of Church organizations, dividing the Greeks, Armenians, Romanists, Lutherans, Reformed, Baptists and others, will reveal the fact that these bodies did not separate owing to psychological or philosophical variations, but on account of some difference in their conception of the Christian religion. As long as not the Christian religion but religion in general is the principle of division, Pantheists, Atheists, Polytheists, Deists and Theists

appear as coördinated groups. For the Church, on the other hand, which stands or falls with its Trinitarian creed, to speak of a Deistic or Pantheistic tendency, is obviously out of place. Such tendencies may creep in temporarily as a matter of fact, but they will always betray their exotic origin; they never lead to a separate organization worthy of the name, and no sooner does the spirit of the Lord come mightily upon His prophets than all these tendencies die out, and the Gideons break down the altar of Baal. Only tendencies which, though they view Christianity under some definite aspect, owing to the limited range of our human vision, still leave its essence intact, have right of existence in the Christian Church. Concentrating upon this single aspect a flood of light, they are, on account of this very one-sidedness, unable to do equal justice to the remaining features. This does not include heresy, which always attacks the essence of Christianity; nor does it protect those paganistic, humanistic and philosophical currents that seek to adulterate Christianity by secularizing it. It embraces that group of tendencies only which, like a many-sided prism, intercept the clear light of Christianity and refract it into the manifold beauty of their colors.

Such a Christian religious tendency therefore does not owe its right of existence to anything in man or of this world, but to Christianity itself. Christianity being too rich, too many sided, too universal to pour its divine fullness into a single channel of human life, has forced its waters into a number of channels. Hence a child of God may and must cherish the conviction of moving in that current which is relatively the most pure; but should never arrogate to himself the absolute in such a sense as would shut off the remaining side channels, as if they were not branches of the main stream. It follows, from the nature of the case, that a tendency of this character will lead to a realization of the Christian religion under its own peculiar aspect in the entire sphere of human life, and will hence create not only a special church organization, a special form of worship, a special theology, but also special usages for political, social and domestic life. This cannot be otherwise, inasmuch as its channels are dug in those periods of history only when the religious principle has reached its highest degree of tension, and when, triumphing over all other motives, it causes human life as a whole to tremble at its very foundations, and dominates it in all its branches.

Now, it is a fact, established historically beyond all reasonable doubt, that Calvinism actually complies with these requirements. Calvinism is no surreptitious paganistic tendency, but is opposed on principle to all manner of paganism. It does not owe its origin to a humanistic effort to secularize the Church, but it has carried out

the contrast between Christ and the Kosmos with the greatest possible rigor. Nor has Calvinism issued from the philosophical camp, for the depravity of human reason, too, is the corner-stone of its system. Nor does its power reside in some psychological or national peculiarity. The former is to be excluded, since it counts among its adherents and promoters men of every character and temperament and of the most varied sympathies; while in reference to the latter it will be observed that Calvinism has not restricted itself to any one nationality, but has been as boldly professed by the Huguenots in the South of France as by the Celts in the Scottish Highlands. It has planted itself squarely on the basis of the Christian religion, and owes its origin exclusively to a specific conception of it. It arose in a period of history when the fate of Christianity shaped the destinies of states and nations. Calvinism was not the illusion of a single day, for as boldly and bravely as by the Gueux, Roundheads and Pilgrim fathers of yore, it is being professed to-day in Europe and America, and by the Boers in the Transvaal. It developed its own Church organization, created its own form of worship, and stood resplendent in the lustre of its own theology. To so great an extent has it set its stamp on political and social life as well, that it was it that freed the Netherlands from the Spanish yoke, gave a new form of life to the Scotch, and laid the foundation for the development of the United States. To appreciate its influence on domestic and social life, one need only wander for a few weeks in Romanist, Greek or Lutheran countries. The free life of the free citizen as it at present flourishes in America, and is making its way into the constitutional States of Europe, is not the fruit of the bloody orgies of the French Revolution, but of that energetic earnestness which Calvinism has infused into the life of its adherents.*

Our first question, therefore, admits of no other than an affirmative answer. Calvinism *does* represent a specific tendency of thought in the Christian Church, which, being able to create its own Church organization, has an indisputable right of existence.

II.

This being the case, we must inquire in the second place: *Wherein does the specific character of this tendency represented by Calvinism consist?* Dr. Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology*, seems to have thought it a happy idea to set the term "Calvinism"

* These various points have been established more in detail by the author in three separate treatises: *Calvinism the Origin and Safeguard of our Constitutional Liberties*, Amsterdam, 1875, 2d ed.; *Calvinism and Art*, Amsterdam, 1888, and *Uniformity the Curse of Modern Life*, Amsterdam, 1869.

in the main to one side, and to speak generally of "Augustinianism." We think this unjust. However highly Calvin, and after him every Calvinist, may have honored Augustine, still it was the former and not the latter who succeeded in elevating that abstract tendency, whose course Augustine mapped out, to the rank of an actual power in life. Augustine had to contend with two classes of opponents, not only with the Pelagians but also with the Manichæans; and however bravely and successfully he may, in the sphere of theology, have defended against Pelagius the sovereignty of God, nevertheless, in his struggle with the Manichæans, he fell back for support upon the power of the hierarchy. In his *Locus de Ecclesia* he tore down again what in his *Locus de Gratia* he had built up. Augustine was lacking in thoroughgoing logical consistency. Hence the Semi-Pelagianism that lay at the root of the Roman hierarchical system was able gradually to pull down again his theological structure also; and in the person of Thomas Aquinas to undo his spiritual achievements by means of the dialectics of Scholasticism. History itself shows that Augustine had neither the will nor the energy to dig out for the tendency that possessed in him its unrivaled advocate, a new channel in the life of the Church and of society. When, in 430 A.D., Augustine dies during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals, things remain what they were. For a time a new wind has blown over the waters of the Church, but the stream pursues its old course through the same hierarchical channels. It was not thus on the death of Calvin. In the *Locus de Gratia*, Calvin may have done little else than copy Augustine. But in one respect he stands far above Augustine: that he made the principle of the divine sovereignty operative for *the Church*, and, through the Church, in the life of *states and nations*. Not that he discovered an absolutely new tendency of thought. This would have been impossible; for every tendency that has a right of existence in the Church must grow on a stem organically connected with the root, and must extend its most delicate fibres throughout the history of the Church, down into its very origins. While, however, these various tendencies, like a compact bundle of fibres, are at first hidden in the common stem, there will at last come a time for each of them to part from it and shoot forth as separate and independent branches. In regard to *our* tendency, this time had come only with Calvin.

