The Menace of the Welfare State
Two Editorials

Christian Theology Versus
Modern Ideology

Can the Natural Man Know God?

Natural Law — Christian?

Correspondence

Book Reviews
The CALVIN FORUM

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Sources of Danger to a Free Society

Today the question of freedom centers about the problem of the individual over against organized education, organized politics, organized labor, and organized government. It seems evident that in America, official Communist opinion and propaganda to the contrary notwithstanding, so-called big business no longer dominates the government, and that the source of danger to our freedoms lies elsewhere, namely, in the growth of a power in Washington created by the tremendous bargaining power of organized labor joined with the patronage hunger of organized politics, the power hunger of organized government in the form of bureaucracy, and the subsidy hunger of organized groups. Admittedly much of the alarming increase in government control within the last fifty years was the direct result of industry’s disregard of men as persons, and legislation with respect to labor and property was simply a requirement of the common good. Furthermore, because of the economic dislocations resulting from wars and from the totalitarian threats of expansion, democratic governments have been compelled to assume functions normally and naturally belonging to the spontaneous and relatively autonomous groups within society. Nevertheless, this extension of the sphere of government is always a menace to freedom simply because the human will-to-power is always present to assert itself irrespective of the demands of the common good. As a consequence, the state instead of confining itself to the supervision of society from the political point of view, will tend toward organizing and eventually controlling the economic and cultural interests of society more or less directly, sooner or later arrogating to itself something like absolute power by inalienable right. As such power extends itself—for power feeds on power—and the machinery of government become increasingly bureaucratic, the state tends to become an end in itself, regarding only its own preservation and growth as the one universal good.

In modern societies the centralization of power seems to be almost inevitable, whether it be that of wealth, or of political action, or of control of the processes of production. Thus the Soviet Union destroyed private economic power only to replace it by a concentration of political and military power. And the experience of mankind seems to show that whenever power becomes inordinate, much more than moral suasion is required to check it. Power weakens character by blinding men to moral considerations. The Communist revolution, intended as a liberation from the “power of acquisitive capitalism,” itself developed an inordinate power which precipitated the bloodiest tyranny of modern times. President Madison firmly believed that men who have achieved positions of power ought to be distrusted. For one thing, power and privilege require a large amount of rationalization, always a most prolific source of evil among men. Furthermore, once men have acquired power they will fight for its continuance as they would for their very lives. In fact the position of “perilous eminence” is one in which it seems impossible to feel secure except by extension of this eminence, a process to which there is no conceivable end, that is to say; the only way to feel secure in power is by a continued acquisition of additional power. And since men attend to the suggestions of the imagination long before they attend to the claims of reason, they will more readily be motivated by considerations of self-interest than by considerations of the common good. The abuse of power, therefore, can be prevented only by force or by the grace of God.

Judging from recent history the love of freedom is not always the strongest of political motives. The tendency to unite under a strong leader and to obey him implicitly seems to be at least as strong. Furthermore, the subordinate associations within political society, whether of labor, agriculture, or industry, being invariably selfish, always tend to resolve any conflict in terms of their own peculiar interests. Consequently, much of democratic statesmanship will consist in preventing any group or confederacy of groups from becoming strong enough and entrenched enough to substitute itself and its interests for the welfare of the whole and thus usurping the powers and functions of the state. That this is a most difficult task can be gathered from the fact that any group, whether a party or a nation, tends to regard its own program as the embodiment of values and ideals universally valid and, therefore, above compromise. Furthermore, the sense of justice upon which harmonious social relationships depend is difficult to apply in the case of groups, whose relationships are more or less impersonal and
mechanical. Finally, inasmuch as no group will voluntarily surrender its privileges in the interest of a larger justice called the common good, any check upon it must of necessity assume some form of coercion.

Unfortunately, no government can long maintain itself by force alone. It must be able to rely to some extent upon the factor of reverence, something which only a tradition and a dominating faith can supply. In a democracy such a dominating faith will almost surely have to be something much more fundamental than a mere belief in democracy. Democratic processes are an effect rather than a cause. The mere belief in democracy seems to be a rather mutable and evanescent sort of thing, as can be observed in the case of the Soviet Union, which to this day professes unwavering loyalty to democracy. In other words, faith in democracy will not in itself insure the actuality of democratic processes. No man really believes in the essential rightness of the democratic way of life unless he is committed to a metaphysic or a religion involving strenuous personal convictions regarding the nature of man, or the nature of the universe, or the nature of God, or all three together. Now because the American people have suffered a conspicuous decline in the matter of moral and religious convictions, there exist today a number of dangers threatening us as a free society. The misgivings uttered by one of our presidential candidates in his speech of acceptance doubtless had something to do with the fact that if elected he will inherit an entrenched and over-staffed bureaucracy based upon enormous spending programs, an administrative personnel habituated to waste and corruption, and the vested interests of labor bosses, whose power and arrogance recently tied up the nations most basic industry, persuaded our chief executive to ignore the law (i.e., the will of the people), and prevented the nomination of a man for the presidency. C.D.B.

The Menace of the Welfare State

A FREE society is characterized not only by self-government but also by an autonomy on the part of those voluntary associations which proceed from the free initiative of the citizens, associations representing the interests and claims of family, religion, culture, education, labor, and industry. Here the proper role of the state is that of vicar or agent of political society, maintaining law, administering public affairs, and promoting public welfare. Like the Sabbath, the state was made for man, not man for the state. Instead of an end in itself, it is a means "to restrain the dissoluteness of men" in order that "we may live a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity." The true dignity of the state is found, not in the amount of force it can display, but in its ability to protect a free society. To the extent that it actually succeeds in doing this it can be said to be administering justice. Accordingly, the Christian citizen is divinely called to carry the spiritual struggle into political life, where his immediate objective is the establishment and maintenance of a free society and a just state, and where its ultimate objective is that of a transformed social conscience controlled by the gospel.

The Christian view of the state involves the recognition that that state is the best which permits the greatest amount of freedom to the individual consonant with public order and sound morality. It holds that the continuity and progress of a society depend upon the individual rather than upon techniques and organization. Creative achievement is not the work of the crowd, and the benefits of genius are not produced but only transmitted by the many. Pericles had this in mind when he said that Athenian society trusted less in system and policy than in "the native spirit of our citizens." Or in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "... it is the manners and spirit of a people that preserve a republic in vigor." Governor Bradford, speaking of Plymouth Colony's experiment in communism, observed that although it was tried "by godly and sober man," the final outcome was confusion and discontent, which the governor interpreted as a judgment upon the colonists for trying "to be wiser than God." In short, the artist, the scholar, the inventor, the worshipper, and the thinker can flourish only in an atmosphere of individual freedom. Every man is unique in that God has appointed him to a work no other man can do, so that if he fails in his allotted task it will remain undone. Accordingly, the sacrifice of the individual to anything lower than personality, whether riches or fame or the state, in going counter to the Divine order, inevitably produces its own peculiar social disaster. A Christian society is a free society and a self-governing society just because it insists that as members of the body politic men are responsible for the well-being of their neighbors and, in the end, accountable to God, who regards their neighbors as potential sons of God endowed with a moral inviolability. And to refuse this accountability is to deny the Divine demand of justice, a sin for which men and societies usually pay in the form of war, pestilence, and famine. A contemporary form of this sin is the popular yearning for the welfare state, i.e., the habit of looking to the government for just about everything. Inasmuch as it amounts to a virtual deification of the state, the state may eventually become, as Luther reminds us, "an instrument of punishment" to the people for the
sin of refusing to govern themselves. In his Commentary on Samuel, Calvin says this: “And ye, O peoples, to whom God gave the liberty to choose your own magistrates, see to it that you do not forfeit this favor...”

We Americans have never been politically minded in the sense in which Europeans are politically minded, not because of this or that hallowed tradition but because our hopes and fears have always been largely economic. Even today we would gladly leave politics to the professionals if we could be reasonably certain that this would not interfere with bread and butter and radios and cars. Whatever political thinking we do is done in terms of the selfish interests of economic pressure groups: organized agriculture insists upon “parity farm prices,” organized labor upon escalator clauses, and organized industry upon unimpaired profits. Huge corporations organize as co-operatives in order to escape certain taxes—a device costing the American people almost a billion dollars annually. Today we have subsidized home building, subsidized crop growing, subsidized medical training, subsidized incomes, and subsidized retirement. The young believe that the government owes them an education, the old, that it owes them a pension, and the veterans, that it owes them practically everything. During the earlier years of the New Deal the general idea was that of taking from the “haves” and giving to the “have-nots”; today we seem to be approaching a state of affairs in which we take from everybody to give to everybody, the government meanwhile spending more than it takes in, and flooding the country with Federal IOU currency in the attempt to be all things to all men.

Almost eighteen million persons—one out of every nine—are receiving monthly checks from the Federal Government. However, most of our farmers, laborers, business and professional men, themselves apparently ready to take whatever they can from the government, seem to regard this as a perfectly normal outgrowth of the complexity of modern life. Today we are in what would appear to be a tight battle with the Soviet Union; yet the policies of the Federal Government since War II have accomplished nothing quite as obviously as helping to ingrain in our citizens the habit of living on the government and feeding at the public trough—what with all the handouts for crop support, wage and profit support, housing, education, and in fact almost everything in which there appears to be a chance to appeal to groups of voters. (One of the things that characterized the last years of the Roman republic was the large number of citizens living on the government.) Not long ago the Democratic National Committee distributed a pamphet on the Brannan farm plan entitled, What Is In It For You? We all realize, of course, that the public treasury has been raided before but this was perhaps the first time such a raid was proposed without the public recognizing it for the civic and political disgrace that it was. It is but a few years ago that the Townsend Plan was regarded by the voting majority as a silly political nostrum amounting to a disguised attempt to tap the United States Treasury. Today, apparently the same kind of thing is seriously regarded as the secret of success at the polls. In the past politicians have been sentenced to the Federal penitentiary for buying elections with their own money. Had they lived today they would have realized that it is easier and safer to permit federal handouts and taxes do the buying for them.

