

19. WAS CALVIN A CALVINIST OR WAS/IS CALVINISM CALVINISTIC?

Prof. B.J. van der Walt*

Where previously the Calvinists had simply accepted that they held a view which Calvin, their spiritual father, had also disseminated, research done in the course of the last ten years or more has indicated that it can no longer be accepted as a matter of course. What is regarded as "Calvinism" nowadays might be something quite different from Calvin's "Calvinism". The assumed direct developmental line from Calvin's thought to that of his followers has to be scrutinized carefully. In many respects Calvinism after Calvin's time was either Scholastic Calvinism or Reformed Scholasticism — a clear deviation from the thought of the Reformer of Geneva.

It has thus become essential to study and investigate both Calvin and Calvinism as it succeeded him. Even more is at stake, though. In view of the fact that Calvinism have always assumed that Calvin's stance was very near to the Bible, a possible contortion of his doctrine at the hands of his followers inevitably raises the question as to whether the Calvinists have not also been sidetracked.

This is an enormous task! But to my mind this is also a research project which might have far-reaching significance for South Africa.

Seeing that I have been unable since 1974 (when I first realized what an important field, of study this is) to delve deeply into this engrossing field, I want to give only some of the most important sources on the subject in this article. My intention is that others — who might have more time for research — might be stimulated and so be prompted to become involved in this very interesting field.

The bibliographical list is, of course, not exhaustive. Yet I do think that it contains some of the most important works in the field which are at present obtainable.

* Prof. Van der Walt is lecturing in Philosophy and is director of the Institute for Reformational Studies, PU for CHE, Potchefstroom 2520, RSA.

It should be borne in mind that the fact that I mention certain authors does not mean that I agree with the interpretations and views of the various authors.

It is quite difficult undertaking to divide the material up to go under various headings, seeing that each work might cover a variety of figures and subjects. Apart from an introductory section, I attempted to classify the material according to countries as far as possible.

What is Protestant Scholasticism?

The first important question is: What is meant by Protestant/-Reformed/Calvinist Scholasticism? No precise, satisfactory definition has been given of this. B. Armstrong (in his *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (1964, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, p. 32) mentions six characteristics, which Bray also used in his work (mentioned below).

In general one could say that Protestant Scholasticism stresses the necessity of a logical system or a doctrinal system that could be reasonably defensible. (The concept of predestination is often regarded as the first principle or point of departure). In order to succeed in this aim, there is usually a strong dependence on the philosophy of Aristotle. (The admiration for the Stagirite often goes hand in hand with a large measure of respect for Thomas Aquinas.) Furthermore a great deal of stress is laid on reason — which is given practically the same status as revelation. In strongly speculative thinking there is a strong concentration on matters touching on the Will of God. Also in keeping with the intellectualistic approach the Bible is seen as a set of propositions "delivered intact" by God, so that a theology may be constructed on the basis of this. Faith does not play such an important role any more — it is misshapen to the status of intellectual submission to the truths of the Scriptures.

Reformed Scholasticism, however, does not only imply a different *method of thinking* or a different *mentality*. It also leads to the achievement of different *results* of thought from those of the Reformation.

More general studies

The inaugural lecture of C. van der Woude, amongst others, is an interesting introduction: *Op de grens van Reformatie en Scholastiek*

(*On the frontier between Scholasticism and Reformation*) (Kampen, Kok, 1964). Equally B. Hall: "The Calvin legend" and "Calvin against the Calvinists" in *John Calvin* edited by G.E. Duffield (Abingdon, Sutton Courtenay, 1966). I gave a brief survey myself in "The relapse into scholasticism during the further reformation" in *Heartbeat* (Potchefstroom, Potchefstroom University, 1978, pp. 278-298). In that article I dealt first of all with T. Beza and P. Melancthon (as heirs of the Reformation and testators of Scholasticism), and then mentioned some important figures from reformed orthodoxy. Finally I tried to deal with the difficult question as to why there had been a relapse into scholasticism so soon after the Reformation.

