

not hesitate to admit that the doctrines of predestination and divine providence raise problems that he cannot solve. Time and again he indignantly repudiates the idea that in teaching the doctrine of predestination he makes God the author of sin and renders the free offer of salvation impossible. He has no patience with those who want preachers to be silent regarding these great doctrines for fear they might be injurious to some. At the same time he desires that these doctrines be taught with care and discretion.⁷

Third, both Berkhof and Kuiper are great defenders of the three points. If Berkhof is not the father of them, he certainly is one of their foster fathers, and he published a pamphlet in their defense. Kuiper preached and published three sermons on these points, in which he made many statements that are still fresh in my mind because of their glowing enthusiasm for the doctrine that God freely offers salvation to all men and earnestly desires their salvation. Also these statements should be compared with the teachings of John Calvin on this subject.

I will start with the paragraph quoted from Berkhof's book review and call special attention to the part that speaks of Calvin's view of the free offer of salvation and of his timidity to enter into the deep things of God. We want to know exactly Calvin's view on these matters and whether or not Berkhof rightly interprets Calvin.

Before entering into this, I must speak of other matters that impressed me when I read Berkhof's brief appraisal of Calvin's book. Berkhof makes statements concerning Calvin's treatment of his opponents. "[Calvin] is hardly civil to his opponents. He certainly does not speak of them in terms of endearment." The professor attributes this feature of Calvin's treatises to "the spirit of the age." It was the custom of the time to treat opponents in that fashion.

Now it may be admitted that Calvin handles his opponents without the gloves of a superficial civilization. He thoroughly enters into their reasoning and enervates their every argument. In doing so he does not spare them and is little careful what he calls them. We would

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Banner* (July 26, 1929).

probably speak of our respect, although we opponent is honorable ever. Calvin surely does. Some very interesting substantiate this state

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⁸ Calvin, *Calvin's Calvin*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

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probably speak of our "honorable opponent" and write with utmost respect, although we do not mean a word of it; we do not think our opponent is honorable at all, and we have no respect for him whatsoever. Calvin surely does not write that way; he calls a spade a spade. Some very interesting illustrations can be quoted from his work to substantiate this statement.

Since the trouble that this vain mortal [Servetus] endeavored to cause us reaches unto you also, it is just that you should partake of the blessed fruit that God brings out of it.⁸

Yet, that the object of this impure and abandoned one [Servetus] was not only to blot out all knowledge of God's election from the minds of men, but also to overturn his power is clearly manifest from those mad dreams of his that you possess in your public records.⁹

Passing by this fellow in silence, the reason we enter into the battle with the other two—Albertus Pighius and Georgius the Sicilian—is, as we will explain, twofold. This ignorant pettifogger could bring forth nothing but what he obtained from these two sources, and so would make what was bad in them worse and worse. To contend with him, therefore, would have been a contest cold and profitless. Let our readers be content with one proof. With what cavils Pighius and Georgius would darken the first chapter of Paul to the Ephesians has been shown in its proper place. They indeed were ignorant and disgusting, but the folly of this worthless being is fouler still, for he blushed not to babble his nonsense in your Senate and venerable assembly; and not only this, but dared to defend with pertinacity what he had thus blattered in folly.¹⁰

I propose now to enter into the sacred battle with Pighius and Georgius the Sicilian, a pair of unclean beasts, by no means

⁸ Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

badly matched. Though I confess that in some things they differ, yet, in hatching enormities of error, in adulterating Scripture with wicked and reveling audacity, in a proud contempt of truth, in forward impudence, and in brazen loquacity, the most perfect likeness and sameness will be found to exist between them, except that Pighius, by inflating the muddy bombast of his magniloquence, carries himself with greater boast and pomp, while the other fellow borrows the boots by which he elevates himself from his invented revelation.¹¹

Yet this ape of Euclid [Pighius] puffs himself off in the titles of all his chapters as a first-rate reasoner.¹²

Now as I proceed, it will be my object not so much to consider what Pighius says, nor in what order he says it, as to take care that this worthless fellow be prostrated and buried under the ruins of his own desperate impudence.¹³

