

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

No. 17—January, 1894.

I.

THE FUTURE OF CALVINISM.*

THE year 1892 was a year of great importance for the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. Two influential groups of Churches, both originating in a secession from the Established Church, the one in 1834, the other in 1886, were, after long negotiations, brought together, and in June of that year held their "First General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands." For various reasons this event has excited considerable interest. It was something unforeseen and unexpected. Both groups, to be sure, were one in their confession and form of government, and both shared the conviction that a Reformed Christian was in duty bound to his Bible and his confession to break with the Established Church. Still, concerning "the method of reformation," *i. e.*, the manner in which this breach ought to be brought about, there existed an appreciable difference of opinion. This difference in method gave rise to the different attitudes which the two sides assumed in relation to the property of the Established Church and the civil authorities. The Christian Reformed Church, originating in the secession of 1834, had gradually come to consider itself as an entirely new Church, and as having broken off all connection with both the governing bodies and the individual members of the establishment. Consequently it raised no claim in the civil courts to retain or recover the property of the Established Church, and presented itself to the civil authorities as a new and different organization. On the other hand, the so-called

*[Our readers are indebted to Prof. G. Vos, Ph.D., D.D., of Princeton Seminary, for the translation of Dr. Bavinck's paper.—EDITORS.]

"Netherland Reformed Churches," born from the movement of 1886, were averse to the idea of separation; and, while favoring that of reformation, considered themselves as the old original churches which had merely renounced obedience to the illegal Synodical government, imposed by the civil powers in 1816, and had returned to the old form of government approved at Dort in 1619 and since then never lawfully set aside. They objected to being regarded as a new organization, side by side with the Established Church, and claimed to be the identical churches, that in the sixteenth century had adopted the Reformation, and that now, for equally valid, if not more valid reasons, repudiated the control of the Synodical body. In conformity with this position they brought action in the civil courts to uphold their claim and title to all church property, and, in view of the refusal of the authorities to concede this claim, designated themselves as "*doleerende*," *i. e.*, as making complaint of the injustice done them by the civil power.

These differences, though not in any direct way connected with the confession, were nevertheless of a serious nature. Owing to them, the negotiations with a view to union with their separated brethren which the Churches of 1886 had immediately opened, led to no result, except that on both sides misunderstandings and exaggerations in reference to the position of the other party began to increase. At more than one time it seemed as if all efforts to bring about a union were to fail. Instead of coming closer together the Churches were drifting apart. And yet, notwithstanding all these discouraging signs, at the Synods of Leeuwarden and The Hague a provisional basis of union was agreed upon. In 1892, contrary to almost universal expectation, nay, notwithstanding the hopes and the avowed opposition of many from without, the union itself was concluded. Both here and abroad this result has attracted attention. The interest shown by many may have sprung from a secret dread of the growing influence of Calvinism; we know that there are others with whom it was inspired by a warm love for the Reformed principles, and whom it led to thank God for having at the decisive moment kept hearts and minds in His peace, and reunited those that were brethren of the same house.

None can deny that by this union Calvinism has once more secured a firm foothold in the Netherlands, and attained a significance which, while easily exaggerated by some, is just as likely to be underestimated by others. This remarkable phenomenon, that Calvinism should be restored in some degree to its former state of prosperity, has led many to ask whether Calvinism has a future. There are but few who will, at this late day, credit Calvinism with any degree of vitality. According to the majority it has long

passed its prime, is antiquated and ready to vanish, nay, already dead and honorably buried. But our thoughts sometimes differ from God's thoughts. The remarkable *réveil* of Calvinism in Holland may at least be considered to justify an inquiry, whether it is capable of a further and richer development for this and the following centuries; whether it is destined to occupy a modest place and to fulfill a specific calling among the Churches of the future; whether God by this revival of His Reformed Churches in the Netherlands intends to bestow a blessing on His people not only here but likewise abroad. The revival of Calvinism in the Netherlands will appear all the more noteworthy in proportion as one is familiar with Dutch history of the past and with the position once occupied by this small country in the sphere of religious, ecclesiastical and political life, a position which enabled it to exercise a powerful influence on the Churches and the theology of other nations. To such as are able to make an estimate of this influence, the question put above will perhaps assume a still wider bearing and involve the inquiry whether this revived Calvinism may not have some significance for the Reformed Churches and the Reformed theology as a whole, and whether it may not, perhaps, be made useful in stemming the tide of unbelief and anti-Christian principles. We wish to seek an answer to these questions, and for this purpose first endeavor to describe the nature of Calvinism; in the second place to point out the historical and national importance to which it attained in the Netherlands; and thirdly to estimate the significance it may have for other countries.

I. Calvinism is a specific type among the Protestant Churches and confessions. Frequently this type is designated by the name of Reformed. The words Reformed and Calvinistic, however, though cognate in meaning, are by no means equivalent, the former being more limited and less comprehensive than the latter. Reformed expresses merely a religious and ecclesiastical distinction; it is a purely theological conception. The term Calvinism is of wider application and denotes a specific type in the political, social and civil spheres. It stands for that characteristic view of life and the world as a whole, which was born from the powerful mind of the French Reformer. Calvinist is the name of a Reformed Christian in so far as he reveals a specific character and a distinct physiognomy, not merely in his church and theology, but also in social and political life, in science and art.