In conjunction with what I had to say about Beza myself, it is interesting to read J.S. Bray's work *Theodore Beza's doctrine of predestination* (Nieuwkoop, B. de Graaf, 1975). In two pieces of doctrine by Beza he already sees clear deviations from Calvin, viz. those of predestination and the certainty of election. His conclusions are that there are many scholastic traits in Beza's doctrines. But, because Beza's doctrine also differs from Scholastic doctrine in many respects, he could not simply be regarded as a Protestant scholastic (cf. especially his "Summary and Conclusions", p. 137-143).

An interesting question is the one as to what influences had acted on Beza. People who might have been important in this context include Petrus Martyr Vermigli (1500-1562) and his pupil Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590).

J.C. McLelland (*The visible words of God; an exposition of the sacramental theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli, AD 1500-1562* (Grand Rapids, 1957) does not find any scholastic influence in Vermigli, while in the study of J.P. Donnelly on *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's doctrine of man and grace* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1976) this is precisely what is indicated.

O. Gründler's study remains a good one on Zanchius: *Thomism and Calvinism in the theology of Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590)* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, University Microfilms, 1961).

Another figure who had been responsible for the origin of Reformed Scholasticism is Lambertus Daneaus. O. Fatio wrote about him in his *Méthode et théologie Lambert Daneau et les débuts de la Scolastique réforme* (Genève, Librairie Droz, 1976). The same author was also responsible for an interesting essay on the presence of Calvin

(especially his *Institutes*) in the reformed orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: "Présence de Calvin à l'époque de l'orthodoxie réformée. Les abrégés de Calvin à la fin du 16e et au 17e siècle" in *Calvinus ecclesiae doctor* (Kampen, Kok, 1980, pp. 171-207).

France

In this respect the work of B.G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut heresy; Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in seventeenth-century France* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1969) is of great importance.

The Netherlands

There are many studies on Dutch scholars from the seventeenth century but there aren't many in which the influence of scholasticism is underlined. One that is of importance is the one by C. Bangs: *Arminius; a study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1971). In this the author indicates to what extent the influence of Aristotelian philosophy and logic shaped even some of the formulations of the reformed confessional texts. K. Runia, in his essay on "Recent reformed criticism of the canons" in P.Y. de Jong (ed.), *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids, Reformed Fellowship, 1968, pp. 161-180), points out the Aristotelian influence in the Dordt Canon.

Important to study is also the recent Dutch work by Hoek, J. 1982: *Daniël Colonius (1566-1635); theoloog tussen reformatie en orthodoxie* (with summaries in English and French), Huizen: Drukkerij-Uitgeverij Bout & Zonen.

England and Scotland

The development here has been influenced by the writings, amongst others, of Petrus Ramus (1515-1572), who pleaded for certain adaptations in the philosophy of Aristotle. He had a strong influence, for example, on an early Puritan such as William Perkins (1558-1602). In this respect one should look at I. Breward's "Introduction" to his edition of *The work of William Perkins* (Abingdon, Sutton Courtenay, 1970 — especially pp. 53 and 80-93.) For Ramistic influence on the Westminster Assembly, see, amongst others, J.B. Rogers: *Scripture in the Westminster Confession; a problem*

of historical interpretation for American Presbyterianism (Kampen, Kok, 1966).

The best-known — and in latter days a quite controversial work — is the one by R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979). In this work he first deals with Calvin and Beza, then a few predecessors of Perkins, then Perkins himself, in the following chapter a number of Perkins' contemporaries, subsequently the influence of two Dutch theologians (Arminius and Ames) and finally the Westminster Assembly of Divines. His conclusion is that the Puritan Westminster theology deviates from that of Calvin completely — to such an extent that it does not deserve to be called Calvinist!

The same material is discussed briefly in "The Puritan modification of Calvin's theology", Kendall's contribution to the Paul Wooley *Festschrift: John Calvin; his influence in the western world*" (p. 199-214), edited by W. Stanford Reid, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1982.