By conceding that Calvinism does not represent the absolute in its fullness, we did not mean to intimate that it appears as but one of many variations, coördinated indifferently with others; as if it could ever be a matter of slight importance whether one should profess and serve his God and Saviour according to the Greek, the

Baptist, the Lutheran or the Calvinistic standard. Notwithstanding all variations displayed by the rose in the vegetable kingdom, nobody puts an equal value on the wild rose and the cultivated rose. A florist's price-list tells us differently. It goes without saying that whosoever is a Calvinist will consider the tendency followed and professed by himself the purest and highest expression of Christianity, and, if a theologian, will be ready at all times to support this judgment. Otherwise his duty as an honest man and the fear of God would compel him to leave the Calvinistic Church for the Lutheran or Baptist, or for whatever organization might in his view appear more nearly to subserve the glory of his God. That in their turn the Lutheran and Baptist will present a similar claim of moving in the highest and purest tendency should not lead us astray for a moment. He who forgets his noble birth disgraces himself. We can conceive of a Calvinistic renegade turning Lutheran or Baptist from conviction, but we cannot understand that an intelligent and well-informed man, who still continued to live in a Calvinistic Church, should have extinguished in his heart the enthusiasm for Calvinism.

The characteristic superiority and specific difference of Calvinism does not lie in any single doctrine, but in this: that within the Christian religion *it does the fullest justice to the essence of religion itself*. Hence, in order to become familiar with the specific character of Calvinism, one need by no means delve into the vast works which Ullmann, Schweizer, Herzog, Baur, Schneckenburger, Scholten, Gass and others have devoted to tracing this specific difference. From a formal as well as from a material point of view, they all reach the same conclusion, viz., that Calvinism in its conception of the Christian religion, nay, in its view of life and the world in general, assigns the first place to God Almighty. This should not be interpreted in the sense of Schleiermacher, who spoke of a "schlechthiniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl," for by the very form of this expression, the subjective element of *feeling* has been placed in the foreground, thus subverting the Calvinistic principle. The Calvinist glories in his profession that religion, especially the absolute religion of Christianity, must not be lowered to an agency of salvation, nor adulterated into a mere incentive to virtue, nor transformed into a cosmology, but that in order to retain its honor it must *remain religion*. And since all religion springs from the relation in which God the Creator has placed us, His creatures, to Himself, it follows that the greatest religious height will be reached by him who at every point of his horizon views God as God, by honoring Him in all things as the almighty Creator who has created all things for His own sake, who, as God, is not bound by anything but Himself,

and determines for every creature both its being and the law thereof, now and forevermore. Not only "Deo gloria," but "Soli Deo gloria," and before His adorable majesty let every creature, prince or pauper, be as the small dust of the balance, a drop of the bucket, nay, be counted less than nothing!

We do not claim that this is exhaustive of the full riches of the Christian religion. When the Methodist places the salvation of sinners in the foreground, the Baptist the mystery of regeneration, the Lutheran justification by faith, the Moravian the wounds of Christ, the Greek the mysticism of the Holy Spirit, and the Romanist the catholicity of the Church—we have no more desire to detract from the great importance of these other six elements for the true appreciation, the pure profession and practice of Christianity, than any of these groups would be willing to admit (theoretically, at least) the existence of a true Christian religion, where God no longer remains God. There is no Church or school that has ever entirely ignored any one of these six elements. Nay, rather, as long as no deliberate apostasy is made, they must all alike be honored; and Calvinism has not been found lacking in its appreciation of any one of them. The differences among Churches and tendencies have not resulted from the *rejection* by one of elements retained by others. Not by a single Church has religion been *mutilated* in its parts. But they are differentiated, and that to a high degree even, by the organic collocation of parts. In the perspective of one tendency one element would occupy the foreground, which in another had been pushed to the side or into the background. Now in this collocation of parts the other systems were less correct than Calvinism. They in one case gave predominance to the arm; in another to the foot; in a third to the texture of veins or to the nerve-tissue; whereas the action of an organic body can be normal only when the head is allowed to dominate over all the parts. The seven elements enumerated above do not like fence-pickets stand alongside of one another, but are organically one. It is impossible, therefore, to keep them side by side in consciousness. One of them must take the first place, so as to make the conception of those remaining dependent on itself.

In this tree, moreover, root, trunk and branches should be kept distinct and the root-principle should in our consciousness control what we conceive of as trunk and branches. A Calvinist says: As in politics the principle of right, in social science that of well-being, in art the idea of the beautiful, are given the first place, so in the sphere of religion the knowledge of God Almighty can and must be the only controlling element, and all other elements are to be subordinated to this theological principle. God should not conform Himself to the creature, but everything professed about the creature

must be made to fit into our profession as to the Eternal Being. Theology cannot reach its highest stage of organic development until the doctrine of God shall have become its controlling feature. We may therefore conclude that, comparatively speaking, there can be, in our conception of the Christian religion, in our theology, in our creed, no truer or higher standpoint than that which unhesitatingly gives precedence to God as God, and rises to the sublime courage of viewing and explaining the whole range of our existence for time and eternity under this one aspect. A sinner who is indifferent to his own salvation and that of his fellow-men stands on a plane far beneath the Methodist, who perhaps surpasses all others in his earnest appeals for conversion. But he that asks: How can even the whole of my existence and that of others be made to serve the glory of my God?—he ranks higher than the Methodist. Undoubtedly the Baptist, deeply impressed with the necessity of regeneration and measuring all other things by this standard, is superior to the Arminian, who fancies a change of mind to be sufficient; but a still higher standpoint is attainable, if, rising to Him that generates, I marvel at the adorable work of God, of which regeneration is only the effect. If, with Luther, I am conscious of having been justified by faith, and no longer rely on any act or work of my own, my position is more correct, from a spiritual point of view, than that of the Roman Church; but I may ascend still higher by penetrating into the origin of that eternal justification, which has its source in the sovereign decree of God. To kneel down with the Moravian in adoration of Christ as my Lord and God, rapt in the contemplation of His wounds, no doubt causes rapture utterly past the comprehension of him who would coldly calculate the sum of Christ's merits; but there is an infinitely higher blessedness in the consciousness of being led through Christ to commune with *my Father in heaven*. The mysticism of the Greek Church must be acknowledged superior to the sober Socinianism that became its rival in the Slavic countries; but mysticism is transformed into a still more precious treasure if, through the Holy Spirit making supplication within and for me, I find my way to Him who knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit. Thus we may praise the Roman Church for her striving after catholicity, which forms such a refreshing contrast to the insensibility of the Separatist, who rudely severs the most sacred ties; and at the same time feel rise within us a holy anger against her ecclesiasticism, by which she forces herself between our soul and its God. And while it may be admitted that, owing to its almost superhuman efforts in deriving all things from God, in maintaining for all things a relation of dependence upon God, and in estimating all things according to their significance for the glory of God, Calvinism

has not been equally successful in appreciating those other elements, and that it will in consequence have to enrich itself from the labors of others, to Calvinism nevertheless redounds the imperishable glory of having chosen the highest standpoint, highest not according to its own subjective opinion, but revealed as such by God in His Word, when the Holy Spirit made the Apostle exclaim: "From Him, through Him, and unto Him are all things. Unto Him be the glory forever. Amen."