The root principle of this Calvinism is the confession of God's absolute sovereignty. Not one special attribute of God, for instance His love or justice, His holiness or equity, but God Himself as such

in the unity of all His attributes and the perfection of His entire Being is the point of departure for the thinking and acting of the Calvinist. From this root principle everything that is specifically Reformed may be derived and explained. It was this that led to the sharp distinction between what is God's and the creature's, to belief in the sole authority of the Holy Scriptures, in the all-sufficiency of Christ and His work, in the omnipotence of the work of grace. Hence also the sharp distinction between the divine and human in the Person and the two natures of Christ, between the external and internal call, between the sign and the matter signified in the sacrament. From this source likewise sprang the doctrine of the absolute dependence of the creature, as it is expressed in the Calvinistic confessions in regard to providence, foreordination, election, the inability of man. By this principle also the Calvinist was led to the use of that thoroughgoing consistent theological method, which distinguishes him from Romanist and other Protestant theologians. Not only in the whole range of his theology, but also outside of this, in every sphere of life and science, his effort aims at the recognition and maintenance of God as God over against all creatures. In the work of creation and regeneration, in sin and grace, in Adam and Christ, in the Church and the sacraments, it is in each case God who reveals and upholds His sovereignty and leads it to triumph notwithstanding all disregard and resistance. There is something heroic and grand and imposing in this Calvinistic conception. Viewed in its light the whole course of history becomes a gigantic contest, in which God carries through His sovereignty, and makes it, like a mountain stream, overcome all resistance in the end, bringing the creature to a willing or unwilling, but in either case unqualified, recognition of His divine glory. From God all things are, and accordingly they all return to Him. He is God and remains God now and forever; Jehovah, the Being, the one that was and is and that is to come. For this reason the Calvinist in all things recurs upon God, and does not rest satisfied before he has traced back everything to the sovereign good-pleasure of God as its ultimate and deepest cause. He never loses himself in the appearance of things, but penetrates to their realities. Behind the phenomena he searches for the noumena, the things that are not seen, from which the things visible have been born. He does not take his stand in the midst of history, but out of time ascends into the heights of eternity. History is naught but the gradual unfolding of what to God is an eternal present. For his heart, his thinking, his life, the Calvinist cannot find rest in these terrestrial things, the sphere of what is becoming, changing, forever passing by. From the process of salvation he therefore recurs upon the decree of salvation, from

history to the idea. He does not remain in the outer court of the temple, but seeks to enter into the innermost sanctuary. He views everything *sub specie æternitatis*. If religion be, according to the old definition, that "virtus per quam homines Deo debitum cultum et reverentiam exhibent," and if theology, as the word indicates, be a knowledge of God and of all other things as put in relation with and subordination to God, then surely with the Calvinist religion is most religious and theology most theological.

This Calvinistic principle, however, is too universal and accordingly too rich and fruitful to allow its influence to be confined to the production of a specific type in the sphere of religion and theology. It produces a specific view of the world and life as a whole; so to speak, a philosophy all its own. The moral life also that grows upon the soil of Calvinism bears a distinct physiognomy. In the first place, the fact is noteworthy that, contrary to the expectations and predictions of all Pelagians, Calvinism has always promoted a vigorous moral life. History has shown that the confession of God's sovereignty and of the absolute dependence of the creature is not only not harmful, but greatly conducive to morality. The truth is that predestination includes also the predestination of means, and election always presupposes an end at which it aims. Election involves a destiny, a life-work, a moral calling. Hence moral life among Calvinists has always been marked by activity and energy, by a restless striving to bring everything under the discipline of the law of God, and by so doing to make it subservient to His glory. It cannot be denied that owing to this, morality has sometimes assumed a character of legalism, of a certain exaggerated earnestness and severity. But, even so, Calvinism has cultivated a number of virtues that have proved of the greatest value for the family, for society and the State. The love for home, temperance, cleanliness, neatness, order, obedience, chastity, earnestness, industry, economy, are virtues that at all times have flourished among Calvinistic Christians. And, since Calvinism has been accustomed to have its greatest influence with the people, it has formed these into a class of solid and industrious citizens, which has at all times and everywhere proved the main support of Church and State.

In close connection with this, Calvinism has developed its own political system and political life. Undeniably there is a republican and a democratic tendency in Calvinism. The Calvinist fears God alone and no man. Authority of one creature over another flows exclusively from the sovereign gift of God; no power is original with any man or inherent in the person himself; it inheres in the office alone. For intriguing, worship of the creature and fear of man, there is no place in Calvinism. Before God all are equal,

kings and subjects; nay, even the poor, the weak and despised things are chosen by Him for the highest ends, that no flesh should glory before Him. To Him obedience is due rather and more than to any man. Hence it is Calvinism that has fostered the civil and political liberty of which the Netherlands, England and America can boast, in distinction from Spain, Austria, Italy and even Lutheran Germany. Separation between Church and State, freedom of religion, liberty of conscience, freedom in the home and in social life, all these are fruits grown on the tree of Calvinism.

In the same manner the principles of Calvinism bear in themselves the germ of a specific type in science and art, though it must be admitted that this germ has not as yet been fully developed. The history of Calvinism has been too abruptly terminated. It has not as yet found the time and the opportunity to unfold itself in every direction and to draw the lines that logically follow from its principles. Still the potentialities for development are there, whereas the Lutheran Reformation lacked this broad universality from the beginning. The anthropological or soteriological principle of the latter was too narrow for so rich a development and application, in consequence of which it was confined to the religious and theological sphere. Calvinism, on the other hand, has a world-encompassing tendency, being catholic in the best sense of the word. The Calvinist is fully conscious of this far-reaching tendency, and, borne on by this principle, he aims with calm and unswerving determination at the end, which God Himself pursues in every creature, the glorification of His name.

II. This Calvinism found entrance into the Netherlands and has shaped the Dutch people as it has no other people on earth. Before the Reformation, in the latter half of the fourteenth century, there was already a religious revival here under the leadership of the well-known Gerardus Magnus (Geert Groote, † 1384). This revival, however, besides being of a positively Roman character, for the greater part died out in the fifteenth century. Among the next generation the corruption of morals reached an appalling depth. At the beginning of the sixteenth century especially the monasteries were breeding places of iniquity. Complaints of the immorality, the licentiousness, the ignorance, the despotism and extortion of the clergy were as numerous and as serious here as in other countries. Only here and there something good survived the reaction. Among the clergy there were a few favorable exceptions to the general rule of badness. Humanism, represented by Gansfort and Agricola, did not assume a hostile attitude towards the Reformation as it did in Italy and elsewhere. In many a hungry and thirsting after

Reformation had been awakened. If anywhere then here it could be said that the soil had been prepared for Protestantism.