One of the sins capable of destroying a group, whether it be a home or a nation, is that of mass irresponsibility, a thing which poisons human relationships and in the end makes personal morality almost impossible. Mastery over material things does not last long after mastery of self has been abandoned. Our present trouble with inflation is a case in point since, evidently, most of us expect the government to do miracles for us and to remove our difficulties at no cost to ourselves. Now it is clearly silly to expect the politicians to stop inflation, since their very existence as politicians depends upon the appeasement of pressure groups. Nor will government price controls do it for us, since controls only conceal the causes of inflation and consequently weaken the will of the people to deal with them. Now the people’s will to deal with these causes will have to be in the form of “great, not easy decisions, decisions that require a long, patient, costly struggle.” They must be fully prepared to engage for a long time to come in such undramatic and unrewarding activities as giving an honest day’s work for a day’s pay, doing without non-essentials, organizing against unlimited spending and artificial shortages, discussing problems with others, rebuking their congressmen whenever they yield to pressure groups, watching local government, and so on. Unfortunately, the two most potent “natural economic laws,” namely human greed and human shortsightedness are still very much in evidence; and so we find organized industry recommending the return to a sound currency by freezing wages and leaving profits unmolested; whereas organized labor, of course, fails to see any hope for the future unless we limit profits and increase wages. Meanwhile organized agriculture has actually induced the Federal Government to pay hundreds of millions to government employees hired for the purpose of keeping farm prices up. Incidentally, this procedure is dignified by the title of “price support program,” something which

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* This does not include about two million receiving temporary monthly payments, about one million receiving semi-monthly unemployment checks, all the part-time workers employed by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and three million farmers receiving crop adjustment checks.

3) From Mr. Stevenson’s speech of acceptance. It is too bad that he had to spoil it all by permitting the amenities of “the lower politics” to seduce him into the palpable insincerities about lifetimes “of service and bravery” and “imperishable pages in the history of the republic.”
to certain grades of intelligence gives an altogether scientific and statesmanlike face to the matter. In other words, whereas only added production or decreased spending or both can really neutralize the drug of Federal IOU currency and thus stop inflation, we have the spectacle of food destroyed and stock-piling locked up in government warehouses, all for the purpose of creating shortages. Fortunately, such things as science, invention, and technology have given us a tremendous capacity to produce; unfortunately, government in the hands of a wasteful and corrupt administration can produce degraded currency, thus evaporating savings, profits, and pay envelopes, at a much faster rate than technology can produce. Where everybody is for himself the devil does not bother to take the hindmost; he takes them all.

A country, and especially a politically democratic one, usually gets the kind of government it deserves; and a political society which expects the state to do everything for it, and in which the members organize into pressure groups to the end of getting something for nothing, will eventually find its own irresponsibility fully reflected in the personnel of government. Politicians will usually be as parasitical as the public permits them to be. Today thirteen different Congressional committees are at work investigating corruption in the Federal Government alone. Of course, we have witnessed corruption in high places before, but the spectacle of its being condoned is surely something new. The Harding administration had its Teapot Dome, but known thieves and liars were not openly defended, cronies and accomplices were not protected, law-breakers and racketeers were not accepted in decent middle-class society, the underworld was not a power sufficiently strong to enforce its will by political penalties, and there was nothing analogous to the recent token investigations in which the FBI was permitted by the Department of Justice to investigate only minor witnesses, being subsequently called off entirely when pursuit was getting hot and about to yield results.

If politics is the art of self-government and if a politician is defined as a person who takes a greater interest in public affairs than most people, then it would seem that for the sake of democracy and freedom every decent citizen should as a matter of civic responsibility, make it a point to become a politician. In democratic Athens every citizen considered it a civic duty and a prerogative of his station as a freeman to know the laws and to attend the assembly for the purpose of making and improving them. And it was not until Athens fell upon more degenerate times that it saw the rise of the professional who taught and practiced the law for a fee. Analogously, although it is true that our professional politicians are more interested in public affairs than most people, it is also true that a dangerously large minority are more interested primarily "for a fee." And if the professional politician has managed to monopolize the interest in public problems, it is high time that this monopoly be taken away from him. Most of us who complain that professionals run organizations, that they dictate the alternatives between which we are permitted to choose, that they are in politics for the benefit of their bank accounts, and that they sew up our national conventions from the start have only ourselves to blame. Everybody can be a politician, and no citizen of the United States can be barred from the key organization—the local caucus or its equivalent—of either political party. There are no laws forbidding anyone to join or to organize political clubs in support of one's pet measure or one's favorite candidate. In America the only prerequisite for becoming a member of the ruling class is an interest in the common good. Not long ago Senator Paul Douglas proposed a commission on ethics in government. Unfortunately, citizens and professional politicians who pay scant attention to the old Commandments will probably not show added respect for the new ones. We need better citizens, not better machinery; and if there is something fundamentally wrong with the political life of our nation, the root of the trouble will most likely be found at home.

Any political society which condones corruption in public affairs is ripe for the demagogue and, by a kind of natural process, ready for the dictator. To be uncompromising in small things may betray a regrettable lack of vision, but to be compromising in just about everything is certainly the mark of moral cynicism. Behind every corruption there lurks a compromise, and history seems to teach that physical disaster usually overtakes a strong nation only after its foundations have been undermined by moral disaster. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," and a political society that will tolerate corruption in high places has lost the right to be free. The irresponsibility which induces men to refuse this vigilance eventually leads them into the political delinquency by which they exaggerate the function of the state, demanding of it the solution of all human problems. Little by little men become habituated to the acceptance of virtual dictatorship in the minor details of life, something especially dangerous because, as De Tocqueville pointed out, it does not immediately drive men to resistance and, therefore, gradually accustoms them to a reliance on paternalistic regulations. The welfare state is something which in the end must be paid for; economically, in terms of inflation, high taxes, artificial short-
Special Revelation and the Problem of World Community

Carl F. H. Henry
Professor of Theology and Christian Philosophy, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California

THE misunderstanding of the Christian revelation-claim looms large in Dr. Ross' work, and that is why he is able summarily to dismiss it as simply a variety of all particularistic views. For a certain positivistic bias runs throughout the work. Much in the spirit of Shailer Matthews, theological views are approached as part of the history of doctrine, without a serious facing of the issue whether such ideas involve after all a genuine reference to the religious object. Thus Dr. Ross opposes faith defined "in primarily intellectualistic terms, as involving a deposit of revelation or a body of teaching" (p. 72). Instead faith is defined as "an attitude of confident exploration" (p. 72), which, we are compelled to add, need not involve any genuine religious object at all. In fact, we are told that all religion is the product of humanity (p. 9), and that "theologies are earthborn" (p. 54). Yet, in his more positive statements, Dr. Ross has a mystical side emphasizing the universal dimension of religion as against isolated holy channels (pp. 93f.), but nowhere is the nature of this universal dimension clearly set forth; in fact, the positivistic side of Dr. Ross' teaching would preclude ever setting it forth in clear terms. Such an approach leads finally to the undermining of all religion.

The Christian revelation-claim can be dismissed in such generalities only when one dogmatically approaches it with the bias that the structure of reality makes special revelation intrinsically impossible. For Hebrew-Christian revelation, by its very nature, has nothing in common with the "special" revelations and incarnations which characterize the pantheistic religions, in which deity must always and everywhere assume new manifestations. Biblical revelation is the once-for-all intervention in a special way of the holy Lord, who cannot be assimilated to nature and man. In opposition to the pantheistic views, Hebrew-Christian revelation is intrinsically unrepeatable for it involves the transcendent activity of the immanent God. The Bible nowhere denies a general revelation of God; indeed it presupposes it and insists that man is related to it by way of rebellion, and hence a sinner. Dr. Ross' assumption is that the essential relation of Christianity and the world religions is something discovered when Protestant missions in the 19th century penetrated foreign fields and gained "new insights . . . through experience" and were driven to a restatement in terms of factors "empirically evident or self-authenticating to one reared outside a Christian church" (p. 117). But if the issue turned upon empirical factors, why did not the first-century missionaries discover it? The reply is that the relation is not something empirically observable at all, but something thought, in terms of modern philosophical biases. The 20th century is not the first one called upon to "face seriously" (p. 106) the question of Christianity's relation to the non-Christian religions; rather, it is the first to "take seriously" the evolutionary bias that the essence of religion is found everywhere, so that no religion can be regarded as qualitatively unique. It is inaccurate to say that "the reformers themselves and their followers were practically unaware of the problem of the relation of their religion to the other religions of the world" (p. 105). Did not Calvin preface his Institutes with a lengthy prolegomenon bearing directly on special and general revelation? Did not Zwinglei, whom Dr. Ross appreciates for his emphasis on divine immanence and on "a well-rounded humanism" (p. 96) write his Commentarius de vera et falsa religione? Dr. Ross is quite convinced, from the standpoint of the 20th century, that 19th century Europeans and American were wrong in thinking that the Christian West is the bearer of a superior religion and culture (p. 106), to which it may be replied that it is precisely because Christianity was so widely known only in its liberal dilution that its superiority seemed to have evaporated. Dr. Ross stands appropriately enough at the juncture wherein a Christianity confronts the world religions, but instead of addressing the world religions, reminding them that super-
naturalistic Christianity has already demonstrated its vitality to rescue the world from paganism, he addresses Christians, who need not be addressed by man, since they have already been addressed by the living God. "The sheep follow him: for they know his voice" said Jesus, as Shepherd of the flock; "a stranger will they not follow . . . for they know not the voice of strangers" (Jn. 10:4-5). One may therefore inquire whether Dr. Ross' volume is not, after all, misaddressed. For it was precisely those who stood historically closest to Jesus who insisted most vigorously on the exclusiveness of Christianity.

At the heart of Dr. Ross' antipathy for special revelation stands the assumption—highly debatable—that other religious personalities and symbols can do with equal effectiveness what Christ can do, that Christianity is simply one variety (and against liberalism, not even the highest) of a general religious essence, that Christian experience is simply a variety of universal religious experience. This unproved assumption we are at liberty to challenge, and in doing so we appeal at once to the self-revelation of the living God inscripturated in the Bible, and also to a wider area of experience than that to which Dr. Ross confines himself. No empiricism which has been straight-jacketed by any presupposition of intrinsic impossibilities can be appealed to in dogmatic fashion at this point; for Dr. Ross himself has previously warned that sheer dogmatism will "betray the principle of growth and . . . convert living by faith into living by formulas" (p.124).