If there had been one grain of the fear of God in Pighius, could he ever have dared thus insolently to call God to order?¹⁴

Pighius, indeed, can pour out the flood of his characteristic loquacity with all the ease in the world, and without one drop of sweat at all. But that his tongue might have full play, he seems always to take care to wet himself well with wine so that he may be able to blow forth at random, and without any check of shame whatever, those blasts of abuse that first fill his two swollen cheeks.¹⁵

Some small space must now be found for dealing with Georgius of Sicily. All things connected with this miserable creature are so insipid, vain, and disgusting that I feel ashamed to spend any time or labor in his refutation.¹⁶

11 Ibid., 16-17.

12 Ibid., 78.

13 Ibid., 82.

14 Ibid., 96.

15 Ibid., 121.

16 Ibid., 144.

It is no wonder that he betrays in wresting to be in heaping passages that he does not possess that might restrain him

I could easily multiply these will suffice.

Certainly these are a conception of civilization severely condemned if treating the enemies of attempts to excuse Calvin reflect the spirit of his then than they are today question that as a proper to address and describe truth in that, the fact is characterized by the same lack writings. Consider in the one of Calvin's opponents

You are a man, John the whole world. You report, but it has myself, being one with one doctrine, as there to see all men agree I have thought that manner, of those things your doctrine; that I have an opportunity I might be able to mention I ask that you would as may be plainly understood

17 Ibid., 154.

18 Ibid., 230.

It is no wonder that the more audacity this worthless fellow betrays in wresting the Scriptures, the more profuse he should be in heaping passages on passages to suit his purpose, seeing that he does not possess one particle of religion or of shame that might restrain his headlong impudence.¹⁷

I could easily multiply these illustrations from Calvin's work, but these will suffice.

Certainly these are not terms of endearment, and in our present conception of civilization, they are not civil terms. Calvin must be severely condemned if our present civilization is a true standard for treating the enemies of the truth of God. It means little when Berkhof attempts to excuse Calvin by saying that Calvin's uncivil expressions reflect the spirit of his time. Men were more brutal and uncivilized then than they are today, and Calvin was no exception. But I seriously question that as a proper explanation of the cutting words Calvin uses to address and describe his opponents. If there were even an element of truth in that, the fact is the polemics of others were not always characterized by the same lack of civilization the professor finds in Calvin's writings. Consider in the following passage the smooth language of one of Calvin's opponents, of one "calumniator," as Calvin calls him:

You are a man, John Calvin, now known throughout almost the whole world. Your doctrine has many favorers and supporters, but it has also many enemies and opponents. For myself, being one who earnestly wishes that there were but one doctrine, as there is but one truth, and who greatly desires to see all men agree, if it were possible, in that one doctrine, I have thought that you ought to be informed, in a friendly manner, of those things which are everywhere spoken against your doctrine; that if false, you might refute them and might have an opportunity of sending your refutation to me so that I might be able to make a stand against your adversaries. And I ask that you would frame your refutation of such arguments as may be plainly understood by the people.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 154.

¹⁸ Ibid., 230.

Surely this attack on Calvin is clothed throughout in very refined and civil language. Read the following to see how Calvin answers the calumniator:

As far as you are concerned, poor masked monitor, I derive some consolation from the thought that you cannot be ungrateful towards the man who has treated you with much greater kindness than you deserved at his hands, without betraying at the same time your foul wickedness against God. I know quite well that there is no sport more grateful to your academics than the rooting out of all faith from the hearts of the godly by casting a shade of doubt over all that they hold dear. And the sweet pleasure that you derive from all those revilings that you direct against the secret providence of God is apparent from the very point of your pen, however much you strive to hide your base gratification. But I summon you and all your fellows before that tribunal on which the judge of heaven sits, from whose mouth the blast and the bolt shall one day fall upon you all and lay you prostrate. I trust, however, that I myself, before I am done, shall make your insolent speaking against God to be as loathsome to the feelings of all good and godly men as they are inwardly gratifying to your own heart.¹⁹

These quotations make clear that not everyone carried on polemics in the same "uncivil" language as John Calvin's. His opponent's language throughout is smooth, sweet, and polite. He does not call Calvin names but treats him with apparent respect. This shows that you cannot explain Calvin's language from the spirit of his time, unless you picture Calvin as less polished and civilized than his average opponent. This certainly cannot be said of the Genevan reformer. It is also clear that Calvin does not change his style one whit because of the sweetness and politeness of his adversary's language. Calvin immediately attacks him with the severest language and invokes the bolts of God's judgments on him and his friends to lay them prostrate.