The Reformation itself passed through three periods. The first is at present designated by historians that of the *Sacramentists* or *Evangelicals* and extends from 1518 to 1531. As early as the first months of the year 1518 the fame of Luther spread to this country; his ninety-five theses were read everywhere; the report of his heroic deeds was received with enthusiasm. The number of his admirers and supporters increased daily. Naturally these were called Lutherans, though, of course, they were not at all Lutherans in the later and specific sense of the term, and inclined rather to Zwingli in their views on the Supper. In fact Zwingli himself had been strongly confirmed in his views by a letter from Cornelius Honius, a jurist at The Hague, and led by him to his exposition of "est pro significat." This period of the Dutch Reformation is characterized by deep religiousness, sacred zeal, fiery courage, and particularly by the entire absence of the political element. According to the testimony of Erasmus, in 1525, a large part of the population joined this movement. Soon, however, Church and State conspired to suppress the heresy. Edicts were issued and people burned at the stake. The evangelical preachers having fled and left the country, their followers were left to their fate, and deprived of leaders they decreased in number and their enthusiasm cooled down.

At this juncture, however, another party appears on the scene to take up the cause of Reformation. The *Anabaptists* open the second period covering the years from 1531 to 1560. Probably their influence had already begun in 1525, when the persecution was most fierce, but not until 1530 did they begin to be known as a separate, distinct party. In the year last-mentioned Jan Trijpman returned to Amsterdam from Embden, where he had met Melchior Hofmann. The Anabaptists soon gathered a large following. Their heroic faith compelled admiration; they did not flee from danger, but braved it. They were men from the people, simple and unostentatious. They supplied the guidance and direction that were wanting, and infused faith and new courage into those that had become fearful. Their doctrines, especially in regard to the sacraments, met with sympathy and assent. The overstrained feelings, to which many had been wrought up by the persecution, could not but favor the fanatical elements of the Anabaptistic movement. It was but natural that the former Evangelicals in great numbers, nay, even as a rule, joined the Anabaptists. The original reformation thus gradually disappeared. But against the Anabaptists, also, persecution began to rage. They were scattered, expelled, put to death,

and moreover divided and consumed by internal dissensions. It was Menno Simons who at this stage gathered the defenseless Anabaptists round himself, bridled their fanaticism and made them seek their strength in quietness.

If it had not been for another movement, which at that time spread to our country, the Reformation among us would probably have perished at its birth and gradually dwindled away. Slowly, however, *Calvinism* was making its way into the Netherlands. It entered partly from the southern provinces, partly it was introduced by those numerous fugitives who had sought a refuge in London, Oost-Friesland, Kleefsland and the Palatinate. This Calvinism imparted to our people the power not only to endure persecution, but also to save and confirm the Reformation for this country. It was distinguished from both the preceding movements in two respects. First, it exhibited a strong organizing power. The Evangelicals and Anabaptists had become scattered and divided, being destitute of good and firm leadership; owing to their lack of unity they suffered from a lack of power; the Reformed on the other hand were organized immediately. As early as 1561 they received a confession from Guido de Brès, and from the year 1563 onward, assemblies of the Churches or Synods were held in the southern part of the Netherlands. In the second place, Calvinism gave rise to a political movement. The Evangelicals and Anabaptists had refrained from every movement in the sphere of politics, allowing themselves to be slaughtered as defenseless sheep; the Reformed were possessed of a political as well as a religious conviction; they sought to attach to their cause the nobles and merchants, and already in 1566 resolved upon armed resistance. Prince William of Orange was placed in command, and in 1568 opened the war, which after eighty years was to end with the peace of Westphalia.

Henceforward religious and political interests were inseparably united. To declare one's self in favor of the Reformed religion and of the Prince of Orange amounted to the same thing. This will explain why, not in reference to the first and second periods, but only in reference to the third, the question has been raised, wherein lay the chief motive for the conflict, in religion or in politics, in the attack on faith or in violation of the charters. Though there be room for this question, yet the answer need not be doubtful. The eighty years' war was a war of religion, a war for liberty of conscience. The thousands that were tried, convicted, and put to death on account of their faith are sufficient proof of this. No less competent a witness than Alva wrote in a letter of July 2, 1572, to the king of Spain, "All the malcontents in Holland demand liberty of conscience, and declare, that after having been granted this, they will

be found willing to pay not only the tenth,* but even the fifth penny." Nevertheless the party of the Reformed, which had thus boldly taken up the contest with Spain, was small in number. According to a rough estimate no more than one-tenth of the population were Reformed in 1587, and even this tenth part belonged chiefly to the lower classes. Nay, for four years, from April, 1572, till November, 1576, the contest with Spain was carried on by the tenth part of the population of Holland and Zeeland alone. But this small Calvinistic group was strong through its faith, powerful through its principles; it knew what it wanted, and was unfaltering and unconquerable in its efforts to obtain it. It increased under the persecution in political as well as in religious influence and power.

By the logic of events, the Reformed religion naturally became the supreme religion, the religion of the State. *De facto* it was this already in 1583, but formally and legally it became so at the Great Assembly of 1651. This indeed is the unique and truly remarkable feature of Dutch history, that Church and State were born simultaneously here, on one and the same day, having been united from the outset. The Reformed Church was the centre of the commonwealth; the Church and the Republic did not at first exist separately, to be united afterwards; the Republic rather was born from the confession of the Church. What Holland has become as a nation, it owes to the Reformation, and more particularly to Calvinism. Here Calvinism has shaped a people, formed a nationality, founded a republic. As a nation Holland is a son, a foster-child of the Reformation. And for this reason Calvinism, more than anywhere else, has entered into the innermost fibres of the stem of our nationality; it has been the principle of our life, the nerve of our strength, the foundation of our prosperity.

The period during which the Church was at its prime was, owing to this close alliance, likewise the time of greatest prosperity for the republic, and the decline of faith involved the downfall of the State. At about the middle of the seventeenth century the Church and the commonwealth had reached the height of their power. More had been obtained than the boldest faith dared expect at the beginning of the conflict. The struggle of the Reformed had saved the Reformation for Holland; nay, in a certain sense, for Europe. In 1574, Prince William had already written: "If this country is brought back under the tyranny of the Spaniards, the true religion will be extinguished everywhere." The religious war in our country had significance for the whole of Europe. In behalf of all Protestant Christendom the contest was waged here in defense

* [This is a technical phrase, designating the tax of ten per cent. imposed by Alva in 1572 on all sales of personalty.—TRANSLATOR.]

of liberty of conscience and religion against Spanish tyranny and Romish inquisition. The peace of Westphalia involved the recognition of the Reformation and its indisputable right of existence.

