

On Becoming a Calvinist

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld

I became a Calvinist as a result of the research I had done in writing *Is Public Education Necessary?* a revisionist history of American education. In writing the book, I had wanted to find out why Americans, so early in their history, had decided to turn over to government the responsibility of educating their children. Although there were Common Schools in New England prior to independence, they were local schools, controlled and paid for by the local inhabitants.

After the Revolutionary War there was no great clamor among Americans for government-controlled education. Indeed, the trend was toward greater privatization. Children attended the Dames' Schools for primary education and private academies for further education. Virtually everyone in highly Christian America was literate because they all had to be able to read the Bible.

✓ The idea of a centrally controlled school system, owned and operated by the government, was a Prussian idea adopted by the Unitarians at Harvard and the prosperous Boston merchant class because it provided the elite with a sure means of maintaining social control over the community. This was contrary to the Puritan idea of education being primarily the means to know God, to live according to His law, to understand one's own sinful nature, and to seek salvation through Christ. Indeed, the child's primer taught the alphabet on biblical principles: "A—In Adam's fall, we sinned all. B—Heaven to Find, the Bible Mind. C—Christ crucified for sinners died." And so on.

Indeed, the New England Puritans followed Calvin's instructions to the letter, for it was Calvin who, in Geneva, drew up a catechism of Christian doctrine which the children had to learn while receiving a secular education.

But toward the end of the 18th century, there arose among the Harvard elite a Unitarian heresy, a rejection of Christ as divinity or God incarnate, a rejection of the Trinity, a rejection of salvation through Christ, and a rejection of all the principle doctrines of Calvinism. The Unitarians had rebelled against the religion of their fathers because in their intellectual pride they could not accept such Calvinist doctrines as the innate depravity of man. al

And so, in order to better understand the conflict between the Unitarians and the Calvinists I found it necessary to read John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

What a revelation! What an exhilarating read! Here was a theologian of great intellect, profound learning, and unrelenting logic interpreting the Scripture so that anyone who could read would know God's word and God's will. But what really captured me in Calvin's writings was his doctrine of man's innate depravity.

As a Jew, I longed to know how was it possible for a civilized, cultured nation like the Germans, with their universities, opera houses, museums, and cathedrals, to fall in so short a time into such barbarism and depravity as to have been capable of perpetrating the systematic murder of millions of European Jews. Calvin provided the answer. When men, no matter how civilized, turn away from God, they are capable of any evil their depraved natures can conjure up.

For the first time I understood the full evil potential of man, and the 20th century certainly gave us example after example of man's unbridled depravity. And then Calvin made me consider Christ himself. Was Jesus what he said he was, or was he not? I came to the conclusion that He was what He said He was. If not, he would have been an imposter, a liar, a phony, and nothing good could have come out of that.

If there was a Messiah, it had to be Jesus, whose mission it was to extend the covenant between God and the Jews to the rest of mankind. And that is why Christianity spread as it did, because Jesus had come to save us from our sinful natures, to offer us forgiven of sin, salvation, and eternal life after death. As Calvin explained (p.215): "As Adam, by his ruin, involved and ruined us, so Christ by his grace, restored us to salvation."

But the Unitarians rejected all of this. To them Jesus Christ was a great teacher, nothing more. If he was divine, it was in the sense that we are all divine. Man was not innately depraved, indeed he was innately good, capable of moral perfectibility. As for salvation, it could not be attained through Jesus Christ, but only through a good secular education. And that is why the practice of Unitarianism became a social crusade for the creation of secular government schools.

In Puritanism, the fear of God was as important as the love of God. But the Unitarians objected to a God that had to be feared. William Ellery Channing, the Unitarian leader, said in 1819:

Now we object to the systems of religion which prevail among us, that they are adverse, in greater or lesser degree, to those purifying, comforting, and honorable views of God that they take from us our father in heaven, and substitute for him a being, whom we cannot love if we would, and whom we ought not to love if we could.

To Calvin, one had no choice in the matter. Scripture revealed God as he was, not as we would have liked Him to be. He wrote (I C R, vol. I, p. 41, 46):

[F]irst of all, the pious mind does not devise for itself any kind of God, but looks alone to the one true God; nor does it feign for him any character it pleases, but is contented to have him in the character in which he manifests himself....

Hence, they do not conceive of him in the character in which he is manifested, but imagine him to be whatever their own rashness has devised.... With such an idea of God, nothing which they may attempt to offer in the way of worship or

obedience can have any value in his sight, because it is not him they worship, but, instead of him, the dream and figment of their own heart.

I was greatly impressed with Calvin's adherence to Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. His intellectual integrity, his scholarly demeanor, his striving to know the truth as best as it could be known gave me a view of Christianity I had never before experienced. He had written the Institutes at only 26 years of age, and became known as the "most Christian man of his time."

So I became a Calvinist. And when I met the Reverend Rousas J. Rushdoony, I saw in him the most Christian man of his time, a reflection of John Calvin.

But the final argument in favor of Calvinism was in considering its fruits. The United States, which was founded mainly by Calvinists, has become the most prosperous, most powerful, and freest nation on earth. Such magnificent fruit could not have come from anything but the truth. In contrast, we've seen the fruits of communism, of Nazism, of Islam. They've produced nothing but misery, enslavement, and mass murder. There's a great lesson there to be learned.

Indeed, by their fruits ye shall know them!