One of the most recent responses to this work of Kendall's is *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) by P. Helm. The whole work is devoted to a critical discussion of Kendall's viewpoint that English Puritanism deviated from, and even clashed with, Calvin. Helm's conclusion (cf. p. 81) is that Kendall is talking nonsense: Calvin and the Puritans taught the same — so that Calvin had indeed been a Calvinist.

The debate centers on the following points:

1 According to *Kendall* Calvin teaches a general doctrine of reconciliation and not, as the Puritans, redemption through Christ for the elect only. According to *Helm* both Calvin and the Puritans taught that Christ died only for the elect.

2 *Kendall* states that Calvin's vision of faith (as a gift) was maimed by the Puritans, who saw faith as an act of will by man. According to Calvin faith included certainty, but according to the Puritans this is not necessary. *Helm*: Calvin and the Puritans acknowledge that sanctifying faith without certainty about personal salvation is possible, although neither Calvin nor the Puritans regard faith without certainty as desirable.

3 *Kendall*: Calvin places the gospel before the law and the Puritans place the law before the gospel (as a kind of preparation for grace). *Helm*: Both Calvin and the Puritans teach that conversion takes place through a preparatory period in which the preaching convinces of the law of sin. Neither of them, however, laid down rigid rules according to which the experience of all Christians had to be tested.

4 According to *Kendall* faith, in Calvin, precedes repentance, while the opposite is true of his followers among the Puritans. Over against this *Helm* also states that in this, too, Calvin and English Calvinism are as one: when one has been converted through the preaching of the gospel, his will is changed by divine grace and faith and repentance are the result.

5 *Kendall's* last attack: the Puritans preach a subtle form of salvation through good works in opposition to Calvin's view about salvation through grace and through faith alone. *Helm* also rejects this accusation strongly: Both Calvin and the Puritans after him support the Biblical truth that saving grace is a divine gift of grace and no man can prepare himself to become worthy of salvation.

In the discussion between Kendall and Helm we find a striking example of how people can come to widely divergent results because of differing interpretations of the same material. This also makes one realise that the last word has not been spoken and thorough-going research is still necessary in order to determine the true state of affairs.

Finally there are two recent articles on Scottish and English Puritanism which are of some interest to this survey. J.B. Torrance indicates that the Puritans' concept of the covenant deviates from the Biblical one in his contribution on "Calvin and Puritanism in England and Scotland — some basic concepts in the development of 'Federal Theology'" in *Calvinus Reformator; his contribution to theology, church and society* (Potchefstroom University for CHE, 1982, pp. 264-286).

L.F. Schulze held a lecture in August 1982 (at the Topicality Course of the Theological School of the Reformed Church in South Africa) on "Permutations of Calvin's thought in the 17th century". In the lecture he compared what Calvin taught on knowledge of God with the viewpoints of the already mentioned Perkins (1558-1602) as well as the previously mentioned Dutch theologian W. Ames (1576-1633).

The United States of America

According to experts the origin of scholastic influence here can be sought in especially the strong Aristotelian systematic theology of F. Turretin (or Turretini, 1623-1687, a professor in Geneva from 1648), and the later Aristotelian "common sense" realism of T. Reid (1710-1796) and his followers J. Witherspoon (1723-1794) and D. Stewart (1753-1828). This development is discussed by J.B. Rogers and D.K. McKim in *The authority and interpretation of the Bible; an historical approach* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1979. Cf. Especially pp. 265-405).

By the way: J.W. Beardslee III recently published Locus 2 of Turretini's influential *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* in an English translation under the title *The doctrine of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1981). According to Beardslee this *Institutio* had a great influence even on nineteenth-century American (especially Presbyterian) theology. It constitutes a background to the Princeton movement, which culminated in the work of the well-known C. and A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield.

A thorough study of this type of scholasticism can also be found in J.C. van der Stelt's thesis *Philosophy and Scripture; a study in Old Princeton and Westminster theology* (Marlton, New Jersey, Mack Publishing Company, 1978).