It is a mistake, therefore, to discover the specific character of Calvinism in the doctrine of predestination, or in the authority of the Scriptures, or in the doctrine of the covenants, or in the tenet of hereditary guilt, or in strictness of life, or in the Presbyterian form of Church government. For Calvinism all these are logical consequences, not the point of departure—foliage bearing witness to the luxuriance of its growth, but not the root from which it sprouted. Because Calvinism would have God remain God, and could not conceive of any good will or work in man unless depending on a will and work of God, it professed the doctrine of predestination. Because it would have God remain God, and therefore held that wherever He spoke it behooved the creature to be silent, it professed the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Because it would have God remain God, and hence ascribed absolute validity to the bond of His covenant, it professed the mysterious working of covenantal grace. Because it would have God remain God, and hence did not allow itself to put the moral question of our guilt individually, as we are accustomed to do, but organically, as is the standing of humanity before God, it professed not only hereditary corruption, but also, as the cause of this, hereditary guilt. And again, because it would have God remain God, and held the entire range of human life in subjection to His law, for this and for no other reason Calvinism came to advocate a strict Puritanism.

Every other explanation leaves the historical phenomenon of Calvinism an unsolved riddle. If its specific character lay in "predestination," we might expect to meet in Calvinistic countries with passive people renouncing all manner of good works, and waiting in stolid insensibility for the evidence of election to make its appearance. So absolute an emphasis placed on the work of God, and so complete a denial of all value residing in the work of man, could not but have resulted in the most shameful Antinomianism. If now, in sharp contrast to this, wherever Calvinism has held its triumphant entrance, in Geneva, among the French Huguenots, in Scotland, in the Netherlands wrestling with Spain, and certainly not the least in the rise of the first American States, we meet with a display of activity that changes the whole aspect of national life, a

moral, even Puritanic earnestness that frowns at every sin and connives at no form of iniquity, a care for the poor and suffering such as has scarcely been witnessed since the golden days of Jerusalem—then it is obvious that we must here either assume an inexplicable dualism, or acknowledge our attempt to explain Calvinism from predestination alone to have been a failure. But truly there was no dualism. Calvinism did not place predestination in the foreground to borrow from it a plenary indulgence for an Antinomian and passive life, but it took its stand in the presence of God, in order that His Word might shed light on the truth it had to profess and the path it had to walk. Because it would have God remain God, it professed to find the source of all grace solely in the mercy of God, and at the same time prescribed a rule of life that made the human will completely subject to the will of God. To be sure, Quietistic circles have formed in Calvinistic countries, and among Calvinistic nations Antinomian sects have arisen; but far from commending this Quietism or palliating this Antinomianism, the true Calvinism of all centuries has shaken both these morbid excrescences like venomous vipers from its arm.

To recapitulate: Religion on earth finds its highest expression in the act of prayer. But Calvinism in the Christian Church is simply that tendency which makes a man assume the same attitude towards God in his profession and life, which he already exhibits in his prayer. There is no Christian, be he Lutheran or Baptist, Methodist or Greek, whose prayer is not thoroughly Calvinistic; no child of God, to whatever Church organization he may belong, but in his prayer he gives glory to God above and renders thanks to his Father in heaven for all the grace working in him, and acknowledges that the eternal love of God alone has, in the face of his resistance, drawn him out of darkness into light. On his knees before God, every one that has been saved will recognize the sole efficiency of the Holy Spirit in every good work performed, and will acknowledge that without the atoning grace of Him who is rich in mercies, he would not exist for a moment, but would sink away in guilt and sin. In a word, whosoever truly prays, ascribes nothing to his own will or power except the sin that condemns him before God, and knows of nothing that could endure the judgment of God except it be wrought within him by the divine love. But whilst all other tendencies in the Church preserve this attitude as long as their prayer lasts, to lose themselves in radically different conceptions as soon as the Amen has been pronounced, the Calvinist adheres to the truth of his prayer, in his confession, in his theology, in his life, and the Amen that has closed his petition reëchoes in the depths of his consciousness and throughout the whole of his existence.

III.

Our third question was: *How has this tendency found its expression in the ecclesiastical symbols?*

First, we will remark that every tendency in order to reach its symbolic destination naturally chooses its own way, and in choosing it is determined by its own inherent principle. When the Roman Church wishes to elevate the *Immaculata Conceptio* or the *Infallibilitas* of the Pope (when speaking *ex cathedra* in doctrinal matters) to the rank of a dogma, the Pope convenes a universal council. Hereupon he has the dogma formulated by the representatives of the majority in this council, on whom he can rely, manages to overawe the minority, and presently compels them to renounce their private judgment, and under penalty of ejection from the episcopate to submit to his wishes. Furthermore the Pope chooses the most opportune time for the calling of such a council, in the present instance by fixing upon the moment when the great Franco-Prussian war precludes all resistance on the part of the Gallican Church, and leaves the German government no time for opposition. When, after the lapse of three years, Prince Bismarck organizes a systematic opposition in the *Culturkampf*, the Roman Church has in the meanwhile succeeded in suppressing all resistance in its own bosom, and feels itself sufficiently strong to give the lie to those haughty words of the *Culturkämpfer*, "*Wir gehen nicht nach Canossa!*" This mode of procedure is with Rome the logical outcome of the preëminence accorded on principle to the *Gloria Ecclesiæ*. The Church stands between God and man, and determines their mutual relation.

An entirely different course of events presents itself in Lutheran countries. Here the government takes the initiative. The best Confession of the Lutheran Church, the *Confessio Augustana*, owes its origin to the Diet of Augsburg, which assembled in 1530. It was an elector that, through his theologians, had a draught of this Confession prepared at Torgau. This sketch of the Torgau articles Melancthon moulded into the form of the Augustana. Political delegates of territories and cities then presented this as an expression of their belief to the Emperor. And it was the Emperor who, after a long opposition, finally conceded in joint action with the Diet the first twenty-one articles to the Lutheran Church. This was the natural course of affairs. Luther having once taken the initiative, the Reformation in Lutheran countries had been taken up by the civil powers, and ever after the Church has continued wedded to these powers in a Cæsaro-papistic fashion.