Holland had won for itself a place of honor among the nations of Europe. The Church passed through its most beautiful days. Theology was cultivated by the foremost scholars. The universities, which drew to themselves the most eminent talents from at home and abroad, became famous and great centres of attraction. Arts and sciences flourished. It was the golden age of literature. Trade and industry developed, and in consequence wealth and luxury increased. The land of liberty offered a refuge to all that were in distress of spirit, to the persecuted Jews, to the English dissenters and the French refugees. All this prosperity was due either directly or indirectly to the contest which Calvinism had so valiantly and perseveringly kept up for eighty years. Holland had first sought the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things had been added unto it.

In the same manner the Church and the Commonwealth went down together. The first symptoms of decay appear towards the end of the seventeenth century. Cartesianism and Coccejanism prepared the way for the subsequent Rationalism. Indolence and luxury began to undermine the old Dutch self-respect and energy. In the eighteenth century foreign influences likewise made themselves felt, in particular English Deism and the French neology. In consequence of all this the love for the house of Orange began to wane, the national character degenerated, and Calvinism withdrew into the more quiet circles of the common people. Among them, to be sure, it remained alive, and was preserved in its original purity, in close alliance with the attachment to the Princes of Orange and with a deep national sentiment. The lower classes of the people retained their originality; foreign customs did not with them replace the old national habits; the French ideas found no acceptance. This part of the people remained, what it had always been, attached to its faith, faithful to its traditions, fond of its history. It was, however, unavoidable that under these circumstances Calvinism should suffer from onesidedness and degeneration, being almost entirely deprived of firm direction and guidance. The Church and the schools, the pious people and theology became more and more alienated from each other. Those who loved the faith of the fathers could no longer find satisfaction in the preaching that now prevailed, and gathered in conventicles to seek edification for themselves. In the same proportion that they felt less at home in their own time, they lived back into the past, in the world of the old religious literature, in the speech and ideas of the fathers.

The Reformed, who had once stood at the head of every movement and been the liberals and radicals of their time, now became conservative, reactionary, panegyrists of the old, and despisers of the new times. They had the reputation of bigots, fanatics, who sought the darkness and eschewed the light. This had the effect of making them still more obstinate and inflexible, and of rendering their isolation almost complete. Being thus shut off from all healthy activity and movement, they did not escape the danger of adopting various foreign and erroneous ideas of Antinomian, Labadistic and Pietistic origin. It was no longer the old, high-minded, radical Calvinism, but a Calvinism that had become rough, harsh, unpolished, without splendor and fire, cold and dry and dead. Yet, notwithstanding all this, to the people the honor is due of having safely preserved the treasure of Calvinism, even in this less noble form, and of having transmitted it to our age and to the children of our generation. Having once, through a period of martyrdom and war, been identified with the very soul of our people, and as it were entered into their blood, Calvinism could no longer be eradicated by any foreign influence or power. God Himself has protected it, and, by so doing, indicated that it still has a task to perform in the future.

At the beginning of the present century Calvinism left its hiding place. Again the restoration of the country's independence, the elevation of the Prince of Orange to the rank of sovereign ruler, and the revival of Calvinism were simultaneous. The restoration, however, soon proved not to have been of the nature of an inward reformation, and consequently took up an attitude of hostility towards the Calvinistic people. At first, in a contemptuous and pitying manner, Calvinism was met with a shrug of the shoulders. It was no longer deemed worthy of serious discussion, or even of opposition, being considered a standpoint that had been thoroughly conquered, something destined for utter extinction. When gradually, with the greatest timidity, it ventured forward, these despisers covered it with derision. And when, notwithstanding all this, it grew in numbers and influence, imprisonment and the imposition of fines were resorted to in order to suppress and eradicate so hated a form of faith. The State strove to liberalize the nation by means of a neutral Church, neutral schools and neutral universities. The press tried to kill the Calvinistic party by systematically ignoring it and burying it in oblivion. In the basest manner, Bilderdijk, Da Costa and Groen van Prinsterer were abused, and the Reformed in general were treated as pariahs in their own country, in their own Church, and among their own people. They had no access to office or position. The various theological tendencies, that arose

in succession, subsisted on foreign ideas, imported from France and Germany, and did not betray the least interest in the common people and its religion; they did not understand the latter, nor did they endeavor to understand them. The first who earnestly sought to study the national Reformed theology and to trace its principles was the "modern" Prof. Scholten. The gulf between Church and school, religion and theology, between the national spirit and foreign influences, continued to exist as deep as ever.

But God raised up men who allied themselves to the Calvinism of the common people and brought it out of its darkness into the clear light of day. The *réveil*, communicated to our country from Switzerland, was confined to the higher classes, and did not reach the common people; nor was it Calvinistic. From the people itself a revival was born. There had always continued to be some ministers who proclaimed the Reformed doctrine. The secession of 1834 roused the confessional consciousness from its slumbers, and led part of the Reformed people to form a separate, free organization outside of the Established Church. Within the Established Church itself a Calvinistic movement arose under the leadership of Groen van Prinsterer. Though of noble rank, he, with his noble heart, understood the people, and was not ashamed to enter into close contact with them or to defend them. He succeeded in drawing them from their isolation, and in rousing them to activity in the field of politics, to wage war against the neutral State schools. Soon others stood ready to take his place as leaders in a movement which grew and is growing still to an ever-increasing importance in the sphere of the Church and of theology. By the secession of 1886 once more a large group of believers withdrew from the organization of the Established Church. The union concluded in 1892 was the victory after a long battle, the crown received after a period of painful toil, a prophecy perhaps also of a better and more beautiful future.