And South Africa

The role of religion in the thought patterns of the Afrikaner has been studied often. A few publications in this field include Sheila Patterson's *The last trek* (1959); Henry Vatcher's *White Laager* (1965); P.G. Schrottenboer's *Conflict and hope in South Africa* (1968); T. Dunbar Moodie's *The rise of Afrikanerdom* (1975 and 1980); John Fisher's *The Afrikaners* (1969); W.A. de Klerk's *The puritans of Africa* (1975); Charles M.L. Villa-Vicenzio's *The theology of apartheid* (n.d.); and "South African civil religion: an introduction", *Journal of theology for Southern Africa*, no. 19: 5-15, June 1977; F.A. Van Jaarsveld's "The Afrikaner's idea of calling and mission in South African history", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 19:16-28, June 1977, and Irving Hexham's *The irony of apartheid; the struggle for national independence of Afrikaner Calvinism against British imperialism* (1981).

Apart from these the Institute for Reformational Studies (previously the Institute for the Advancement of Calvinism) has published the following recently as a result of a research project that had been launched:

In 1981 C.J. Malan wrote *Die Nadere Reformasie* ("The Later Reformation") in which he dealt, among others, with the "oude Schrijvers", who had had such an enormous influence on the Voortrekkers. On the question whether and to what extent these thinkers of the Later Reformation remained true to the principles of the Reformation, he has to reply that they had deviated from the track of pure Calvinism. He also indicates (pp. 33-36) where the deviations are most clearly visible.

It is usually said that the idea of Christian-nationalism is *the* manner of expression assumed by Calvinism in South Africa. In her study on *Christelik-nasionaal: outentieke, ideologiese of gesekulariseerde nasionalisme?* ("Christian-national: authentic, ideological or secularized nationalism?") (IRS, Potchefstroom, 1982) M. Elaine Botha seeks the origins of the idea of Christian-nationalism in South Africa.

In the course of the study it becomes clear that in South Africa two forms of Calvinism have come to assume places opposite each other. These are the Kuyperian and that of Murray. The latter is more pietistically inclined and can therefore not be regarded as authentic Calvinism. But the Kuyperian form too, which had a great influence on leaders such as S.J du Toit, and which stressed the universal dominion of God in all spheres, had elements which, according to Botha made Calvinism in South Africa go off the tracks.

This researcher therefore does not see the idea of Christian-nationalism as an authentic form of Calvinism. She does not go along either with the views of various contemporary writers on the subject, who feel that Calvinism has become "ideologized" to a "civil religion" with the idea of Christian-national.

In his essay on "Christian-national: tracking down Calvinism in South Africa" in *Anatomy of Reformation* (Potchefstroom, IRS, 1981, pp. 396-435) B.J. van der Walt follows the line of Calvinism in various Calvinist organizations. At the end of his study he looks critically at the idea of whether the concept of Christian-nationalism really does give full scope to the Biblical injunction (and the original ideas held by

Calvin) of service to God in all spheres. His hypothesis is that the two-realm doctrine (of nature and super-nature) in which life is divided into religious and neutral spheres, would in all probability still play a role in the concept of Christian-nationalism. According to him, then, Christian-nationalism does not really mean truly radical Biblical and thus pure Calvinist thought.

With his brief survey of literature I hope that somebody will be stimulated to investigate more closely one or the other facet of this intriguing field — which is still largely *terra incognita*. I am convinced that such studies can offer surprising results — for our South African Calvinism as well — and that these would be relevant to more disciplines than merely Theology and Philosophy.

PS: (After this chapter has been typed):

On the influence of scholastic thought on the famous Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) D. Sinnema in 1975 wrote a Master's Thesis entitled *Reflections on the nature of theology and theological method at the University of Leiden before the Synod of Dordt* (Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto).

In 1982 he read a paper (not yet published) at the Theological Faculty of Calvin College, Grand Rapids on *The Synod of Dordt and protestant Scholasticism* (28 pages). His conclusions (on the last page) is of great importance for the whole reformed community in which the Canons of Dordt today still plays an important role.

Sinnema also expects to complete in 1984 his D.Phil. dissertation on *The issue of reprobation at the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619)*.