VI

The central issue is, of course, the interpretation of sin. In the resolution of Paul's guilt into merely the feeling of guilt (p.36) Dr. Ross furnishes the reader an anticipation of his view. "It is one of the tragedies of Christian history," he declares, quite in opposition to the viewpoint which counts it to the credit of Christianity that it takes sin seriously, "that the men who determined the theological pattern or mood for the majority of Christians were men who . . . lived in the sense that they had somehow quarreled with God" (p.90). Dr. Ross disparages this "fearsome idea of God" (p.90). The turning point here is the nature of God, whether indeed he is personal, and as personal both righteous and loving. If theology must constantly revise its ideas, so that one cannot be sure that God is holy, even that He is personal, or even that He is, that is one thing; but to act upon this conviction as an assured datum not only does violence to what God has made known of Himself, but to any view which permits itself no assured datum. Nobody can quarrel with a deity who, because nobody has any durable idea what He is like, i.e., is an unknown god, and hence cannot be quarreled with. Dr. Ross' view of man is a most optimistic one, a view against which, on the ground of empirical dissatisfaction, theologians like Barth, Brunner, and Niebuhr have revolted in recent decades. Whether the emphasis on the sinfulness of man can sustain itself, apart from the reaffirmation of Biblical authority, is a moot question, but it is marginal to our present discussion; all that is intended here is to indicate that Dr. Ross' view of man does not seem to be the only empirical option. His denial of original sin (p.130) and insistence that "divine potentialities are present in every man" (p.30) apart from supernatural regeneration is so unrealistic about the contemporary sociological drift that it may well be asked whether it is not Dr. Ross' view, rather than the less optimistic alternatives, which do "violence to many of the basic laws that underlie the development of creative human relationships" (p.139). Dr. Ross accuses those who believe in sin to be the only real sinners. To the Biblical emphasis that it is man's pride proceeding from an autonomous will and reason that most deeply accounts for the rejection of special revelation, he replies that the belief in special revelation stems from "egocentrically satisfying feelings" which, instead of getting at the root of pride, conceal pride in a more subtle form" (p.114). It can always be replied, of course, that pride reaches its most subtle form in self-justification driven to explain the Biblical view in these terms. In any event, when the author urges Christians to become "mature enough in their religion to point the way to a dynamic concept of world community and understanding" (p.106), the Christian has every right to press against Dr. Ross the necessity of maturing to the depth-dimension of sin and to the need of divine redemption as the only way to a solution. The simple fact is that, from the standpoint of the New Testament, Dr. Ross has approached the problem of community from the wrong side, not alone in failing to emphasize that the individual man must be remade before society can be remade, but in failing also to see that it is man's community with God which needs first to be restored, before the sociological predicament will find its rectification. The tensions of egotism and altruism are resolved only in the enthronement of the revealed will of God which, while embracing all humanity, does so in intensely personal terms. The "God who transcends both East and West," in behalf of whom Dr. Ross so fervently pleads is precisely the transcendent God of Biblical theology who deals realistically with man in sin and provides salvation in the manifestation of His holy love. The illusion of personal superiority may well characterize not those who assert special revelation and redemption as Dr. Ross would make it out, but those who reject it.

VII

Conservative Christians, asserts Dr. Ross, are "reactionaries" (p.108); they are victims of "uncritically held presuppositions" (p.115) and of "unanalyzed beliefs or hunches" (p.115-116). Particularism is associated, asserts Dr. Ross, who elsewhere argues
against the lack of respect for personality supposed-ly inherent in that viewpoint with “a shrinking, withdrawing type of person”—a judgment which squares with great difficulty with the great prophets of Israel, with Jesus the Christ, with apostles like Paul and a reformer like Luther. Perhaps we are not to take seriously the implication that the advocates of universalism are an expanding, efferves-cent type. Why respect for personality requires the admission that another’s theological views are true is not apparent; else Dr. Ross is clearly guilty of dis-respect for the personalities of all theological partic-u-larists. More important is the fact that the history of Christianity itself makes clear that particularism does not stand in the way of an enlarging fellowship; Christianity excluded nobody, of whatever race or color, in any age, except the impenitent. Biblical re-velation and redemption constitute not an obstacle to solution of the problem of community but the one hope for such solution. For the Hebrew-Christian tradition alone offers the dynamic for making every man a neighbor in a genuine sense. Here one thinks by way of contrast of anti-particularistic outlook such as ancient Stoicism or modern Spinozism the former issuing in ataraxia and the latter in resigna-tion; neither view knows anything of love in its deep Christian sense. For both universalisms give me the encouragement only that the universal necessity of things shows no more regard for me than for my fel-lowman, and that there is no point to thinking more highly of my brother than I do of a stranger. But the Christian dynamic for world community rests upon the election love of God. It translates the par-ticular love which God has shown in Christ into a love for all men. The love that Christ has shown for me as an underserving sinner can find its reflection only in a love which goes out to those to whom I am unobligated, even to those who are my enemies, for a renunciation of that kind of love would renounce my share in the mercy of God. Here is a partic-u-larism that can hardly be described as “shrinking” for it involves a world-wide commission, and teaches believers not that God is equally indifferent to all, but that all may have the same intimate share in His as I do of my brother. That the denial of the truth that God has revealed himself in a special way will indubitably yield an “ever-enlarging capacity for community” is never proved by the author, but simply assumed. The solution of the problem of world community has not come in the past by way of the inclusivistic views, nor has it come in the present by way of the inclusivistic views; every syncretistic approach succeeds only in destroying a movement’s missionary and martyr zeal. Rather, men delivered by Christ from a syncretistic outlook have come to find a love for their fellow man that had never before been a deep reality, and such a love carried Christianity to victory over Greek philosophy. For Christianity knew that a God who does not love anybody in particular is not a loving God, but only a god—like those postulated by Greek philosophy—who is equally indifferent to every-body, for he is no god at all. The contrast to be made therefore is not human unity of the Spirit either “under God” or “under historically condi-tioned symbols” (pp.19f.); rather, it is unity under the God who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures or no unity at all. There is no other dynamic basis for creatively meeting cultural mediums.

VIII

In summary, it must be said that if Dr. Ross ob-jects to the specific theology upon which the Chris-tian view of world community rests, his too is a specific ideology, one rooted far more in dogmatic conviction than in any transparent empiricism. If he claims for his view the distinction that it is a 20th century outlook, we must remind him, in view of his own repudiation of finality, that additional cen-turies are likely to intrude. Actually, neither the universalistic nor the relativistic emphasis of Dr. Ross argument is modern, though they are bolstered frequently in our day by a certain philosophy of science. The issue of the sinfulness of man is an issue for theology, not for a philosophy which claims to be the arbiter of all questions by a priori ruling all issues unreal which do not worship at its method­ological shrine. In the Biblical revelation and in the incarnation the holy Lord declares His mercy upon sinners and offers a free pardon. Thus the problem of world community narrows to the problem of sin and redemption. In the spirit of Biblical theology, Augustine saw that we properly speak of world community only when sin has not entered human his-tory; where sin and grace have entered, there is a struggle in history between two communities, the city of light and the city of darkness. Nothing is to be gained by conceiving the city of darkness as a city of light, although in a city of darkness the dis­tinctions are doubtless obscure. But in the city of light, the difference is always transparently obvious, and the problem of community gains genuine solu­tion only as one city is deserted for the other. The issues here are deep, and Dr. Ross perchance sees them more clearly than those who try to pitch their tents on some unreal borderline between the two cities. Dr. Ross reminds us unmistakably of the implica­tions of such a view as his. “A large part of the educational task today within the Christian fold,” he states, “is to guide people in such a way that they no longer feel it necessary to search the Christian Scriptures” (p.129). That is, of course, the cry of the city which insists upon turning out its light. For if we would find real solution of the problem of com­munity, the one indispensable book is the Bible.
How Do We Know?

An Introduction to the Epistemology of Cornelius Van Til

Point of Departure: The Ontological Trinity

MBUED as he is with the vision of God, Professor Van Til asserts as the Alpha of all his postulates the God of Christian Theism. Unless man begins with this God, he says, nothing else can possibly be meaningful. But this God must be what He declares himself to be: the tri-personal, self-subsisting God. Any attenuation at the outset is fatal. “The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are each a personality and together consistute the exhaustive personal God. There is an eternal, internal, self-conscious interaction between the three persons of the Godhead. . . . Each is as much God as are the other two. . . . The diversity and the unity in the Godhead are therefore equally ultimate; they are exhaustively correlative to one another and not correlative to anything else.”

This Trinity is called the ontological Trinity. By the use of the adjective Van Til, following Reformed theology in general, intends to set off the concept of God ad intra, or as He is in himself, from the concept of God ad extra, or as He produces effects outside of himself. When, therefore, we talk of the ontological trinity, we contemplate God apart from the cosmos over which He presides.

Van Til deliberately sets his jaw against the separation of the existence of God from his nature. We cannot intelligibly talk about an existing “something” apart from its “whatness.” Denotation means nothing apart from connotation. The moment we assert “He is” the question arises “Who is?”

Rejection of the Thomistic Point of Departure

This refusal to separate God’s existence from his nature is, of course, a rejection of the Thomistic apologetic method. Thomism “proves” God’s existence by distilling from common sense an Unmoved Mover, a First Cause, or an Ultimate Intelligence. Granting now that it has proved the existence of a First Cause, can we say that it has proved the existence of God? The answer is a flat NO! Aquinas, observing in a finite universe the motifs of motion, causation, contingency, gradation, and purpose, imagined that from these finite phenomena he could conclude the existence of God. But the argument collapses when one observes that he has at best proved the existence of a Somewhat big enough to produce these effects. He has not proved the existence of the Infinite. There is no reason why this Somewhat should not be a relatively intelligent It. Of these proofs Van Til says that “they cry out day and night that God does not exist. For, as they have been constructed, they cry that a finite God exists. Nothing more could come from the procedure on which they have been constructed. They have been constructed on the assumption that we as human beings may make our start from the finite world, as from something that it ultimate. They take for granted that we already know from our study of the phenomenal world the meaning of such words as “cause” and “being” and “purpose” whether or not we have referred this phenomenal world to God.”

Hence Van Til says not only that the Thomistic argument presumes to prove what it does not prove but also and with even greater vigor, that the whole attempt, so begun and so conducted, is illegitimate. This objection flows from Van Til’s conception of “facthood.” No fact in this temporal universe stands by itself; every fact stands in systematic relation to every other fact and the whole web of facthood stands in a determined relation to God who is the Father of all Facthood. Every fact is what it is and does what it does and undergoes what it undergoes because of God’s comprehensive plan concerning it. He has pre-interpreted every fact and controls every fact: hence, no fact is intelligible without reference to its Origin, its place in the realm of facthood, and its end in the divine scheme. In this realm of facthood there are no ultimate contingencies rampant, no rioting particulars; chance hasn’t a chance in it.

If this theory of coherence be true, and no fact may be interpreted without taking account of God’s pre-interpretative activity, Van Til has every right to challenge the Thomistic method. Involved here is, of course, a dispute as to the place and function of human reason. We shall pursue this discussion when we come to the epistemological implications of creation. Let it suffice to say now that, according to Van Til, God is the telescope, so to speak, through which man must contemplate the firmament of facthood. We cannot then first look at that firmament to see whether or not God exists. If we do not presuppose this existence we cannot even “see” the facts. If we do not use a telescope we cannot even

1 Apologetics, 1951, p. 8.
2 Cf. F. J. Sheen, God and Intelligence, page 218.

4 Not to be identified with the corresponding Hegelian theory. For Van Til this coherence is owing to the comprehensive counsel of God upon whom the phenomenal world is dependent.
see the stars; nor can the stars then explain to us the telescope.\textsuperscript{5}

Ultimate or Proximate Point of Departure

Van Til’s ultimate starting-point then is the ontological Trinity. He does not, however, deny that one may take the human mind or human experience as a proximate starting-point. When St. Augustine says “Cogito ergo sum” his takeoff is not necessarily false.\textsuperscript{6} St. Augustine stands as it were on the tip of a springboard from which he will in a moment dive into the realm of facthood. This tip is his immediate starting-point. But he is conscious all the while that the last twenty inches of the divingboard do not make sense apart from their connection with the rest of the structure. It rests, as he knows very well, on a solid emplacement. So too his mind. It is unintelligible apart from its resting place in God. St. Augustine’s Cogito is miles away from Descartes’ Dubito.