This revival of Calvinism, so surprisingly blessed in its beginnings, is of great importance for the Netherlands. Exaggeration can only harm. The Roman Church embraces still two-fifths of our population. The Established Church counts more than two millions of souls. Other Churches and sects together number half a million of members. After the Reformed churches shall have attained to local union their numbers will not exceed six hundred with a membership of about four hundred thousand. This is comparatively small, as it comprises but one-eleventh part of the population. To be sure there are still thousands in the Established Church that love the Reformed confession and hear the doctrines of this confession preached from their pulpits. It would be a great

cause for rejoicing if they also could unite with their brethren on the basis of a free and purified Church. It is to be expected that in the same proportion as they take a more decisive stand, they will feel less satisfied with the situation, and will be led to consider the breach with the Establishment, which for the present they deem sinful, a matter of necessity and duty. At any rate, the Reformed Churches should never rest until the brethren belonging to the same house are all reunited in love and peace under one roof. But, even if God should be pleased to grant this grace to His Church in Holland, even then the free Reformed Churches would probably count no more than six hundred thousand members, which is about one-eighth part of our whole population.

This smallness in point of numbers, with its consequent deficiency of power, should protect us from overstrained expectations. The dread in which many profess to stand from the growing influence of Calvinism is not at all justified by these numbers. A Calvinistic State, a favored Church, an extension of the Reformed religion to the whole nation, are out of the question. The situation has totally changed since the time when these things were possible. Church and State, religion and citizenship, have been separated forever. Unbelief has permeated all classes and alienated a great part of the people from Christianity. To the alarming fact that unbelief is increasing on all hands, the Reformed do not close their eyes. They do not wish to reprimatinate, and have no desire for the old conditions to return. They heartily accept the freedom of religion and conscience, the equality of all before the law. As children of their time they do not scorn the good things which God in this age also has given them; forgetting the things that are behind, they stretch forward to the things that are before. They strive to make progress, to escape from the deadly embrace of dead conservatism, and to take their place, as before, at the head of every movement. Even at the present day many in Holland consider them too radical, and suspect them of a secret alliance with socialism.

On the other hand, however, no one should allow himself to despise the day of small things. There is a surprising strength in Calvinism. Those that conduct the movement may be few and weak, the principle itself is full of latent energy. So it was in the sixteenth century, and so, comparatively speaking, it is at the present time. In this relation all of course depends on faith. The Calvinists are a party of faith; together with their faith they stand and fall. But if God should grant to the Calvinists of our time to lay hold of their faith with the same enthusiasm and self-denial as did their fathers of old, then perhaps a happy future would be in store for them. The preservation of Calvinism in the heart of our people,

notwithstanding all discredit and opposition, all the slight and persecution that have been heaped upon it, seems to indicate that God Himself has something great in store for it, and intends to make it a blessing for His Church in the Netherlands.

It appears to me that in the first place the significance of this revival lies in this, that it preserves and protects the Christian religion and the Christian Church in our country. Calvinism is the religion of the Dutch nation, and he that would take our Calvinism away from us, would rob us of the Christian religion and prepare the way among us for unbelief and revolution. Other Christian creeds may have a small group of adherents; they do not sway the people; and in general eke out but a scanty subsistence. The theological tendencies that arose in the last century have all been transitory and have disappeared one after the other. Though not without use for their own time, they did not avail to stem the tide of unbelief and protect the nation against the revolutionary powers at work among it. Calvinism on the other hand keeps its ground, does not pass away, but stands firm and immovable, and, while offering to the people a harmonious system, provides it with a stay it can rest upon. The Dutch people will either be Calvinistic or will cease to be a Christian nation. They are by far too absolute, too resolute, to put up in the long run with anything that is of a hybridical or mediating character. In other countries, where the national bent is less dogmatic and theological, this may be different. In Holland such a case is hardly conceivable. Moreover, history proves that Calvinism is so closely interwoven with our national life, that nothing else will ever be able to take its place. No other confession can ever dislodge the Calvinistic creed from the hearts of the people, which it has conquered under the stress of persecution and suffering. Its adoption by the people has been consecrated by blood and tears, it fills the most luminant pages of our history, it is the creative and formative power of our national character. The revival of Calvinism is equivalent to the preservation of the Christian religion itself, as it found entrance here during a most fearful struggle, and it alone can offer a guarantee for its own future existence.

In the second place, Calvinism certainly has a future in Holland for this reason also, that, in a less degree perhaps, but nevertheless from the same principle, it has always contended for the liberties of the people, and vindicates this claim even at the present time. Calvinism is both the origin and the safeguard of our religious, political and civil freedom. When this freedom was assailed in the present century, Calvinism took up the battle in its defense, now no longer against tyrannical Spain, but against the absolutism and

omnipotence of the State. Once more during our life-time the liberty of conscience, of religion, of the Church, of the school, have been reconquered, by never-flagging exertion in the face of the most persistent opposition. Official Holland has not shunned the use of a single means, however objectionable, in the council chamber, the press, the pulpit or the professor's chair, to curtail this liberty and take it from us. Inch by inch we had to reconquer it in every sphere. At present so much has been gained that the equality of all confessions is being recognized more than it used to be, both in the making and in the execution of our laws. But the final goal has not been reached as yet, the fight has to be kept up against the State monopoly in the intermediate and higher education, against the favored position of the Established Church, and the like. It is to be expected that a still more serious struggle awaits the Calvinism of the future. We are living in a democratic age. There is a universal pressure and demand for extension of the power of the State. The middle parties are one after the other disappearing from the scene. Radicalism and socialism are growing in power. In all likelihood, Calvinism will have to take up the contest with radicalism and socialism in the near future, as once it did with the conservatism and liberalism of the past, and will have to contend for our religious, political and civil liberties. Now already it is entitled to the honor of having organized an influential group of laboring people for the purpose of warning and protecting them against the fatal theories of unbelief and their social consequences.

A third quality in Calvinism that gives promise for the future is its historic sense. In politics Calvinists with us constitute the Anti-revolutionary or Christian-historic party. It is noteworthy, that Bilderdijk, that bold opponent of revolutionary principles, used to hold lectures at Leiden on Dutch history, thus gathering round himself a circle of disciples, who were to carry on after him the fight for the Gospel and against the revolution. Among these the foremost was Groen van Prinsterer, not only a Reformed Christian and a learned statesman, but likewise a historian of the first rank. By his famous *Handbook of the History of the Fatherland*, he became a blessing to many. Besides purifying history from the prevailing humanistic and rationalistic views; besides placing it in the only true light of the divine Word; besides pointing out the intimate connection between the Church and the Republic; besides all this and by means of it, he roused the national spirit, developed the noble love of liberty, and confirmed the people's attachment to the house of Orange. Following his lead, and contending for the rights of the Reformed religion, Calvinism could not but be national and historical. Religion, language and nationality are intimately

connected everywhere, but nowhere more closely perhaps than in Holland. A contest that is waged for the first will of necessity benefit the other two. The efforts of a party therefore, that has its deep roots in the past, that is built on the firm foundation of three centuries of history, bid fair, under the divine blessing, to yield a good harvest for the future.