No such course was pursued in Calvinistic countries. Here in

virtue of the Calvinistic principle itself, the Confession had to be the spontaneous product of the struggle of believers, and to bear the clearest evidence of having originated under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. In their Confession, as well as in their theology, Calvinists take their point of departure in God and not in man. God, through the kingship of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, actually governs the Churches. The same Holy Spirit presides in the Church councils, expounds the Holy Scriptures in the assemblies of believers, and directs, deepens and inspires the studies of the theologians. Of course, not as if this work of the Holy Spirit bore an absolute character. On the contrary, the rays of the Spirit's light no sooner are intercepted than diffracted by the prism of the life of the Church. Nevertheless it implies that a Calvinistic Synod, a Calvinistic pastor, or a Calvinistic theologian derives its energy from the sacred consciousness of being inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Thus one of the richest Calvinistic Confessions, the *Helvetica Posterior* of 1566, was not drawn up by a delegated commission, nor prepared at the command of the civil authorities, but taken from Bullinger's Testament. It was an effusion of the pious man's soul written down as in the sight of God, many years before his death, and laid by with his testament, that even after his departure he might still bear witness of his faith. One of the oldest, the French Confession of 1559, is the work of the martyr-Church of the Huguenots, adopted at a Synod which assembled at Paris amid the threats and murderous cries of persecution. As a result its beauty is unmarred by any terms of scholasticism. It is a cry from the heart of an oppressed people feeling the sword on its neck, and is intended to bear witness in the Lord's name to the simplicity, the earnestness and the blamelessness of its faith. The same may be said of the Belgic Confession, the product of the martyr, Guido de Brès, and soon adopted by the Churches, not as a theological thesis, but as a cry of conscience, and presented to the Spanish powers. England's first Confession, that of the pious King Edward VI, was, *mutatis mutandis*, of a similar character. The original Scotch Confession was the work of a man who had been tortured and tormented in the galleys in France for his unswerving fidelity to the Gospel, and who had become and continued to be the soul of the Scotch Reformation. It must be admitted that the Westminster Confession drawn up as late as 1648 is not entirely in keeping with this Calvinistic tradition. But it should be observed: 1. That it was not so much intended to form a new Confession, as rather to give a *résumé*, in behalf of England, of the martyr-Confessions. 2. That the war which the Long Parliament waged against King Charles

I was merely a continuation, in a modified form, of the struggle which Luther had begun against the tyrannical rule of the Hierarchy and the absolute Monarchy in his plea for "*die Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*." 3. That the Westminster Assembly solicited in behalf of its labors the opinion of the sister Churches in the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, the Palatinate, Hesse-Cassel, Hanau and Anhalt. 4. But in addition, the Westminster Assembly was composed of a group of such eminent and godly divines, that it may be justly claimed to represent the ripe fruit of the Reformation, equally illustrious in its love of liberty and godliness as in its manly strength and sound learning.

Now in tracing the general principle that has put this stamp on the Calvinistic Confessions, we may call attention to four things.

First, Calvinism does not undertake to formulate its Confession except under the impulse or after the close of some powerful movement, stirring the very depths of life. So it was in the ancient Christian Church, which committed its first symbol to writing under the pressure of an agonizing struggle with anti-Trinitarians, Montanists, Gnostics and Manichæans. In a similar manner Calvinism brought forth written Confessions in France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and soon afterwards in Scotland and England. The impulse giving birth to such a confession did not come from the spirit of man, but from the Spirit of the Lord. It was no product of theoretical discursive thought, but of a conviction that dominated the person and governed his entire life, exposed him to danger and toil, led him into conflicts and complications, and demanded from him the greatest sacrifices—a conviction from which his flesh might shrink, but which the Calvinist neither would nor could abandon, because God Himself had impressed it upon his soul. Behind a Calvinist's Confession there is always that hidden impulse of the Spirit in reference to which Jeremiah exclaimed: "I was weary with forbearing, but I could not; there was in my heart as it were a burning fire, shut up in my bones." Before a Calvinist could attain to confession, there had first to arrive in the Church that moment of a spiritual *ἀκμῇ* which the Psalmist has so vividly described in the Word: "It is time for the Lord to work." Then, to be sure, after the working of the Lord had been made manifest, and taken hold of the believer's spirit so as to impart the assurance that neither the schoolman, nor worldly philosophy, much less the voice of the flesh, but the Spirit of the Lord had begun to make itself heard—then the Calvinist also would breathe his soul into a living creed and make profession before judge and magistrate, not in terms that had first to be sought, but in words that spontaneously suggested themselves, growing as it were as a shell around the pearl, words unctuous and sacred.

In the *second place*, according to the view of Calvinism, the Holy Spirit never satisfies this desire for a confession, but through the exposition of the Word. From the Holy Spirit the impulse proceeds, from the Word the contents are taken in which it finds utterance. Especially in the Westminster Confession this principle, at the prompting of the Scotch delegates, has been rigorously applied and distinctly stated; but in all Calvinistic Confessions without exception the feature is too prominent to require special consideration. In order that God might remain God, *the King's Word* had to exercise authority over their spiritual life and over their confession as well. They wished but to repeat what God in His Word had dictated. Their confession neither will nor can be anything else than a joyful response and a faithful echo to the Word of their God.

Thirdly, Calvinism in its method of arriving at a confession excludes all individualism and sectarianism. Placing no reliance on their individual utterance, Calvinists do not speak out in a full-voiced confession until they are assured that the same voice has likewise spoken from the heart of their brethren in all Churches and countries. Only after perceiving that the one Spirit has by means of the one Word everywhere produced the same conviction in the hearts of all that move in the same current, they feel warranted to make a public profession in the name of the Church and to formulate in writing that same faith which has been sealed with the blood of their brethren at the stake. Hence it is that Calvinists always and everywhere have struck the same keynote in their confessions; that they subscribed each other's symbols; that in drawing up and revising their Standards they always solicited one another's advice; and that in point of fact in their various creeds they have professed one and the same faith.

In the *fourth place* we must observe that the Calvinists never proceeded to formulate their confession until after and only so far as the Holy Spirit had clearly given them to understand the meaning of the divine Word on disputed points. Nowhere is there a trace of what is common among enthusiasts of every sort, viz., that, proceeding on some obscure data, they give expression on the spur of the moment to their private opinions. Calvinists stand firm in the conviction that theology also is a servant of God, walking by His light, and for this reason they never proceeded to speak until this sacred theology had reached sufficient maturity of development to enable them to speak clearly and plainly.