At this point it is natural to ask: If only those who know God can truly know reality or any segment of it, how does Van Til explain the staggering attainments of modern science? And does the non-Christian philosopher exert himself only to produce egregious falsehood? A perfunctory reading of Van Til would indeed betray us into some such absurdity. Says he in one place: “... Suppose that one should just begin his investigations as a scientist, without even asking whether or not it is necessary to make reference to God in his investigations, such a one would be in constant and fundamental ignorance all the while.”\textsuperscript{7} From this quotation one might readily infer that Christians are the only people in the world capable of true scientific endeavor. And a glance at history tells us that their actual attainments in the field of science are not conspicuous. Has Van Til a blind spot? But elsewhere we read: “... non-Christian thinkers in general and non-Christian scientists in particular, may discover much that is true about the universe that is made by God. Perhaps most of the great discoveries of science have been made by those who are not Christians. But such discoveries could not have been made unless the universe is what the Christian says it is, namely, created and controlled by God. There would be no order in nature and no rationality of relationships to be found anywhere in the universe had not God made them. Therefore the possibility of science itself presupposes the truth of the Christian concept of God. When, then, the non-Christian scientist discovers truth this is not because of, but in spite of, his own theory of being and of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{8} The possibility of knowledge, then, is given by God in creation; the possibility of knowledge for the antitheist, whether he likes it or not, is still given in Theism. Still there seems to be an inconsistency in Van Til: he has said the antitheist can, and cannot, discover truth in reality. The solution is given—though not always with the greatest lucidity—in Van Til but we shall discuss it under another heading.

A word yet about the reason for holding to Christian Theism. The argument is again unblushingly circular. Van Til believes the Bible, because there alone, in world literature, he hears the voice of the absolute God making sovereign overtures of grace. And he believes in that God because He alone is so revealed in Scripture. Gratefully he embraces this God—and not only for his soul’s sake: “The God that the philosophers of the ages have been looking for, a God in whom unity and diversity are equally ultimate, the ‘Unknown God,’ is known to us by grace. It has been the quest of the ages to find an interpretative concept such as has been given us by grace.”\textsuperscript{9}

Creation and Human Knowledge

Christianity stands or falls, epistemologically and otherwise, with the doctrine of temporal creation. Any tampering with this doctrine is damaging to the whole system. Pantheism or Panceosism is the ultimate heresy.

The doctrine means, roughly, that God chose to give temporal embodiment to a pre-interpreted pattern of things which would publish, each in its own key, the magnificence of his attributes. Man, “his masterpiece of selfportraiture,” was appointed vicegerent of this created realm. But he was never to forget that his was a derived and not an original authority. In the realm of thought, conformably to this status, he was to be a re-interpreter of the patterns God had laid down—a task for which he was equipped to perfection.

This man Adam moved in a many-voiced medium of eloquence. Every fact surrounding him was a herald of God’s majesty; the atmosphere in Paradise was, as it were, completely personal. And he himself, as a reflector,\textsuperscript{10} was just as revelatory of God as his horticultural environment. “Man’s very constitution as a rational and moral being is itself revelational to man as the ethically responsible reactor to revelation.”\textsuperscript{11} But general revelation, even before the fateful dissociation called the Fall, required a supplement. Man needed to be told, through a direct self-disclosing act of God, about his task and place in this world.

So Adam, whether he closed or opened his eyes, was in rapport with God. Life for him was a perpet-

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Metaphysics of Apologetics}, 1931, page 10.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., page 110.
\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Metaphysics}, page 10.

\textsuperscript{9} Common Grace, page 9.
\textsuperscript{10} Van Til would, I think, assent to the lyrical description of the created analogue as given by C. S. Lewis: “Nay, the very beauty of it lay in the certainty that it was a copy, like and not the same, an echo, a rhyme, an exquisite reverberation of the uncreated music prolonged in a created medium.” \textit{Pere­landra}, page 220.
\textsuperscript{11} Apologetics, page 56.
ual tête-a-tête with his Maker. As did the author of 
Psalm 19, Adam saw how the firmament shows the 
sculptor’s hand of God and in almost the same act, 
again like the Psalmist, he would reflect on the just­ 
ice of the divine requirements. Revelation impinged 
on him from all directions.

For him it was impossible, therefore, to regard 
any fact as neutral on the question of divine exist­ 
ence. It did not then — before the subversive appear­ 
ance of Satan — occur to him to regard any fact as 
existing apart from the governing and supporting 
activity of God. Nor did he regard his own interpr­ 
etative task as anything other than humble recon­ 
struction of the interrelated patterns incarnate in 
and about him. He knew himself, in all his opera­ 
tions, an analogue of the Great Original.

There was mystery in that, as in our, environment. 
An environment lit up through and through by the 
revelation of the God who dwells in light unappro­ 
achable is bound to be mysterious. God can be 
known, but never exhaustively; and his creation is 
like Him. When the non-theist talks of mystery he 
means that he has not yet penetrated “the dark con­ 
tinent of unexplored reality” (a favorite topic, inci­
dentally, for speakers at university inaugurations); 
and he, in so speaking about reality, assumes both 
that this continent is opaque to God as well and that 
man is able, under his own steam, given time, to 
explore its ultimate periphery. When the theist talks 
of mystery he confesses the impenetrability of God 
to the extent that He has not revealed himself. Not 
God, but his self-disclosure, is perspicuous.

The Fall and 
Human Knowledge

In a setting coruscating with the brillance of the 
divine imprint Man, husband and wife, chose to defy 
the living God: this it is, says Christianity, which 
constitutes the bitter divorce between analogue and 
Original. Implied is the rejection of one’s status as 
analogue — the assumption of intellectual ultimic­ 
ality. God had said: In the day thou eatest thereof thou 
shalt surely die. Satan had countered: In the day 
 thou eatest thereof thou shalt not surely die. And 
man at this crossroads of cosmic destiny chose to 
proceed without consulting his Master. He who had 
been appointed co-thinker and co-worker with God 
chose to be arbiter in the most appalling dispute of 
cosmic history. Satan by implication questioned 
God’s ability to control the future in accordance with 
his purposes. God cannot know what is going to hap­ 
pen when you eat, said Satan: He cannot know be­
cause He cannot control and He cannot control be­
cause He cannot know. Nobody knows. God’s counsel 
is a hoax. God is presuming on your gullibility. 
Irrationality is at the heart of things. Not only does He 
not know what will happen but I know that He 
doesn’t. I understand the future well enough to know 
that God does not control it. Satan claimed the pow­ 
er of perfect prognosis.

Confronted by two claimants to ultimacy, man 
appointed himself a third. The satanic hypothesis to 
him was no less relevant than the divine hypothesis. 
What really mattered, of course, was his own final 
powers of judgment. In keeping with this assumed 
independence of judgment was his initial attitude of 
neutrality. This neutrality toward the claims and 
counter-claims confronting him amounted to a re­ 
jection of the sole originality of God’s thought and 
ended with the affirmation of the superiority of his 
own created mind. From now on he wished to think 
under his own auspices and experiment without 
such fat assumptions as the all-conditioning powers 
of a remote God. God must be baffled by futurity, 
said man, and what’s more, I know He is. I know the 
future is the realm of chance. Adam at this point as­ 
sumed the equal ultimacy of God’s mind, Satan’s, 
and his own; he posited an ultimate epistemological 
pluralism.¹²

This rationalism and irrationalism, says Van Til, 
is characteristic of all antitheistic thought from Tha­
les down to Santayana. The aqueous world of the 
one, no less than the evolutionary flux of the other, 
is chance-controlled; and the one, no less than the 
other, assumes the prerogatives of original postu­ 
lation.

What has happened meanwhile to general revela­ 
tion? The heavens still declare the glory of God but 
his wrath too has been revealed. It has been revealed 
from heaven, says Paul, against all ungodliness.¹³ It 
is revealed, he says, because man mutes the voice of 
God in his heart.¹⁴ The natural man, though constant­
ly under pressure of God’s requirements, refuses to 
have God in his knowledge. He tries to chloroform 
the Spirit speaking in and around him: epistemolo­
gically he commits deicide.¹⁵ His sin-conditioned 
brain reels at the thought of having to follow God’s 
logic after him.

Point 
of Contact

Common ground seems impossible between the 
man who, by the mystery and miracle of salvation, 
has resumed rapport with God and the man who sub­ 
scribes to the ultimacy of his mind and, in the 
phenomenal world, to a riot of chance-ridden surds. Yet 
the Gospel must be preached. Man must be chal­
enged to surrender his pseudo-autonomy. And the 
truth in many instances wins out, not because the 
natural man is accessible to the preacher, but be­
cause he is accessible still to God. It is God who, by 
the alchemy of his Spirit and the catalyst of his 
Word, effects a reconciliation.

The Christian philosopher and the Christian scien­
tist, who presumably cannot preach, have their task

¹² Metaphysics, page 22. 
¹³ Romans 1:18. 
¹⁴ Ibid., 1:18, 19: the crucial word, for present purposes, is 
katechonton, literally “holding down.” 
¹⁵ Common Grace, page 57.
cut out for them as well. On all issues in which the antitheist gives free play to his postulates the theist must show him the scorpion that lies at the heart of his epistemology. The theist must show him that his anti-theism is totally destructive of meaning. The theist after all has system (God’s plan) geared to the facts (which are subject to that plan) and he can be content to leave the mysterious in the hands of a kind Father; whereas the antitheist is at a loss when it comes to showing how his self-concocted system intermeshes with changing fact; and meaning eludes his grasp.