Nor are the signs entirely absent that point to a scientific calling for Calvinism in the future. Prophesying is a difficult task, and it is not given to any man to write a history of the future. Still it is far from improbable, that Calvinism will attain to significance from a scientific point of view. Both the possibility and the necessity for this are clearly existent. The Dutch character demands principles, insists upon a harmonious, consistent system, and is fond of reasoning and drawing conclusions. During the best time of the Republic, science, as well as arts and literature, had attained to a high development and was flourishing. The Calvinistic principle is sufficiently rich and powerful to admit of a special application in the field of science. In this connection it must not be overlooked that the science of our present day has become a powerful weapon in the hands of those who oppose Christianity. A party which would live with its time, and desires to take a decisive stand against the prevailing tendencies, cannot keep aloof from the scientific battle of principles. It will not rest until over against the theories of unbelief it shall have placed the science of faith, and that not merely in regard to theology, but likewise in reference to all other branches of knowledge. It is from the side of science that Christianity is threatened with the greatest danger. Principles rule the world. Words lead to action. Unbelief issues in revolution. This world of science also cannot be conquered in any other way than by faith. The glory of God ought to find recognition in the sphere of science as everywhere else, and it is Calvinism which here also stands as a champion of the divine sovereignty.

III. It is even more difficult to speak about the future of Calvinism in other countries and Churches. One thing is sure: the tendencies prevailing at the present day in the Christian Church are not favorable to Calvinism. In some regions there is still attachment to the Reformed confession, as in Wales, the Scotch Highlands, and in some Presbyterian Churches of America. But everywhere else, in France, Switzerland, England and America, we perceive in the Church and in theology, an effort often unconscious, to modify the old Calvinism in accordance with the so-called demands of the times and of modern science. This fact may elicit our approval or disapproval: its being a fact does not admit of denial, and we are required to face it frankly.

This tendency, which at present seems to be everywhere in the ascendant, is characterized by this, that it endeavors to represent and commend Christianity from its purely human and natural side, if not to divest it wholly of its supernatural character. The doctrine of evolution, in its principle, is being adopted by Christians and applied more or less consistently to Christianity. The Christian religion is not the only true religion, but the highest and purest among religions. Revelation is not something absolutely supernatural, but something that has passed through the heart of the best and noblest of mankind and afterwards been deposited in the Bible. The Holy Scriptures are not the infallible Word of God, but contain the Word of God; and side by side with its divine element, the Bible has also its human and fallible elements. The highest revelation of God in Christ coincides with the purest revelation of the human. The incarnation of God is identical with, or rather is replaced by, the deification of man. Hence the religious and ethical sides of Christianity continue to be appreciated, whereas the metaphysical elements are rejected with scorn. Men exert themselves to divest Christianity of all these accidental and accessory things, and, after having confined its essence to what is ethical and religious, to represent the rest as worthless and insignificant for faith and practical life. In doing this they are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the "Tagesphilosophie" of the spirit of our times. Agnosticism teaches that the supernatural is unknowable; physical science confronts us on every side with inflexible laws; history finds no place for miracles; historical criticism undermines the Bible. Christianity can be vindicated and maintained against all these results of modern science, on the condition only that it shall permit itself to be cut loose from its metaphysical background and shall be satisfied with being pure religion. All dogmas must submit to a modification—the doctrine of Scripture, of the Trinity, of election, the divinity of Christ, His satisfaction, the Church, eschatology; they all are to be thrown into the crucible, in order that the impure dross may be purged away, and the pure religious and ethical elements retained. In England, at the present day, this process is in full course of development. The whole of theology is to be transformed in a religious, ethical, "Christological" direction.

This is the reason why everywhere a demand is heard for a new dogma, for a different and better form of Christianity, for a practical, ethical, undogmatic, social, modern Christianity. The centre of gravity has been shifted from doctrine to life, from the object to the subject. Not faith, but love, is the essential thing. Love is the *summum bonum*, "the greatest thing in the world." The Christian religion must prove its worth, its truth, its right of existence, by

healing the wounds of humanity, by the improvement of society, and by the conversion of the heathen. Formerly men used to be considered souls that were to be saved; now they are considered bodies that stand in need of help. Christianity is to be socialized, in order that socialism may become Christianized. Theology and Church must lay aside their dogmatic, aristocratic, hierarchical character, and expound the social side of Christianity. The Church is to make place for the kingdom of God. To work for this kingdom is the fashion of the day. All disposable power is to be developed for this purpose; every Christian, be he young or old, must be mobilized and every recruit called to arms. Peter and Paul have had their day, John's turn has come, that of the apostle of love. Not the Epistle to the Romans, but the Sermon on the Mount is the programme of original Christianity.

It would not be difficult to point out in detail, that our present-day Christianity as a whole is really developing in this direction. This, however, is unnecessary and superfluous. We need only mention the names of Tolstoi in Russia, Astié in Switzerland, Sabatier in France, Ritschl in Germany, Farrar in England, Drummond in Scotland, Lyman Abbott in America, to show the substantial truth of the foregoing. More than ever before Christianity stands under the influence of the ruling philosophy. It is being modified in accordance with the opinions of the day. It no longer leads but is being led. In the modern conception of Christianity, as in so many other things, the principle of *becoming* is substituted for the principle of *being*.