¹⁹ Ibid., 231-32.

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What then is the explanation of Calvin's form of writing? I would explain it from a very firm conviction regarding the truth. Calvin did not doubt. He was strong in the faith. He did not intellectually philosophize about the truth for the sake of mental enjoyment and exercise of his logical faculty, but he was deeply convinced of the truth of what he wrote. He believed the word of God and was assured that his doctrine was the true representation of the truth of God's word. Still more, Calvin loved the truth of which he wrote, and he had a personal part in it. Calvin's heart was filled with reverent love of God and the fear of his name. Calvin embraced the truth with all his heart, and in it he clung to his covenantal God, the glory of whose name meant so much to Calvin.

It follows and is evident from all his writings that Calvin regarded his opponents who attacked the truth of predestination and of the sovereign grace of God as enemies of the truth of God, which they were. According to Calvin's conviction these men slandered the name of his God. They were wicked, base fellows, ungodly men, who possessed no grain of religion and of the fear of God. Calvin, who could endure so much concerning his honor and name, did not hesitate to express his contempt and holy hatred against those enemies of his God. I am convinced that these are the deeper and nobler motives behind the reformer's "uncivil" language.

Hardly civil?

What is civilization that speaks in endearing terms when the enemy attacks the truth and name of God, and the language should be in holy wrath? What does it mean to express our highest esteem and respect for opponents of the truth when there is not a grain of such respect in our hearts? Is this a bit of ungodly hypocrisy? Surely the theory of common grace can cover this wicked hypocrisy, according to which we are often more concerned with our honor and the friendship of man than with the honor and friendship of God. Common grace has already so blinded the eyes of many that they would even criticize the profound love of God expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 139, where he emphasizes that he hates those who hate his God and are his enemies. It is a small wonder that in our age of humanism, self-love,

and the honor of men rather than of God, we stumble over Calvin's language that calls the enemies of God by their true names, rather than feigns esteem for them.

My general second remark is that one almost receives the impression that Berkhof's book review of *Calvin's Calvinism* in the *Banner* was chiefly a warning to be careful and not to enter too audaciously into the deep things of God. Oh, Calvin is so careful! He almost seems to devote his work chiefly to defending the free offer of salvation in light of the doctrine of predestination. He appears almost timid in his care not to express himself too boldly on the subjects of election and reprobation, as if they were the subjects on which Calvin wrote, and as if such was his chief purpose. Nay more, as if there were even one iota of Berkhof's theory of a free offer of salvation on the part of God in the whole work.

One feels how the wind blows in Berkhof's book review. It appears that the three points were before his mind when he wrote. One receives the impression that he was thinking of 1924, of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and of the corruption of the doctrine of Calvin and of the Reformed faith by the Christian Reformed Church in its three declarations. Then that church, very politely and civilly, without giving the ministers an opportunity to defend themselves and the truth, wickedly expelled those who faithfully defended the truth of the sovereign grace of God in opposition to the adopted theory of common grace. Berkhof must have met many passages in *Calvin's Calvinism* that flatly contradicted the doctrine that under his leadership was adopted by the church in the now famous three points. Now he desperately tries to read into *Calvin's Calvinism* the "whitewashed Calvinism" of the three points. Now he emphasizes that Calvin is careful not to go beyond scripture and defends a free offer of salvation in the sense of the first point of 1924.

Grace to all in the preaching of the gospel, is it not, Professor? Grace also to the reprobate in the proclamation of salvation in Christ? God's earnest desire to save not only the elect, but also all men? This is what you mean by a free offer of salvation. This is what Kuiper preached in his sermons on the three points.

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