We must now return to a question broached earlier. Can the antitheist or can he not know truth in any dimension? Van Til seems to assert both. It would be unfair, however, to say that he asserts either without qualification. His entire book Common Grace is, in fact, devoted to such qualification. A philosophy of history is involved. A thumbnail sketch would be that both believer and unbeliever are still on the escalators of history, the theist ever ascending to a more consistent theism and the antitheist ever descending to a more consistent antitheism. But the escalators are in slow motion and one can, by a curious technique, switch from one to the other. And as long as neither the theist nor the antitheist have arrived at the top they will swap views, and even adopt certain notions not really in harmony with the basic position of each. By borrowing such theistic notions as law, or regularity, or purpose, the antitheist, even without recognizing that nature is the product of divine artistry, can still read a right many of the patterns in it. His grasp on truth may be fragmentary but his efforts are nonetheless very serviceable. The reason is that the voice of God sounds unabated beneath the threshold of his working consciousness and he does not always succeed in choking the ancient life which stirs there. To this sensus divinitatis, that importunate whisper in the heart of the antitheist, the theist must appeal.17

The Catholic apologete, which I mention as a foil to that of Van Til, appeals to “common sense.” It seeks rapport with that which lies above the threshold of a man’s working consciousness. Says Jacques Maritain: “The great truths without which man’s moral life is impossible,—for example, knowledge of God’s existence, the freedom of the will,—be-

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167 Since I have shown neutrality to be negation I feel free to interchange “non-theist” with “anti-theist.”
177 Apologetics, page 62.

Epilogue

The net impression left by Van Til is that epistemology, conceived in Christian terms, is in separable from ethics and that both interlock with ontology. Or to put it less abstractly: Man the knower is concurrently Man the moral reactor to revelation, and both in his interpretative and in his ethical activity he is Man the created subject.20

190 J. Maritain, op cit., page 130.
20 By subject I mean “a creature placed by God under an imperium adapted to his nature.”
MORE than once have we referred to the concept of natural law in The Calvin Forum. Thus, in the October issue of 1942 we wrote on “General Revelation and the Holy Spirit.” In the issue of April, 1947 we wrote on Grotius. In both articles we treated the concept of natural law as a subsidiary subject. However, the ignorance on this subject among us is so abysmal that it is very necessary that we devote an entire article to it. We consider it a most important subject.

Natural law belongs to general revelation. It is one of its facets. Too many people, when general revelation is discussed, think only of the beauty in creation, where the invisible things of God are made known through the visible—His eternal power and divinity. There are many other aspects of general revelation. God teaches us through history and the experiences through which we and the human race go. We should also think of the arts and the sciences, literature, the intuition, and what we call the creative imagination. All that is good and true and beautiful in this world, and is not revealed through special revelation or Scripture, belongs to general revelation. God also teaches and chastises and punishes us through the evils in this world.

What is natural law? Some may think immediately of the laws of nature that we discuss in the exact sciences, for example, in physics. We do not have that in mind, although some see a connection here. Thus, one of our founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton, compares natural law, the rights of mankind, to the maxims in geometry and says, “If they cannot pretend to rank in the class of axioms, they are yet such direct inferences from them, and so obvious in themselves, and so agreeable to the natural and unsophisticated dictates of common-sense, that they challenge the assent of a sound and unbiased mind, with a degree of force and conviction almost equally irresistible.”

Before we try to give a definition of natural law, let us give a brief history of this concept. It is by no means a new idea. It is as old as the human race. Some of the ancient Greeks believed in it very strongly, particularly Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Along the Romans Cicero occupies an outstanding position. He calls it the supreme law, the only true law and genuine justice. He attributes its origin to God, nature and right reason. The Latin term for natural law is ius naturae, and, according to Grotius, the word ius may have been derived from the name Jupiter. We cannot mention all the scholars who have discussed the concept of natural law and contributed to it. We wish to mention Thomas Aquinas, who quotes St. Augustine on the subject. Then there were the later savants—jurists and theologians, Francisco Suarez, Balthazar de Ayala, Alberico Gentili, and Francis cus de Victoria in the sixteenth century and Blackstone, Kant, and Rousseau in the eighteenth.

The Reformers did not pay much attention to natural law. Catholic scholars speak in this connection about “the suffocating Supernaturalism of the Reformers.” Melanchton paid a little more attention to the concept than the others. He discusses the communissimas formas, the most common forms of natural law.

Natural law reigned supreme in the domain of jurisprudence during the 17th and the 18th centuries. Since that time we have been living under what is called positive law, “the aggregate of legal precepts established or recognized by the authority of the state, as contrasted with natural law or a body of ideal precepts.”

However, many jurists claim that natural law still forms the background of our legal system of today, particularly in our country where the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights occupy such a prominent part in all legal procedures and legislative acts. In 1901 James Bryce wrote, “Who can say that an idea so ancient, in itself simple, yet capable of taking many aspects, an idea which has so varied a history and so wide a range of influence, may not have a career reserved for it in the long future which still lies before the human race?”

II

There are two notable instances in recent developments which make us think that the wish and prediction of Bryce are being fulfilled. In the Nuremberg trials in Germany the war criminals were condemned upon the basis of natural law as justice Jackson himself stated. The criminals themselves tried to excuse themselves upon the basis of positive law. They referred to recent examples. Justice Jackson referred more than once to Grotius, the great expositor of natural law.

12 Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, Prolegomena, 12.
The other instance is that in 1947 an Institute on Natural Law was founded by the College of Law of Notre Dame University. Five convocations have been held there since that year. The Proceedings are published in book form every year. It is very interesting to read these. There are lectures on natural law not only by Catholics but by people who hold to other religious views just as well. Thus, at the last Convocation there were representatives of five great religions who spoke on this subject. For example, a Jewish scholar spoke on, “Natural Law in Hebrew Literature.” The Institute claims that the momentum for the interest in natural law is increasing. And it behooves us, especially the jurists among us, to keep abreast of this movement for the sake of our God and for ourselves.

We know very well that it may be possible that the concept of natural law may mean more to a Catholic than to a Calvinist because the Catholic attribute more to human reason which they consider, I am told, to be untainted by sin. Nonetheless, it behooves us to pay more attention to this beautiful and Biblical concept than we are doing today. The Catholics are way ahead of us. I am not sufficiently acquainted with what is being done in the Netherlands and elsewhere among the Calvinists. But in our country we seem to be centuries behind the times. When are we going to start to be progressive?

Grotius has been singled out to be “the scientific founder of the modern school of natural law” by August Lang and many others. Even Catholic writers pay tribute to him on that score, though they are not as enthusiastic as others. They usually say that Grotius only plucked the fruits that grew on the tree which Catholic jurists planted and nourished. We should not forget that the books of Grotius were placed on the Index immediately because the Catholic Church did not like some of his views and methods. In 1899 the Pope asked permission to send a delegation to the First Peace Conference at the Hague. He was refused because the books of Grotius were still on the Index and that whole conference stood in the sign of Grotius. One writer states that in 1902 the works of Grotius were taken off the Index. But up to that time it was a mortal sin for a Catholic to read his works. No wonder they have not paid as much attention to him as they should. We have to remember that also when we read the Proceedings of the Natural Law Institute. Yet many of the speakers paid high tribute to him.

More than one writer, among them particularly Dugald Stewart, an English jurist, asserts that Grotius wrote his The Right of War and Peace primarily as a treatise on natural law. John Locke, who lived in the Netherlands immediately after Grotius and was a student of him and wrote his works in Hol-

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III

What then is natural law? Grotius’ definition in De Jure Belli ac Pacis, Book I, chapter X, section 1 is as follows: “The law of nature is a dictate of right reason, which points out that an act, according as it is or is not in conformity with rational nature, has in it a quality of moral baseness or moral necessity; and that, in consequence, such an act is either forbidden or enjoined by the author of nature, God.” We can find similar definitions in all the writers on this subject. Thus Blackstone held the same view of natural law that Grotius held and he adds: “This law of nature, being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe in all countries, and at all times: no human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this; and such of them as are valid derive all their force and all their authority, mediately or immediately, from this original.”

Grotius and Blackstone both emphasize the immutability of natural law as have all other writers on this subject.

The statement of Grotius that has been rather severely criticized at times is found in the same chapter of the same book we just quoted. In section 5 he says, in explaining the law of nature: “The law of nature, again, is unchangeable—even in the sense that it cannot be changed by God. Measureless as is the power of God, nevertheless it can be said that there are certain things over which that power does not extend. . . . Just as even God, then, cannot cause that two times two should not make four, so He cannot cause that which is intrinsically evil be not evil.” Thus, Dr. Gesina H. J. van der Molen, of the Juridical Faculty of the Free University of Amsterdam, in an excellent article in the Free University Quarterly, Dec., 1951, on “Christentum und Weltordnung” states on p. 277 that “Grotius fundamentally made natural law separate from God and founded it in human reason.”

However, we should be careful in condemning Grotius too soon. We Calvinists have statements too that, lifted out of their context, can easily be mistaken by others. Think of the doctrine of predestination. One author even wrote a book on The Predestinated Thief. Wrong emphasis on natural law can easily lead to wrong conclusions. Just like a sharp knife it may heal or hurt. The whole area
of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on reason and nature has been attributed to it, as well as the ideas of natural theology and of the natural rights which ended in the French Revolution. After all, our leaders particularly Dr. Geesink have told us emphatically that one of the fundamental differences between the view of God that the Mohammedans and the Calvinists have is that the Mohammedans believe that their God is a capricious, a whimsical God. Allah may want one thing today and tomorrow the very opposite. As Leibnitz would say, Recht ist nicht Recht weil Gott es gewollt hat sondern weil Gott gerecht ist: Right is not right because God wills it but because God is right.

IV

There is a good Scriptural basis for natural law. It would be worthwhile for someone to make a study of natural law in Scripture. The locus classicus of course is found in Romans 2:14 and 15: “For when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves: in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them.”

The law of nature is as immutable and as inexorable as Scripture is infallible. Man’s interpretation of that law is fallible just as is his interpretation of Scripture. Orthodox theologians have exhausted the superlatives of the dictionary to tell us how clear the revelation of God in nature is. The Bible itself tells us that the invisible things of God are clearly seen. If Gentiles and unbelievers observe the dictates of the law of nature, how much more should we as Christians pay heed to it. We have a clearer revelation of the law of God in Scripture, but that does not make natural law superfluous to us. Just as the Bible is not a text-book on science, so it is not a textbook on jurisprudence. We should be thankful that God has given us so many windows instead of one through which the human mind may be enlightened. And God has not given all the light to the Christians or Calvinists. Do not let us shut the windows and shut off the light which a gracious God gives us. We need it all. We often feel like the Boanerges. We believe in such things as common grace and general revelation and natural law, but if I may use that expression with profound sincerity, some find it so difficult to handle them that they almost seem to be sorry that the Lord ever invented them. As Calvin says, even the pagans thought more kindly of their gods than that.