We may be allowed to illustrate this last-mentioned point somewhat more in detail. In order to have a case of living interest we will select for our purpose the salvation of those dying in infancy. If the question be put whether the Calvinistic confessions have ex-

pressed themselves on this delicate point, the answer must be an emphatic affirmative. Still there is a certain limitation, owing to the fact that at this point also our confessions have not in the first place aimed at flattering human feelings, but at the glory of God. Our little babes also must be made to serve His glory, instead of the latter being made subservient to the emotions awakened in us by the death of our darlings. Hence in their confessions they did not venture further on this point than was warranted by the Scriptures and had been revealed by the Spirit spreading light on the Scriptures. Within these limits, however, prescribed by their principle, the Churches have most emphatically pronounced in favor of the view that those of our children whom God takes away before they have attained to years of discretion, must be considered as elect, and consequently as saved. In 1619 the Calvinistic Churches at Dordrecht professed in the seventeenth article of the first chapter of the *Canones*: "Quandoquidem de voluntate Dei ex verbo Ipsius nobis est iudicandum, quod testatur liberos fidelium esse sanctos, non quidem natura, sed beneficio fœderis gratuiti, in quo illi cum parentibus comprehenduntur, pii parentes de electione et salute suorum liberorum, quos Deus in infantia ex hac vita evocat, non debent dubitare." This Confession of 1619 was subscribed not only by all the Churches of the Netherlands, but in addition by the five English delegates, the three delegates from the Palatinate, the four delegates from Hesse, the five delegates from Switzerland, the two members from Wetterau, and also by the deputies from Geneva and Bremen. There can be no difference of opinion, therefore, as to whether it is still at the present day the unanimous confession of Calvinistic Churches that "believers" losing their infant children by death have to regard them as elect and saved. If now we place the limit for the full awakening of conscious life at the age of seven, and reflect that, according to statistical data, out of one thousand deaths an average of thirty-five per cent. occurs before the close of the first year, fourteen per cent. between the first and fifth year, and two per cent. before the seventh year, then it will appear that the Calvinistic creed positively assumes the salvation of fully fifty-one per cent. of the total membership of our Churches. Harshness is out of the question here; there is rather a presumption of excessive boldness in affirming the salvation of so great a number. This has all the more weight since from the foregoing it will appear that Calvinists have not permitted themselves to be led by sentimental conjectures or *a priori* deductions from the love of God, but have constantly appealed to the revelation given in the *Word*, and hence have not tampered in the least with the truth that these infants also are lost in Adam and that the sole ground of their being saved lies in election.

This conviction in regard to the salvation of dying infants is by no means a piece of new cloth sewed on the old garment at Dort, but a direct inference from what Calvinists have always held, and would still better realize in the present, if on the point of Holy Baptism they had not departed so far from the doctrine of the fathers. In our days Baptism is generally conceived of as being administered in hope of subsequent regeneration, whereas Calvinists have always taught that Baptism should be administered on the presumption that regeneration has preceded. In those days people still had an insight into the organic character of the work of God, and were taught to make a clear distinction between the various parts of the plant of faith. First there was the seed of faith, by which the power to believe is implanted in the sinner, coinciding with regeneration proper; further from this seed by a second work of grace the stem of faith is made to sprout, which then is seen to bud in conversion and finally to bear fruit in the works of faith. Now, of course, with an infant every act of faith, or budding of faith, or sprouting of faith is excluded. We may speak, however, in such a case of a seed of faith. Where this seed of faith or the faculty of faith has been implanted, regeneration has taken place, and, in case of death, salvation will follow—things which constitute a clear title to the seal of the covenant and Holy Baptism. On these grounds Calvinists have taught: 1. That children of believers are to be considered as recipients of efficacious grace, in whom the work of regeneration proper has already begun. 2. That accordingly they are to receive Baptism as being sanctified in Christ. 3. That, when dying before having attained to years of discretion, they can only be regarded as saved. Of course, Calvinists never declared that these things were necessarily so. As they never permitted themselves to pronounce an official judgment on the inward state of an adult but left the judgment to God, so they have never usurped the right to pronounce absolutely on the presence or absence of spiritual life in infants. They only stated how God would have us *consider* such infants, and this consideration based on the divine Word made it imperative to look upon their infant children as elect and saved, and to treat them accordingly.

On the other hand their confession is silent in regard to the infants, both of Mohammedans and of the heathen. It was not intended to deny that God is able to perform his hidden work of grace in these little ones also; but where the Scriptures did not pronounce on this point, they thought that the Church too neither could nor should speak. A creed is not for the purpose of stating our own surmises or conjectures, but for professing that, of which, on the basis of God's revelation, we possess most certain knowledge.

Already Calvin had laid down this Calvinistic thesis regarding the work of grace in infants in the most explicit terms, when he wrote, speaking of the Anabaptists: "But how, they say, are children regenerated, that still lack all knowledge of good and evil? To which we reply: That although we may not observe in them a gracious work, still this can never be a ground for denying the presence of such" (*Inst.*, Lib. iv, C. xvi, § 17). And elsewhere: "What will prevent God from having already granted, if it so pleases Him, a *little spark of His light* to those same children, on whom presently He will shed its full lustre, especially so when He takes them out of this life before they attain to consciousness" (*ib.*, § 20). And still more positively: "Moreover this whole objection, that children are baptized in view of a *fides* and *pœnitentia* revealing themselves later, may be easily met in this manner: That although this *fides* and *pœnitentia* have not as yet assumed a fixed form, nevertheless through a secret operation of the Spirit the seed of both (*utriusque semen*) is implanted in them" (*ib.*, § 21). Nearly all truly Calvinistic theologians agree with Calvin on this point. Thus Mac-covius writes in his *Theol. Quæst.*, Loc. 42, Cap. xx: "*Anne infantes habent fidem? Resp. Habent, non actualem sed habitualement, quemadmodum enim regeniti sunt, ita et fidem habitualement habent.*" Voetius, in his *Disputationes Theologicæ, De Regeneratione* (comp. *Bibl. Ref.* iv, p. 247 seq.), says in reference to all baptized infants of believers: "*Placet opinio auctoris, quod statuit in infantibus electis et fœderatis locum habere Spiritus Sancti regenerationem initialem, per quam principium et semen actualis conversionis suo tempore secuturæ imprimitur . . . nota est enim sententia theologorum reformatorum de efficacia Baptismi non in producenda regeneratione, SED in jam productâ ob-signandâ*" (p. 254). This *regeneratio initialis* he then proceeds to describe more fully in the following words: "*Non est actio, nec habitus proprie sic dictus qui faciliat potentiam, sed partim relatio, partim qualitas ceu facultas spiritalis in mente et voluntate, ex qua tamquam e semine quodam . . . actuales dispositiones et habitus per impressionem Spiritus Sancti suo tempore suscitantur*" (p. 255). In like manner Gomarus says in his *Opera Omnia*, Vol. iii, p. 130: "*Ad quos Spiritus Sanctus pertinet illis aqua Baptismi denegari non potest.*" Not to mention many others, Cloppenburg in his *Exerc. Theol.*, Tom. i, p. 1097, declares: "*Opponimus, infantes fidelium arcana immediata operatione Spiritus Sancti inseri Christo, donec vel in hac vita vel in mortis articulo infantilis ætas accipiat finem, ut vel hic in carne, vel exuti carne, per fidem vel per visionem agnoscant, quæ ipsis gratificatus est Deus, ut et nobis.*" Even Van Der Marck, in his *Comp. Theol.*, C. xxii, § 12, still says: "*Interim lubenter fatemur . . . infantibus fidelium . . . competere juxta Christi meritum, Spiritus*

gratiam, quam fidem seminalem, radicalem, habitualementiam minus proprie, nonnulli appellant." And J. Van Den Honert, who lived towards the close of the last century, still wrote in his *De Gratia Particulari*, C. ii, § 44, p. 459: "*Potest enim vultque Deus fidem, sine qua nulla hominis salus est futura, in infantibus, quos elegit quosque ante auditum ab iis Evangelium ad cœlestem gloriam evocat, ignota nobis atque impervestigabili via operari, non sine Spiritu sancto, sed per ejus efficacissimam operationem.*"*