In view of this down-grade movement, the revival of Calvinism is of double importance. Its significance would not be so great, if Holland had not experienced the influence of all those modern theological tendencies which at present prevail in other countries. The difference is only this, that elsewhere these tendencies are just now springing up, whereas among us they belong already to the past. They have had their season here and have outlived their prime. Both from a historical and from a dogmatic point of view, their unsatisfactory and insufficient character has been demonstrated. They have proved unavailing as barriers against the growth of unbelief. It has become clear that they offer no firm position amidst the tempests of doubt. One by one the various stages can be pointed out through which they have passed in their rapid decline from the pure heights of faith to the depths of infidelity. The first step was to summon men to turn from the Confession to the Scriptures; the next to appeal from the Scriptures to Christ. In regard to Christ, first His divinity, next His preëxistence, finally also His sinlessness were denied, so that nothing remained but the idea of a religious genius,

who has revealed to us the divine love. But even this divine love became an object of criticism and doubt; the Being of God was found to be unknowable, His existence uncertain. As a last resort, the moral nature of man was made the central position, which was thought to be safe from the attacks of evolutionism. Alas, even this moral nature of man was discovered to be non-original, a product of development. Thus many retained nothing but the cheerless creed of materialism.

Apart from the fact, however, that this down-grade movement offers no secure position against the advance of agnostic science, and is compelled to make one concession after another to evolutionism—it is just as little satisfactory from a religious point of view. There is an immense difference between the conception of Christianity of former ages and that of the present time. Formerly Christianity was preëminently religion, now it is chiefly morality. There was a time when the Gospel was considered a means of saving men, of giving them comfort in life and death; at present it is no more than an instrument used to equip man for his task on earth. Once heaven was represented as the final goal; now it is earth. In past time religion was an independent factor, whereas now it is merely taken into account for its usefulness in the moral conflict. Of old religion was essentially mystical, a life in communion with God; to-day it is mostly moral idealism, a life in the service of humanity. Then, the question was: What has God done for man? At present people ask: What is man doing for God? In a word, formerly man existed for the sake of God, of late God is held to exist for the sake of man.

As a reaction against the too "jenseitig" ideas of former days, there is no doubt much truth in this modern view. Nevertheless, in the long run and as a whole it will prove unsatisfactory. As long as a strong sense of energy and activity prevails, it may partially satisfy. In such a state man resembles the philosopher Fichte, who, in the consciousness of his strength, was contented with the Ego, and viewed the external world as merely so much material for the subject to operate upon in the performance of its duty, a "Schranke" to be ever again conquered by human energy. But soon the reaction will follow. Instead of a restless becoming, a changeless being will begin to charm us. Instead of longing for endless labors, and calling, with Lessing and Fichte, the bliss of heaven "Langeweile," we shall begin to thirst after that rest which remaineth for the people of God. Then we shall no longer hate the conception of being, but on the contrary we shall be weary of the eternal process of becoming. And in the same manner as Fichte later on modified his philosophy, the present tendency that

sways the Christian Church, will have to be reversed because it no longer satisfies the human heart. It has taken the heart out of religion, and degraded religion to a servant of morality, thus depriving it of its independent value. Religion is not merely a doing. Christian works, however good and necessary, cannot by themselves satisfy the human heart, or give peace and rest to the conscience, any more than the good works of the Romish Church have sufficed to do this. Love cannot supplant faith. Martha will not be able to deprive Mary of the praise of her Lord. The righteous shall live by faith alone. The course which modern Christianity seems intent upon pursuing, and of which the outcome is hardly a matter of doubt, will probably in the end subserve the interests of Calvinism. Sooner or later our eyes will be opened to the fact, that this modernizing of Christianity, while unsuccessful in winning the world, has only weakened the faith of believers. Every compromise between the Church and the world, between faith and unbelief, is to the advantage of our opponents. The battle will have to be fought on the line of principles. David can conquer Goliath in no other way than by facing him in the name of the Lord, the God of the hosts of Israel. As soon as this is recognized, the beauty of Calvinism also will once more be seen and appreciated. Calvinism gladly honors the good features of the Christian labor of our age. It by no means favors the idea of fleeing from the world, the Anabaptist principle of "avoidance;" it does not encourage idleness and somnolence. It is active, points out to each man his moral calling, and urges him to labor in this with all his might. On the other hand, it is no less averse to that worldly type of Christianity which would transplant the turmoil and clamor, the agitation and strain of our times, within the pale of Christianity. Calvinism maintains the independent value of religion, and does not suffer it to be swallowed up by morality. It has a vein of deep mysticism and it cultivates a devout godliness. It considers God alone as the highest good, and communion with Him as supreme happiness. Calvinism sets the rest of being over against the restlessness of becoming, and makes us feel the pulsation of eternity in every moment of time. Behind the vicissitudes and transitoriness of this life it points to the unchangeableness of God's eternal counsel. Thus it offers a place of rest to the weary heart, in which God has set eternity, and protects man from all overexcitement. Those that believe shall not make haste. Calvinism is deeply convinced that the husband as father of the family, the wife as mother of her children, the servant girl in the kitchen, and the laborer behind the plough, are as truly servants of God as the missionary and minister and Sabbath-school teacher, provided they fulfill their calling faithfully, honestly, with

a heavenly mind, and for the Lord's sake. The domestic and civic virtues which Calvinism has nurtured are of inestimable worth, and are not to be neglected even for the sake of the most valuable labor in the field of Foreign or Home Missions.

Furthermore no one denies that in the present century Calvinism is passing through a serious crisis and is being put to a most severe test. There are thousands—and the number is daily increasing—that have severed every tie which bound them to Christianity. The confession of Strauss is repeated with ever-increasing boldness: We are Christians no longer. Many deem religion the greatest disease and aberration of the human mind. There are others who seek compensation for the loss of religion in the cult of humanity, in devotion to their duties, in love to their neighbor, in the service of beauty, in the worship of the ideal, in their admiration of the universe; or who even, to appease their dissatisfied spirit, have taken recourse to spiritism and theosophy, to the religion of Mohammed or Buddha. Christianity and Calvinism are confronted with the question whether in the true sense of the word they are catholic and universal; whether they are adapted to all regions and circumstances; whether their usefulness may be limited to the time that is past or may extend to the future; whether in this century of power also they will be able to maintain themselves over against the civilization that more and more emancipates itself from all religion; whether in the future as in the past they will prove a blessing to humanity.