Remember the terrible religious wars of the time of Grotius that were waged in the name of the ius divinum as found in Scripture. It prompted him to seek a broader basis for the ius gentium (law of nations), and he found it in the ius naturae. Grotius lets both Scripture and Nature speak in his works. And so we should do today. There are ever so many people, many jurists included, who do not believe in eternal principles. They are materialistic in their views. Everything is a matter of expediency. Let us point them to the eternal principles of the Decalogue and of natural law which are always timely. We know very well that when we disobey the physical laws of nature, particularly in regard to our body, we will suffer the bad consequences. So we believe that there are equally real and strong moral laws for every domain of life, including jurisprudence, economics, sociology, and politics that we cannot violate with impunity. It is our duty as Christians to give leadership in these various fields. Then we must also find and interpret the precepts of natural law and bring them in harmony and balance with Scripture. “This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith.” But if we do it for the sake of God and suffering humanity, it becomes a pleasure and a privilege.

I hope that some of our pre-law and law students and jurists may have been stimulated to contribute more. We hear so little from them in regard to the philosophy and metaphysics of law. Cease to be overly modest. We hope that at least some of our readers have been made to think of the absolute necessity of a Christian University of Calvinistic persuasion. It seems that only then will we be able to tackle this problem energetically. In the meanwhile it would be well for our library at Calvin to gather all the books available on the subject of natural law as the Natural Law Institute at Notre Dame is doing now.

We also trust that no one will accuse us of being out of step with our Reformed persuasion as has been done in the past. We firmly believe that we are in step even though we may be perhaps a few steps ahead.
FROM SOUTH AFRICA

The University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. June 30, 1952.

The Editor,
THE CALVIN FORUM.

Dear Dr. De Boer,

In my previous letter of January 16, I undertook to tell you something about our difficulties over here in regard to the medium of school instruction. At the present moment this is a rather urgent matter. In the Transvaal Province a new Education Ordinance is in the making; in the Cape Province an important report on a piece of research on the medium of instruction has been published. In the Province of Natal there is some doubt as to the future of Afrikaans as an official language in South Africa. All is plain sailing in the remaining province, viz., the Province of the Orange Free State.

The easiest place to start this letter is Natal. Natal is by far the most representative English province: English speaking Europeans form the great majority. Naturally English occupies the first place in the educational system, although due regard is given to the teaching of our second official language, viz., Afrikaans. In the Natal schools the parents have the right to choose the medium of instruction for their child. Consequently, English is the main medium in Natal. There are even many Afrikaans-speaking parents selecting English as a medium with a view to better bilingualism and partly as a result of their pro-English politics. In the Orange Free State, Afrikaans again is predominant, although special attention is given to English as a subject of instruction. In Natal schools the second language was to be speeded up. In the Province of Transvaal there is some doubt as to the future of Afrikaans as an official language in South Africa. All is plain sailing in the remaining province, viz., the Province of the Orange Free State.

On the official introduction of double medium instruction, the Cape Education Department set up a careful school experiment. For more than six years double medium instruction was introduced into a number of selected schools as an experiment involving the use of the pupils' second language as a medium of instruction. The report of the committee of investigation has just been issued by the Department of Public Education of the Cape of Good Hope. The findings are given under two headings: a) the Home Language and b) the Second Language and Content subjects.

It was found that the use of the second language as a medium of instruction had no effect, either beneficial or detrimental, on the pupils' knowledge of their home language. There is definite evidence that under the conditions of the experiment an advantage tends to accrue to the dual medium class in respect of the second language, and that the content subject suffered as a result of the use of the second language as a medium of instruction in those subjects. Although the second language does improve slightly by using it as a medium of instruction, there is no doubt that this is gained at the expense of the content subjects.

The conclusion we can draw from these extensive and carefully conducted experiments is just this: a) it is better to teach content subjects through the medium of the home language and b) to improve the standard of the second language it is better to concentrate on teaching the language itself and fairly useless to think that its standard will improve by using it as a medium of instruction in the content subjects. The Cape Province decided to solve the medium question on educational lines. Its experiments give us a clear and unequivocable decision.

The Province of Transvaal was not so fortunate. In 1945 its Administration—then under control of the United Party of the late General Smuts—decided to introduce dual medium without any experimental investigation beforehand. Dual medium was made a point of party politics. It was decided that dual medium should be introduced into all schools, public and private, gradually. In the elementary school for the first seven school years, the home language was to be the medium, while instruction in the second language was to be speeded up. In the secondary school, the next five school years, the second medium was to be gradually introduced until by 1951, the home and the second language were to be employed equally as media: half the school subjects in the home and the other half in the second language. Reaction against this dual medium policy...
set in immediately. By 1948 it was so violent that the United Party lost its majority in the Provincial Council. The new National Party Administration immediately cancelled the compulsory dual medium. In the new Draft of an Education Ordinance for the Transvaal (1952) the National Party Administration proposes to make mother tongue medium compulsory in all public schools for the first ten school years, except of course, for the instruction in the second language itself. Private schools will be allowed to use the medium of their choice.

Language policy in South Africa is closely and most intimately associated with national policy. Neither Afrikaans-speaking nor English-speaking South Africans will allow any discrimination against their particular language and, I may add, against the language of the other section.

Yours truly,
J. Chr. Coetzee

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia 18, Pa.
August 12, 1952.

Dr. Cecil De Boer,
THE CALVIN FORUM.

Dear Dr. De Boer,

It is a pleasure to send you a report of the nineteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which was held in Denver, Colorado, July 10-15, 1952. In addition to the regular business of the church one action was taken which may be of special interest: that is, the breaking off of the church's connection with the International Council of Christian Churches.

Before going into the matter of the I.C.C.C. let me mention a few other aspects of the Assembly. The Rev. Calvin Knox Cummings of Pittsburgh was chosen moderator, and served with exceptional skill. The official delegate of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, the Rev. M. Ouwinga, was heard with warm appreciation and seated as a corresponding member. Many commissioners enjoyed the privilege of worship at the Christian Reformed churches of Denver on the Sabbath, July 13. A communication from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, proposing the establishment of close fraternal relations with our church, was answered with approval. Committees reported progress on suggested revisions to our Form of Government and on the preparation of a new hymnal. A pension plan for ministers was set up. The appeal of a licentiate whose license had been recalled by the Presbytery of Philadelphia was heard and the case referred back to that presbytery in order that further documentation might be supplied to the next Assembly.

Beyond the business sessions there was opportunity to enjoy the wonders of Colorado. Members of the Park Hill Church of Denver under the leadership of the Rev. W. Benson Male made generous provision for the entertainment of the commission-ers, even arranging a memorable expedition into the Rockies, with a motor trip to the top of Mt. Evans (14,000 ft.).

Back to the decision to leave the International Council lies a debate of three years. It was in 1949 that the Assembly formed a tentative relationship with the Council, although formally dissenting, at the same time, from the preamble and doctrinal statement of the Council's constitution. A "committee on ecumenicity" labored during the next year and at the 1950 Assembly presented a report dealing with the principles that should govern the participation of a Reformed or Presbyterian church in a "council of churches." Particularly, the report held: "It must . . . be emphasized that cooperation between churches may never permit of compromise of the specific doctrine and practice to which a church stands committed. For no church in the interest of cooperation may set aside or compromise its own doctrinal and governmental position without denying its right to separate existence as a denomination. In order to maintain faithfully its commitment to what the Scriptures teach concerning faith and practice, it follows that a church may cooperate in the performance of the specific functions of the Church only with denominations of like purity of faith and practice. In the case of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church this would mean, for example, that cooperation in worship and evangelization would be permissible only with denominations which are specifically committed to the Reformed faith and life and are similarly faithful in maintaining discipline in accordance with this commitment." The report went on to say that since the I.C.C.C. contains non-Reformed as well as Reformed bodies, and does not profess to be Reformed, that Council ought not to engage in evangelism or in the specific functions of the Church, but only in other "circumstances or incidentals essential to the discharge of these functions in the world." But the constitution of the Council seemed to commit the Council to the specific functions of the Church. The preamble of the constitution established the Council as a "world-wide agency, for fellowship and co-operation on the part of Bible-believing churches for the proclamation and defense of the Gospel, for the maintenance of a testimony pure, steadfast and world-wide to those great facts and revealed truths of historic Christianity and especially to the great doctrines of the Protestant Reformation"; and also, "as an agency, without compromise or evasion, unre­servedly dedicated as a witness to 'the faith once for all delivered unto the saints.'" Such testimony would presumably be carried out on the basis of the doctrinal statement of the constitution, which is a "common denominator" platform designed to be neither specifically Arminian nor specifically Calvinist. Moreover since it was required that in order to become members in the Council, churches should "by official action, approve and accept the preamble
and the doctrinal statement of the Constitution,” it appeared that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church would be asked to give official testimony to that which was contrary to its own standards as a Reformed church.

Accordingly the Assembly of 1950 adopted, for recommendation to the I.C.C.C., a series of proposed amendments to the Council’s constitution. These amendments consisted of a whole new preamble and of other extensive changes, but their principal thrust was to forbid the Council to “perform the specific functions of the Church.”

Later in 1950 the second plenary congress of the I.C.C.C. met in Geneva. The amendments proposed by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church were considered by the Council’s executive committee but were rejected, except for a few of small consequence. A motion from the floor of the congress, asking that serious consideration be given once more to these amendments, was almost unanimously defeated after a debate turning on the issue whether the Council, as composed of Arminian and Calvinist bodies, should engage in evangelism.

The 1951 Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, after the rejection of its proposed amendments, might well have been expected to sever its connection with the Council. Instead, after a debate in which the issues apparently did not become concrete, a vote was taken at a time when many delegates were absent, and the close decision was in favor of full membership in the Council. Shortly afterwards a protest against this action was read, and was signed by more delegates than had voted for the action.

With the history of this three years’ discussion behind them, the commissioners to the 1952 Assembly did not take long to make up their minds. A motion to terminate the church’s membership in the Council was passed by a large majority. The issues, as developed in a debate of several hours, were clearly drawn. Opponents of the Council held the issue to be doctrinal: a Reformed church must be profoundly concerned with its objective testimony to the truth; it must define the gospel in terms of particular, efficacious grace; therefore it cannot make objective testimony, at the same time, to a “common evangelical” position—to a position supposedly neither Arminian or Calvinist—as required of members in the Council. The advantages of the Council, such as its opposition to Modernism and the opportunity which it provides for Christian fellowship, can never justify the altering or obscuring of the church’s witness to the Scriptural system of truth. To this the advocates of the Council replied, accepting the issue as stated but taking the opposite view, that a Reformed church can testify to a “broader” position and yet remain Reformed in its testimony, without compromise to its objective witness. Beyond this central issue of the official doctrinal testimony of the church, there was discussion whether actual evangelization is carried on by the Council. The question was raised as to the effect of the withdrawal of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church upon other Reformed churches which are either members of the Council or which contemplate membership, especially those European bodies which may not be aware of the nature of that American fundamentalism which is the core of the I.C.C.C. One minister who in 1949 had favored participation in the Council said that while he had once hoped that we could exert a Reformed influence upon the Council it was now clear that we could not do so.