It amounts to a total subversion of the Calvinistic view therefore: 1. To deny that the seed of regeneration can be produced by God in a new-born babe. 2. Not to assume this in the case of children of believers. 3. To administer Baptism to them on any other supposition. 4. Not to consider them in bringing them up as potentially regenerated, and not to make this the basis of the demand for conversion. Evidently this is the import of all Calvinistic confessions, where they treat of the sacraments. For they all avow that the sacrament serves *ad fidem corroborandam*. How then can Baptism, more particularly Infant Baptism, pass for a sacrament except on the supposition that in the child offered for Baptism the seed of faith has already been implanted by God? Unless this be assumed, there is no authority for baptizing a child; for the seed of faith failing, baptism cannot serve *ad fidem corroborandam*. The Westminster Assembly also has affirmed this in its Larger Catechism, when in reply to the question, "What is a sacrament?" it does not fail to enumerate among the effects of the same "*confirmare et augere fidem.*"

Now it may be objected that our Calvinistic symbols, and especially the Westminster Standards, are rather meagre in their treatment of this important point. This must be conceded, with the further remark, however, that this meagreness was due to two causes. In the first place it is obvious that the Holy Scriptures almost entirely confine themselves to describing the way of salvation for adults and scarcely touch upon the quite different way in which God saves infants. In doing so, the Scriptures do not deny that, alongside of the way for adults, there is a quite different way for these little ones (within the limits, of course, of election, redemption by Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit) and they even clearly indicate that such is the case. But they do not enlarge upon it any further than is absolutely necessary for our consolation. The Holy Scriptures are not intended to satisfy our curiosity, or to enable us to penetrate into the realm of mysteries, but have the sole end to in-

* The author has more fully discussed this topic in his *Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*; compare the articles on the "Sacrament of Baptism" and "Infant Baptism" in *De Heraut*, 1889 and 1890.

struct those who read and hear, and are of riper years, in reference to what they are to believe and do. To this principle our Calvinistic symbols adhere. They never go beyond the Holy Scriptures and had no liberty to go beyond them. The *second reason* was that they never admitted into their confessions such points *as had not been fully elucidated by theology*. Now, although the connection between Baptism and the antecedent work of God, had been under theological discussion for some time, and had received a partial explanation, still the fact that it had not been clearly formulated compelled them to be rather meagre in their statements. Later on, when the influence of Methodism began to be felt, *i. e.*, of that superficial tendency, which on principle denied the work of God in infants—did not recognize a distinction between the *seed* of faith and *budding* faith—robbed infant baptism of its sacramental character, and lowered it to the rank of a purely human ceremony—thus clearly taking its stand in maintaining that a person not yet converted cannot be regenerated—then Calvinistic theology, in reaction against these errors, reached a greater degree of clearness, and at the present day there can hardly be any further doubt as to its conclusions.

To recapitulate, we may conclude that the Calvinistic Churches attained to confession only after the Spirit of God had given the impulse through the momentous events of Church history and the personal inspiration of their leaders; that, secondly, in confessing they had no other aim than to reëcho the Word of God; that, thirdly, they did not speak until there went up from all the *Reformed Churches* one voice as a voice of many waters; and, fourthly, that even then in all soberness they confined themselves to what the study of theology under the illumination of the Spirit had brought to a sufficient degree of clearness.

IV.

Our last question was: *To what conditions is the revision of the symbols, in the case of a progressive development of Calvinism, to be bound?*

The answer to this question also should not be left to the caprice of subjective opinion, but depends for Calvinistic Churches on the dictates of their own principle as interpreted in the light of history. It should be remembered that this problem of revision was formulated as early as the seventeenth century in connection with the Synod of Dort, both from the Calvinistic and the Arminian side, and that in contradictory terms. The documents bearing on that controversy are still extant, and have been rendered accessible by the author of these remarks, together with all explanatory data, in

his work, *Revision of the Revision Legend* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1879), to which we may be permitted to refer in this connection. In that controversy neither side called in question the abstract right of the Churches to undertake a revision of their creed. Each side admitted, both that the possibility of error had to be assumed, and that either the inward development of the Church or the more aggressive attitude of enemies from without might make a fuller explanation necessary.

On the other hand, Arminians and Calvinists were found to differ in principle as soon as the question was raised: In what manner is the revision of the symbols to be brought about? This difference of principle originated in the vast difference between the value and significance ascribed by either party to the symbols that were in force. Those on the Arminian side in arguing took their point of departure from man, and hence viewed the confessions as products of human study. They held accordingly that human judgment was at liberty, if occasion required, to remodel the adopted formulas or to substitute different ones, and they therefore demanded that the revising Synod pending the process of revision should be free from the trammels of the creed, and should be permitted to erase, to alter, or to add whatsoever it pleased at each moment; with the single proviso that the next or a subsequent Synod should be allowed to do the same work over again and to revise anew the already revised confession. The Calvinistic side opposed this view as being essentially Arminian, as implying a disregard of the work of God and a denial of the Kingship of Christ over His Church. No, Calvinists said, our confession did not originate from man alone, and shall not be treated as a bare product of human study. God Himself by the mighty deeds of His providential government created a more than ordinary movement in the current of Church life; in the midst of this general stirring, took a firmer hold of the spirits of His people; enabled them thereby to pass through a period of deeper spiritual experience of the truth of the Christian religion; and thus in the light of the Holy Spirit there was gradually evolved out of this mighty commotion a clear, distinct, positive conviction, which has been formulated in our confession. In these symbols, therefore, we possess a part and parcel of the life of our Churches. They were given not to a single generation, but to the Church of all future generations until the coming of our Lord. The Church is bound therefore not to lord it over this truth, but to submit to it, and to keep the gold of this God-given confession untarnished until that illustrious day when the King of His Church Himself will appear to profess His truth in judgment.