This crisis is very serious. There is none that can foretell the issue. Nevertheless Calvinism is sufficiently pliant and flexible to appreciate and appropriate what is good in our age. It is opposed on principle, to be sure, to the powerful spirit and the prevailing tendency of this age. Still it has some elements that are closely allied with it and may serve to accredit it to the present generation. It is thoroughly intellectual, possesses a far-reaching principle, a consistent system; it knows what it wants; it offers truth instead of doubt, firmness and assurance over against the ever-shifting opinions of the day. It involves a comprehensive view of the world and of life, and for this reason is adapted not merely to religious and ecclesiastical, but likewise to ethical, social, and political life. It is democratic, and champions the interests of the people and strengthens their influence with the governments. It loves liberty, and never fails to come to the defense of the freedom of the press and of conscience, of art and of science. It is social and prides itself upon having produced a class of solid industrious citizens, who, in accordance with the prayer of Agur, are protected from both riches and poverty, and are fed with the bread of their

portion. It is active and energetic, averse to all sinful passivity and complacent rest, urging upon man the fulfillment of his calling imposed by God. Even the philosophic systems of this century contain many elements which Calvinism may turn to an apologetic use. The agnostic philosophy falls in with the Calvinistic doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, of the impenetrableness of His counsel, of the hidden character of the *voluntas beneplaciti*, of the finiteness of the human faculty of knowing. The rigorous moral principles of Kant serve to reveal more clearly the depravity of human nature, "*das radical Böse*," having its seat in the human heart. The pessimistic philosophy confirms the doctrine of sin, and through Schopenhauer has maintained most emphatically the necessity of regeneration as the only means of deliverance from the power of sin. Almost every system that has been developed during the present century contributes proof to the Reformed denial of the indeterminism of the will, and helps to affirm the causal connection of the laws and ordinances of God. If one were to trace in the philosophical systems of our time the various lines in which they correspond with Calvinism, in order thereby to defend its doctrinal system, the results would richly repay his labor.

Another feature which serves to commend Calvinism consists in this—that it allows of various minor shades, and in the application of its theological and ecclesiastical principles avoids all mechanical uniformity. Lutheranism, strictly speaking, has produced but a single Church and a single Confession. Calvinism on the other hand has found entrance into many nations and founded many and multiform Churches. It created not one but a number of Confessions. And yet the latter are all but copies of one another. The Zwinglian Confessions bear a different character from those of Calvin. The Catechism of Geneva differs considerably from that of Heidelberg. The Belgic Confession is quite distinct from the Westminster Standards. The Episcopal Church has been recognized as a Reformed Church as much as the Presbyterian Churches. This remarkable fact shows that Calvinism has room for the display of individuality, for that difference in character which must exhibit itself among the various nationalities. There is a variety of gifts, and a difference of insight may not work harm, but be of advantage. To no individual man or individual Church has it been given to assimilate truth in all its fullness. Truth is too rich and manifold for this. Only in company with all the saints can we understand the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of Christ.

This will apply to the Churches of the future also. Robinson spoke to the pilgrim fathers: "Brethren, God alone knows whether

I shall ever taste the joy of seeing you again; but whatever He may be pleased to bring on us, this I would bind on your hearts, that you honor me no longer as your leader, than you will observe me honoring Christ as my own leader. If the Lord be pleased to lead you through life through any other instrument, then follow Him. We have not yet arrived at the goal. There are still treasures in the Scriptures, the knowledge of which has remained hidden to us. All the misery of the Presbyterian Churches is owing to their striving to consider the Reformation as completed, and to allow no further development of what has been begun by the labor of the Reformers. The Lutherans stop at Luther, and many Calvinists at Calvin. This is not right. Certainly these men in their time were burning and shining lights; nevertheless they did not possess an insight into the whole of God's truth; and, if able to arise from their graves, they would be the first to accept gratefully all new light. Brethren, it is as absurd to believe that during the brief period of Reformation all error has been banished, as it is to believe that the Christian gnosis has at one step completed its task." Calvinism wishes no cessation of progress and promotes multiformity. It feels the impulse to penetrate ever more deeply into the mysteries of salvation, and in feeling this honors every gift and different calling of the Churches. It does not demand for itself the same development in America and England which it has found in Holland. This only must be insisted upon, that in each country and in every Reformed Church it should develop itself in accordance with its own nature, and should not permit itself to be supplanted or corrupted by foreign ideas. The tendency now prevailing in England and America of looking towards Germany as the centre of theological science can but work harm for both the Reformed Church and the Reformed theology. In this manner all sorts of heterogeneous principles and ideas find an entrance into the churches and schools, which thus are led to undermine their own foundation. As of every nation that honors its independence, so it is the calling of every Church to guard and preserve its individual character, and, instructed by the teachings of history, to labor for the Church and theology of the future.

This demand is not born from exclusivism. The Reformed have never been narrow-minded. At Marburg Zwingli far excelled Luther in brotherly love. The Calvinists have never repulsed the Lutherans, but always recognized them as brethren. Calvinism, though laying claim to being the purest religion, and to having most thoroughly purified Christianity of all Romish admixture, has never pretended to be the only true Christian religion. Even in the papal Church it has recognized the *religio et ecclesia Christiana*. Its broad and mild recognition of baptism shows that it has never denied the

catholicity of Christianity. Calvinism is a specific and the richest and most beautiful form of Christianity, but it is not coextensive with Christianity. The Church will not attain to the full unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God until, as the body of Christ, she shall have reached her fullest growth and all members of her body shall be fully developed. Until this time every Church, the Reformed Church included, has to guard what is committed unto it, that the truth may be transmitted pure and intact, and, if possible, still further purified and reformed, to the succeeding generations.

Nobody can tell whether Dutch Calvinism is still destined to exert influence on the future of Calvinism in other countries. A Dutch writer at any rate will certainly be excused from expressing an opinion on this point. At the Synod of Dort the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands recognized the communion of saints, and in the struggle with Arminianism, inasmuch as it concerned the principles and foundations of Calvinism, refused to decide the issue without the assent of the whole of Reformed Christianity. Such a communion of saints still exists at the present day. Here and everywhere, the struggle is one struggle for the sovereign grace of our God, for the authority of His Word, for the honor of Christ. Perhaps the unexpected revival of Calvinism in the Netherlands will elsewhere strengthen the faith of the brethren, increase their confidence, fire their zeal, and encourage them to remain firm in their battle for the Lord.

KAMPEN, NETHERLANDS.

H. BAVINCK.