In the judgment of your correspondent, the decision to leave the International Council means that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has resolved once more to look to its responsibility in its objective witness to the integrity of the Scriptural system of truth. The church’s witness to the Reformed doctrines of the Church and of sovereign grace is to be maintained not only in the church’s testimony through its own agencies, but also in that testimony which it must make in order to participate in other associations.

Sincerely yours,

ARTHUR W. KUSCHEK, JR.

REACTION TO CHRISTIAN FILM ACTION

Dr. Cecil De Boer,
THE CALVIN FORUM,
April 7, 1952.

Dear Dr. De Boer,

The apostle Paul uses his childhood understanding to illustrate the imperfect knowledge we have here below. “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

In the January issue of the Calvin Forum the Rev. Hendrik J. Spier writes about the aims of the Christian Film Action as it is developing in the Netherlands.

He states there are two viewpoints in regard to filmed pictures. One is to condemn the film industry because it is “wholly worldly, threatening faith and morality” and therefore to shun it altogether. The other is to look at it as a gift of God and to improve it as much as possible in order that it might do some good. And not being content with sifting what is considered good from the bad and showing only the good, the Christian Film Action is aiming at producing its own pictures in order to counteract the worldly ones.

He realizes that this is almost a hopeless task. But taking courage from other small beginnings, like the founding of the Free University at Amsterdam, he would proceed. He states that “Christian life as it is going on in this world, should be filmed and presented with all its varieties and strains, with its sadness and gladness, with its struggles and pain, with its victory and everlasting joy.” (Italics mine.) And he believes that by these performances—he
calls them "an indirect way"—the pictures can bear witness to the honor of Jesus Christ, and on the screen shall shine the glory of God of His greatness of mercy and justice, to lighten a darkened world."

There is still another view of Film Action which the Rev. Spier has not mentioned but which nevertheless exists and has a right to be heard because it differs radically from both views mentioned by the author. This view I have indicated by the heading of this article: *When I Was a Child.*

There are points of agreement which can be mentioned. All the comparatively new inventions such as moving pictures, radio, and television are legitimate in their proper use. Man has a right to harness nature and use it in a just way. But not all new inventions are equally useful. Nor can the use of some of them be defined as marks of progress. Also there is agreement in regard to the use that the world makes of the production of films, the alluring ones and the lawless ones. They stand unequivocally condemned.

What I do condemn in film production is that it is not at all a step forward in the development of the life of man, but definitely a step backward. It is a return to the "childish things" which we should have put away. When I was a child I went to school and once in a great while earned a "prent" of the teacher because of some special good work in class. Those "prenten," a sheet with several pictures on it were appreciated and neatly put away. Then we also had our playthings, our hobby horses, and other toys—all very good for children. But "when I became a man" I forgot those childish things and had real horses to subdue and work with and was engaged in actual life in its various forms. At the present writing the horses are only a memory, for now we have our cars and tractors, not to mention planes. They are all very useful and are a real forward step in power and transportation. For entertainment the car can be used to see the wonderful works of God in nature and see them as first hand. You can feel and touch them for they are real.

But the moving picture is a retroactive step, a going back to childhood times, unworthy of any mature person. That the whole world clamors for the pictures is no proof whatsoever of their value. It merely proves the fickleness and hollowness of present day human life. In the days of Ahab there were only seven thousand left that did not serve Baal, though Baal was not and is not a god. The god of the present day generation is the screen and its offspring, television. This view condemns not only the worldly films, it condemns the whole film industry as unworthy of being used and patronized in a Christian country.

The Rev. Spier would produce good pictures to offset and, if possible, to overcome the bad pictures. He asks: "What is a Christian Film?" He would exempt and bar those reproducing Sacred History. But though he does not define any, he would produce such performances of real Christian life as would have many good effects. On this point I differ with him entirely. One point of agreement only can I find and that is the barring of filming Sacred History. But I would bar ever so much more. Not only Sacred History, but any part of religious life; any incidents of an intensely serious nature; tragedy of any kind should all be barred. None of that can be reproduced and acted over and shown without profaning it and making it a sham. And none of that would ever produce any good effective results to the audience, for none of it is real; it is only a performance.

The only things that can be shown on a film are the episodes of lighter vein, the humorous and the comical, if you can keep out silliness, and then it is useful only for entertainment, if done sparingly.

Also if you can make pictures of real life as it is being lived (without being acted) and then only the normally good side of life and not the sordid, such pictures have little educational value, for they would be real representations without being acted.

But the moral or spiritual good to be derived from Film Action is zero. The Spirit of God cannot be seen, neither can the things of the Spirit be reproduced and shown. That is an offense to God and man.

One may observe the fruits of the Spirit in the Christian life of our fellowmen. But the devil, the arch imitator, would manufacture them and throw them on the screen pretending them to be real. No wonder Paul commanded the unholy spirit in Philippi to shut up. We do not need the devil's imitations for the real thing. Our lives should be pictures of Christ, able to be read by all men.

If you cannot persuade man by the testimony of your word and example, you will never influence any by a cheap imitation of the same, no matter how gaudy the colors are that you use.

Peter L. Van Dyken
Book Reviews

ATTACK ON ATHEISM


The author of this small volume is head of the Bible Department at Harding College, Searcy, Arkansas, where he had his undergraduate training in English and History. He had further work in English at Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee, and wrote his M.A. thesis on The Kingdom of Heaven in the Works of H. G. Wells (1938). He also received a Ph.D. in History and Philosophy of Education from the University of California (1946).

As a relatively young professor Bales has produced no fewer than six books. These include one book on the Kingdom and the other, The Existence of God. Atheism’s Faith and Fruits is the second in a series of volumes on Christian Evidence, of which the first is The Roots of Unbelief. A third one will deal with the fruits of faith in Christ.

In the Introduction the author informs the readers that “little effort has been made in this volume to refute unbelief by a direct attack on it in the sense of a detailed examination of all of its arguments. In other volumes it is our intention so to do” (p. 8). It rather endeavors to examine atheism from the standpoint of its own faith and fruits. In his earlier volume, The Existence of God, Bales has defended the traditional arguments for theism. Now paving the way for Christian Evidence proper he attempts to demonstrate that the beliefs of atheism (Ch. II) “call on one’s beliefs without sufficient evidence in some cases, and contrary to the evidence in other cases” (p. 24). Bales enumerates twelve articles of faith, affirmed by the theists, which may be subsumed under the categories of Materialism, Determinism, and Evolutionism.

Bales’ own conviction is: “Natural science cannot establish the non-existence of God, the Spiritual Being, since the very instruments of natural science are, by their very nature, unable to deal with the mental and spiritual world . . . . We have to look beyond these instruments to our own human experience in order to know the reality of life, faith, hope, love, ideals, consciousness, and thought” (p. 25). Human experience really then determines the existence or non-existence of God. His defense for the resurrection of Christ is also typical of his whole approach. “The atheist who holds that life sprang from non-life can little afford to think that his reason is insulted by the Christian’s faith that Christ came forth from the tomb. Which would be the most miraculous: for life to spring from non-life or for life to continue apart from the body or to be reunited to the body?” (p. 32).

Using Jesus’ saying in Matthew 7:20 that “by their fruits ye shall know them!” Bales points out three fruits of atheism, namely, its fruits of utter pessimism (Ch. IV), its wreck of morality (Ch. V), and its degrading superstitions (Ch. VI). From his knowledge of literature and history Bales gathers together the pessimistic utterances of more than twenty atheistic writers, poets, scientists, and philosophers for his readers to prove their utter pessimism. These include Swinburne, James Thomson, Hume, Diderot, Shelley, Byron, Wells, Buchner, Ingersoll, Voltaire, Strauss, Schopenhauer, Darwin, Bertrand Russell, and Woolsey Teller.

Throughout the book Bales pays much attention to the last two men. Woolsey Teller is one of the three founders of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism. Bales has held several discussions with Teller, including a public debate in 1947, in Searcy, Arkansas. Teller applies Darwinism in the matter of marriage in advocating a sort of Super-man, by “artificial selection” and “breeding mankind from the top” (p. 119). Opposing this view Bales insists: “I have hope for all men. More for some than for others, but at least some hope for all. For I know that potentially they are children of God, i.e., that they can become noble, spiritual sons of God and live up to their high possibilities” (p. 121). There is a tinge of a sort of universalism here. This is more obvious in his statement about the work of Christ. “The Christian sees men as men and women for whom Jesus Christ died, and as subjects of redemption” (p. 122).

Connected with the idea of man is his idea of the freedom of the will which is really Bales’ basic motif against the determinism of the materialistic atheists. And he promises: “In other books, however, we plan to show that man is not a mere mechanism, that here is indeed freedom of will” (p. 131). His argument for immortality is based on the idea of “an antecedent probability.” “If the Christian is wrong his life on earth has still been meaningful and elevated by hope; furthermore he will never know that he was wrong. If the unbeliever is wrong he has robbed himself of the full meaning which this life could have held for him; and he will always know that he was wrong” (p. 108). Reformed readers will readily notice the weakness of this sort of argument, let alone the non-scriptural idea of free will.

The basic weakness of such a methodology in atheism and Christian Evidence is seen from Bales’ use of the Bible. He complains that in debating with the atheist the latter “would not stay with his proposition but spent a portion of his time attacking the Bible. And yet, the proposition itself was concerned with evolution and not with the Bible” (p. 22). In fact the theist knows that unless he attacks the Bible, with its presuppositions implications, he cannot establish any non-biblical “truth” at all, regardless of evolution or any other subject. There is only one kind of theism and that is the theism of the Bible, the ontological Trinity. Any knowledge apart from the Bible, after the fall, is only the faith and fruits of atheism.

Though we can not approve the method and result of this book from a Reformed point of view, we appreciate the author’s effort in gathering some valuable material in this volume. Atheism is by no means confined to eighteenth and nineteenth century materialists and rationalists. The fact that Life magazine, (May 26, 1952) should honor an atheist, Bertrand Russell, with an editorial for his eightieth birthday is but only one of the signs of the intellectual atmosphere in which we are living.

Paul Szto
GOOD SERMONS AND SOME OF THE PREREQUISITES


THROUGH the past years the name of Clarence Edward Macartney has become synonymous with the art of preaching in America. His long occupancy of the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, his numerous published sermons, and the several books on homiletics and sermon illustrations have firmly established his reputation as a dean of contemporary American preachers. His popularity sweeps across denominational lines as well as the various shades of theological thinking.

As on past occasions, the author makes use of a series of sermons around a central theme for his latest book. The cardinal doctrines of the Trinity, the fall of man, the Person and Work of Christ, and eschatology are expounded in fifteen sermons. He has chosen catchy and pointed Biblical verses or portions as his text but only to introduce the subject. The sermons are synthetical, rather than exegetical, and depend upon the illustrations to convey the main points.