This confession, Calvinists held, did not lie in the ecclesiastical

archives as a lifeless and antiquated manuscript of which each future Synod could dispose at pleasure; but it stood up in the Church as a living witness of Christ, insisting upon its rights, until after proper filing of complaint, proof should have been brought forward from the Word of God of its incorrectness on any point. The confession possessed rights conferred by God and confirmed by history, and could only be deprived of these after due process of law. Only the Word of God stood higher, to it alone it had to strike the flag. According to this view, then, the method of procedure had to be as follows: In the Synod that took up the matter of revision no one was entitled to speak who did not begin by subscribing to the confession, reserving of course the right of appeal to the Word of God. Next it had to appear whether from the Synod itself or from without any complaint was entered against the confession on the *basis of the divine Word*. Such complaint having been made, a comparison had to follow with the Word of God as to whether the sections under complaint were actually untenable or inadequate. If the assembled Churches, after having called for the assistance of the foreign Churches, found this to be the case, they were bound to enter upon a revision, in order that the sovereign rights of the Word of God as exercising authority over the confession also might continue intact and inviolable. This course of action was followed at the Synod of Dort, with the express approbation of all the foreign theologians. The Arminian method of revision was positively *rejected*. The Synod assembled on the basis of the confession in force. The Arminians were permitted to bring their charges against this confession. They were held to proving these charges with evidence drawn exclusively from the Word of God. This evidence was weighed and found wanting. And finally, in the five *Canones Dordracenæ*, the contents of the confession on these disputed points were explained more fully with an appeal to the Scriptures, and the assertions of the opposing party were refuted by the most emphatic declaration of Holy Writ. Thus in the matter of revision also they remained faithful to the dictates of the Calvinistic principle that the *divine* factor should have the full respect to which it was entitled. The confession was honored as God's gift to His Church, the rights with which it had been invested by God in the course of history were respected, and no other revision was tolerated than that which the distinct utterance of the divine Word rendered imperative.

So much for the formal side of revision. What has been said will suffice to show that the Churches do not possess authority, for no reason in particular, to bring the confession as a leaking ship into drydock for calking, or to have it rebuilt after some presumably more seaworthy model. If this exorbitant demand were granted

to the Churches, a Reformed Church would be at liberty, from a formal point of view, to turn Lutheran from Calvinistic, to become Baptist ten years afterwards, still later to become Episcopalian, and to end with being Greek or Roman Catholic. According to the composition of its Synod, a Church might be Trinitarian during one period and Unitarian during the next. This would indeed be to keep pace with one's time, or rather to drift along with the current of the "Zeitgeist," instead of glorifying God by bearing witness to the eternal rock of His truth, in contrast with the restless shifting of human opinion. In a short time every tie connecting us with our ancestors would be severed, and scarcely any connection with other Churches would remain. From a formal point of view the whole character and essence of the Church would become unsettled. And the end would be, that what called *itself* a Church would, as a matter of fact, have been resolved into a debating society of religious sophists.

Still even these terms are not adequate to secure the right course in the process of revision. There is still another aspect under which this delicate question ought to be considered. Most assuredly the Reformation has not been the last "Sturm- und Drangperiode" of the Church. Even in these very days our Churches are passing through a crisis of the most serious character, which will undoubtedly produce a higher tension of spirits, and thereby lead on to a deeper and richer conviction of faith, whence, as a matter of course, an enrichment of our Church Standards will result. The chasm that has gradually opened up between our subjective convictions and our objective confessions will have to be filled in due time. *But has the time for this already come?* And does not a Calvinistic Church incur great risks in concluding that it has? In our opinion it does, and we on our part would not dare to enter upon a revision in our Dutch Churches.

The reasons that, in our view, make a delay in this matter of revision necessary are the following. Four conditions must be complied with before a Calvinistic Church can undertake the revision of its symbols on the ground of a richer spiritual development: 1. This development must tend in the direction of the Church itself, not being a reaction against, but a richer unfolding of the Calvinistic principle. 2. This unfolding must have made such universal progress in the Churches, that there is, in reference to it, a practically unanimous testimony of *all the Churches*, and not the least danger of one-half of the Consistories or Classes obtruding their opinion on the other half. 3. Calvinistic theology must have made sufficient progress to furnish the Churches with adequate means for formulating this development. 4. In the foreign Churches of the Reformed

Confession a similar conviction must have led to similar results, before this new stage of symbolic development can be entered upon. It is evident that of these four logically incontestable conditions not a single one thus far either has been or can be complied with.

Not the first. If anything then this is certain, that the most recent development of theology, starting from Schleiermacher, does not carry out the Calvinistic principle, but moves in an entirely opposite direction. It may indeed be questioned whether it can be held to represent, in even the most general sense, any Christian principle at all. One receives the impression that the old Gnostic and Neo-Platonic attempt to turn aside the stream of divine revelation into a philosophical channel has in a talented manner been revived by this school of Schleiermacher. We would not gainsay the blessings of the Réveil that succeeded the fall of Napoleon, and we fully recognize that this God-sent awakening has worked miracles in the practical sphere and for the mysteries of religious sentiment. But its influence did not extend to the world of thought. In the sphere of scientific development a philosophical tendency, not seldom inclining to Pantheism, had all but absolute sway. Greater and greater emphasis has been placed on the *immanence* of God, at the expense of his *transcendence*, and the Calvinistic intent thereby more and more obscured. In reference to the spiritual development to be observed in our Churches a twofold influence should therefore be sharply distinguished. On the one hand we meet with a spiritual impulse creating a more vigorous manifestation of life in the practical and mystical sphere; on the other hand we observe a philosophical anti-ecclesiastical element, foreign, nay even diametrically opposed to Calvinism, secretly insinuating itself into the sphere of scientific thought. Now it is precisely this element of thought, not the practical or mystical element, which is chiefly involved in this question of revision. Hence there is a more serious danger than many suspect of permanently deflecting from the Calvinistic line, and of admitting an element into the Confession which, being the product of philosophy, will react against the truth of revelation. This danger may lurk even in the adoption of apparently harmless alterations and may unawares overtake even such as have not the slightest desire to invite it. The richer development of Calvinism is passing through a process of fermentation, but has not nearly reached a stage to show any definite results.

Nor can the second condition be complied with, viz., that such a development alone shall be formulated in the confession as has become the common faith of the whole body of the Churches. When in 1559 the Synod of Paris promulgated its Confession, every Huguenot in France responded from his heart with "Yea and Amen." The

Confession of Guido de Brès was not adopted by a majority of votes, but with a sort of spiritual *élan* by all our Churches. At Dort also the Canons were passed unanimously. And after the Westminster fathers had completed their labors, all Calvinistic Churches of English origin felt that no other confession had been framed than the living confession of their souls. And thus it should be. As long as the Lord our God has not brought to completion the work of His Spirit in the hearts, the Church is not prepared to revise its creed. To control one another, to make a majority rule a minority, should not be thought of here. As long, therefore, as the Synod convened for the purpose of revising, stands divided, this fact alone abundantly proves that the moment for so important a work has not yet arrived, and that a stage of riper development should be awaited.

In a worse plight even are matters in regard to the third condition by which every legitimate revision of the confession is bound, viz., that Calvinistic theology by its previous development shall have acquired sufficient strength to supply an adequate formula for the work in hand. In Germany, to be sure, an independent *Lutheran* theology has been evolved in opposition to the *Vermittlungstheologie*, owing partly to the stand taken by Villmar and partly to the energetic labors of the Old Lutherans. Roman Catholic theology also has exhibited significant symptoms of life. Even the Baptists have displayed not a little activity. But Calvinistic theology alone continues to slumber. Not as if the Calvinistic Churches had been lacking in learned scholars and productive authors; the contrary is true; but their labors have either been of a more practical and edifying character, or when engaged more strictly with principles they have either been satisfied with *cocta recoquere*, or been occupied with smuggling the contraband of the German *Vermittlungstheologie* into the Calvinistic camp. Aside from Hodge hardly an effort has been made towards reconstructing Calvinistic theology; and even Hodge by his proposal to take "the facts of the Bible" as the *principium theologiæ* has weakened his own initiative. What has been accomplished by Heppe and Ebrard, and partly by Schweizer and Scholten, should be appreciated as contributing to our historical knowledge; but it should also be remembered that these historical data have been used by them for the purpose of grafting a philosophical shoot on the Calvinistic stem. The theology of the French Churches has either followed Vinet's individualism or moved in the grooves of the schools of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. In Switzerland, after Gaussen and Merle d'Aubigné, no man has ever made efforts to pour fresh waters on the root of Calvinistic theology. In Germany the Calvinistic consciousness has well-nigh vanished in Reformed circles, a fact not difficult to account for. The astounding influence

on theological thought, not so much of Kant, but particularly of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, later of Lotze and Herbart, has here, as well as in other departments of science, placed Germany at the head of the intellectual movement of our times. Hence under the influence and auspices of these philosophers an entirely new theological life has been awakened in Germany, which has left the theological labors of other countries far behind. Germany has thus been enabled to produce manuals for every branch of theological study that in many respects are excellent and useful, and owing to their non-confessional character even have found their way into other countries. As a result there is hardly a single living theologian whom this German *Vermittlungstheologie*, in some of its many variations, has not considerably influenced, and whose way of thinking it has not molded to a greater or less degree, so as to estrange him from the theological basis of his own Church. Not until sad experience had taught how this chameleonic German theology 'led from Martensen to Rothe, from Rothe to Ritschl, and presently from Ritschl to Lipsius and Biedermann, has the brave example of the Old Lutherans incited a few Calvinistic theologians to take in hand the development of what has been committed to their trust. A beginning, therefore, has been made. Calvinistic theology will in the near future be able to demand a hearing. But a development which could lay claim to being abreast of the times, and furnish the necessary light for reshaping our symbols without forsaking its own principles, is as yet out of the question. Lacking these things that are absolutely indispensable in the line of preparation the result of an attempted revision could only be that, notwithstanding the best of intentions, foreign elements would imperceptibly creep into our confessions, that we would formulate our views in a most questionable manner, and that the necessity would soon make itself felt to undo the work just accomplished.

To this must be added that our chances of being able to comply with the last and *fourth* condition are extremely slight. At Dort and at Westminster, on both of which occasions a body of exceedingly learned and thoroughly Calvinistic theologians was assembled who had their views well formulated, still the absolute impossibility was recognized of closing the proceedings without having advised with the foreign Churches. These men would not separate themselves from the Reformed Church of Christ scattered over the entire earth; and on the other hand they felt that the approbation of all these Churches would set the seal on the work undertaken. For the present, such a coöperation cannot be thought of, all the Reformed Churches being involved in a fierce struggle against the most glaring unbelief in their own bosom, and being for the greater part disqualified by their Synodical organizations from serving as organs of

the voice of Christ in formulating the divine truth. On the European Continent at least the situation in this respect is pitiable. At the utmost a few individual theologians could be consulted, provided these would give the preliminary assurance of being in full agreement with the confession of their Churches. But after all this could never take the place of the advice of the Reformed Churches all over the world.

Under these circumstances a revision of our symbols, carried through in opposition to the Calvinistic principle and the warning voice of history, would only be the forerunner of a still more thorough-going revision to follow immediately in its wake. Thereby the assurance of the certainty of divine truth would receive a serious blow in many of our Churches. And of this unsettling the result would be that the confession instead of strengthening the faith, which is professedly its aim, would be turned into a very hurtful instrument for injuring the faith of our people to an ever-increasing extent. In order to avert this very danger our fathers have always observed the wise custom, wherever they were compelled to give a closer definition of the truth, of leaving the old intact, and of adding in the form of an appendix a further declaration on any disputed points. The Canons of Dort are an illustrious example of this, which might be imitated even now, should matters come to such a pass. Thus no piece of new cloth is put on an old garment. All things remain firmly established, and the Churches only declare that in regard to some points requiring further elucidation, they have arrived at a certain new formula. But even such a measure the author would not venture for the present to recommend to the Dutch Churches. Even in regard to the relation between Church and State, this would be untimely, although we can fully understand, why the Calvinistic Churches of America have eliminated the third article of the twenty-third chapter of the Westminster Confession. He that would pluck the fruit before it has ripened always draws upon himself the penalty of a regret coming too late. The time for a revision of our Standards will not arrive until after our Churches shall have succeeded in purifying their atmosphere of heterogeneous elements, in regaining the consciousness, both in a theoretical and in a historical sense, of the principle that shapes their life, and in developing from this principle once more understood, a Calvinistic theology, that will draw its vital saps from its own root, and will be able to accredit itself to the scientific consciousness of the children of our age.

Calvinism is a specific tendency, which has to keep in the Church of Christ *its own sacred trust*, to reveal the lustre of a principle peculiar to itself, to fulfill a distinct mission for the glory of God. By

allowing this specific character to be effaced it would commit a crime, and the Church would be impoverished and mutilated in a spiritual aspect, in so far as a member would drop out of its organism. We would sink from a higher to a lower plane. And the coming generation would address to us, laid to rest in our graves, the reproachful question, whence we derived the right to surrender the trust committed to us by God, the sacred inheritance of the fathers.

These are the reasons why the author, hearing of the revision proposed in America, and realizing what its consequences might be for the Dutch Churches, would feel in duty bound in the sight of God to dissuade from such revision in the most positive manner, if it were proposed in his own country. We do not presume to give an opinion on American questions. This would obviously be out of place, and the good reader will not ascribe to us such presumption. Some personal intercourse with the American Churches would be indispensable to qualify us for forming such an opinion. Notwithstanding his almost enthusiastic sympathies for the life that is flourishing in America, the writer has not thus far found time to make this acquaintance. That we have nevertheless rendered this account of our views, is exclusively owing to the consciousness, that in this question also there are certain universal principles at stake, principles that should govern the conduct of the "*issus de Calvin*" in every age and clime, independently of all transient conditions and local circumstances.

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