It is commendable that the Reverend Macartney preaches doctrinal sermons, but it is unfortunate that he uses a synthetic method of sermon construction. In such a presentation, the reader is always approaching rather than coming to a serious and direct grip with the doctrine itself. There appears to be a gap between the doctrine and its source, instead of the doctrine being coterminous with the Word itself. There is a tremendous need for a return to interesting exegetical sermons to instruct congregations in what is actually contained in the Word of God. They must be helped to study and understand Scriptures as the true source of not only life but also of doctrine, and they must understand that life is impossible without doctrine.

It is true that exegetical sermons are more difficult to preach and for congregations to follow; but they will bring the milk-fed Christian to a meat eating diet. To pad a sermon with numerous illustrations does make it interesting, but accomplishes little in teaching if it is at the expense of doctrinal content. Dr. Macartney unfortunately has not solved the question: “Can doctrinal sermons be interesting?”—by his prolific use of illustrations.

The use of illustrations have a definite place in the construction of sermons; in fact the trouble with most sermons is a serious deficiency of illustrations both in quality and quantity. But to turn to the other extreme and construct sermons entirely on illustrations does not help congregations to learn doctrine. So often the illustration is remembered rather than the material to be illustrated.

Sermons constructed mostly of illustrations are bound to be popular in this pleasure-loving generation when serious thinking is ignored. Today the sermon is not for the nourishment of the soul, but viewed as the personal product of the minister with pleasurable qualities for the ear and mind. A sermon is “nice” if the congregation has not had to think and yet was entertained. This book has not set the pace for the correction of a serious cultural deficiency so evident in preacher and congregation alike.

Theologically, there is little departure from the fundamentalist approach to doctrine. Though Dr. Macartney is a representative of a Presbyterian church, there is no distinctive Reformed flavor to this book. He denies limited atonement, a cardinal point of the Reformed faith, and ignores the other distinctive Reformed doctrines which make the Gospel a gospel of Grace. In his sermon on “God the Father” he uses the traditional theistic proofs to establish the doctrine of God. It is true that nature displays the works of the Creator, but it is also true that the mind of the natural man has been darkened by sin so that he no longer interprets the revelation aright. The “great Being” or “Reason” of the natural man is certainly not the Christian God, but a figment of the mind, so that it is a poor foundation for the doctrine of God.

These sermons are interesting and helpful for the new convert, but much is needed to change the diet from milk to meat. Unless this change comes to American doctrinal preaching, the fast-fading number of lay theologians will be depleted and the church left even weaker.

R. J. SUTTON

THEOLOGY IN TRANSLATION


THIS volume is a translation of Geloof en Heiliging, one of the series of 19 monographs on the entire field of dogmatics, and is an important contribution to Reformed theology.

In this volume the author deals with the relation of faith to the process of sanctification. Present-day enemies of the Reformed faith such as Perfectionism, Romanism, and Barthianism are allowed to present their views, and after having done full justice to these opponents the author exposes the weaknesses of their position and presents the Reformed teaching in a fresh and vital fashion.

These studies are not written for other theologians only, for there is a remarkable blending of the scholarly with the devotional, of the scientific with the popular. The pointed and pertinent approach inspires and edifies as well as instructs. Scripture references abound and the reader is rewarded with many new insights into Scriptural texts and pericopes. Throughout the author manifests tremendous historical learning.

The chapter on Sanctification and Humility offers the proper answer to the Barthian teaching that sanctification as well as justification is altogether the work of God. In his valuable chapter on The Imitation of Christ the author traces the distortions of and controversies concerning the imitation of Christ from Thomas a Kempis to Albert Schweitzer in order to show that all of these have either overemphasized the Atonement or the Imitation. He then points out that “the Atonement and the imitation of Christ are related as a spring to a well and this true imitation of Christ may and must be a leitmotiv in the preaching of the church: preaching based on the premise that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself (2 Cor. 5:19)” (p. 159).

The last chapter, Sanctification and Law, deals with the perennial problems of Christian freedom, and Law and Gospel. The whole volume glows with passion for the truth.

To translate a book and do it well is not an easy task. To combine accuracy of translation with idiomatic English is an exacting responsibility. The translator has an easy-flowing and very readable style. In general it may be said that Mr. Vriend has caught the meaning and spirit of the author and reproduces these in elegant English. However,
at times the translation is so free that it hardly does justice to the original.

Your reviewer noticed one sentence that does not reproduce the meaning of the original at all. On page 94 we read, "For this reason, too, Reformed theology has always been at sixes and sevens with Amyraldianism." To be at sixes and sevens means to be in confusion or to be at one's wits end. In the Dutch we read, "On deze reden is de Gereformeerde dogmatiek voortdurend in conflict geweest met het Amyraldisme," and the simple "in conflict with" instead of "at sixes and sevens" gives us the meaning of the author. Another grave error has crept into the volume. On page 27 we read, "The 'sola-fide' of justification made it possible, once for all, to regard justification and sanctification as almost identical acts of God." In the original we read, "maakte het eens voor altijcl onmogelijk," which is the very opposite of "made possible." Then, on page 88 we find the word "umbiblical," which seems to be an error missed by the proofreader. All in all, however, we have here a good translation.

Indices of texts, subject matter, and authors would greatly increase the value of this important book. The publisher deserves praise for presenting this important series to the American public.

J. F. SCHUURMANN
Holland, Mich.

"ART IS LONG AND TIME IS FLEETING"


As I take up the pleasant task of reviewing this latest literary effort of Calvin students, I come to it fresh from reading Perry Miller's splendid anthology entitled The Transcendentalists. These New England writers were bold and strong. Each one felt deeply that he was part of a crusade to give American democracy a new religious faith. Convinced that all nature was Divine, these writers did not hesitate to strike down to the religious and metaphysical foundations of every phase of human life. Every selection in Miller's anthology establishes religious preconceptions: The primary aim in education, according to Alcott, was not to study external nature but to assist a soul to study its own nature. The literary artist of the movement, Jones Very, pointed out that we admire Shakespeare but cannot praise him. "God's will was not his motive—so there is no warning for other men." Transcendentalist poets often tried to turn their epistemology into poetry. John Sullivan Dwight declared that the harmony of music symbolizes the sacred relationship of each to all. "It is God's alphabet, and not man's; suited for harmony of human passions and affections; ... a foretaste of the harmony of heaven." Others in the group offered a religious and a philosophical foundation for democracy.

My point is: if the religious motive at the very heart of Transcendentalism enabled it to make a lasting impression upon American society, how much more should not we Calvinists, who know we possess the epitome of all the interpretations of Sacred Truth, reveal the religious and metaphysical foundations of our thought in all our literary efforts. The next four paragraphs evaluate selections that illustrate this approach very well.

In his scholarly contribution Mr. Wolterstorff recognizes that Matthew Arnold's and the modern educator's definition of religion is humanistic; it lacks height because it denies the need for revelation and faith. This cogent and well-written article is an example of Calvinistic criticism at its best and deserves its first place and a wider circulation.

The Spiritual content that Mr. Rubingh teasingly hides away in his "Motif for Viola" is refreshing. In this allegory a viola maker and his wife stand for the spiritual and the Spiritual respectively. Adrian represents the tragedy of seeking to know God only through Art. Sonia knows that Adrian's dead heart needs the touch of the master "Musician's" hand before he can experience the "Life" that he is seeking.

Van Staalduinen's "Kafkaesque" nightmare entitled "Pathetique" is a clever bit. He prepares us gradually for unreality. The path, not a road, leads to the dump, not the dump; there are piles of garbage, not piles of junk. Then we see people piled up on the dumps and others with their heads sticking through the sewage of the river. "Pathetique" is the cry of the anguish of a soul deep in the "dumps" of sin and God's answer to this cry. It is the most powerful and striking piece in this issue.

In spite of the symbolism effectively employed by Kent Prell in his poem, "To An Adolescent," to suggest even more Calvinistic truths than are in "Pathetique," the poem remains a rather prosaic and does not have the emotional power of the latter. After all, knowing oneself for what one really is is a heart-rending experience!

Because the selections reviewed thus far are saturated with Calvinistic preconceptions, they are contributions to Calvinistic literature. The remaining selections are not, although some of these have Christian touches, to be sure. This does not mean that all the entries except the above four are to be condemned. But why not work on things that are more positive instead of on stuff that students at other colleges do as well.

Student Pantinga uses Emerson's "Things are in the Saddle" as a text for his indictment of the materialism in higher education. About one-tenth of the article is an attempt to define the spiritual aspect that he laments is absent. But he can't tell what it is. Calvin College knows. Nintehnts of Emerson will tell you too.

A modern humanist would find little wrong with Edgar Boeve's able definition of the creative impulse. But would not the intuition of a Christian artist include something more than training, perception, technique and purpose?

There is more poetry in the prose of Cal Seerveld's recapturing of Lord Byron's exciting dash through life than in all the poems of this number, and there is genuine pity for this perturbed spirit who could find no rest. But isn't there a bit too much admiration for that handsome rake?

Mr. Seerveld's song has the dignified simplicity and content of a negro spiritual, but the triteness of his title, "A Sad Song," is unfortunate.

Mr. Van Halsema packs an amazing amount of intellectual content into four short poems; they are critical religious biographies of four French thinkers. Miss Boeve, in our lone woman contributor, packs more imagery into the martial trochees and dactyls of her poem, "The State of the Nation," than the other poets do.

The only purely humorous selection is a delightful parody of one of Shakespeare's lighter sonnets by Richard Mills.

Kent Prell's poem in praise of great English sonneeters would honor them more if he had used the sonnet verse-form, as Mills did.
But Prell's recollection of an Asiatic war experience has a touch of irony and pity that makes it a deserving prize winner. It ranks with much of the popular journalistic reporting of this type.

Jack Bolt's "Sonata" is a somewhat sentimental but very beautiful short story. It tells how the loss of a great love inspires a concert pianist to perform with greater depth and richness. Mr. Bolt's description of the varied musical moods that the artist creates is very well done.

In the final narrative Herman Turkstra suggests that a certain new article of haberdashery will sometimes do as much for the inner man as a new spring hat does for a woman.

This issue proves again that Calvin students can write. Its editors maintain a high literary standard.

Andrew Vander Zee
Orange City, Iowa

REAPEARANCE OF MACLEAR


In view of the appalling and at the same time revealing paucity in present times of orthodox and conservative works on Bible history, the republication of this eighty-six year old classic is significant. If the modern church is delinquent and non-productive, we have no other recourse than to draw upon and revivify the contributions of the past. Maclear belongs to the florescent, scholarly, orthodox movement of the Church of England in the nineteenth century and stands in the Westcott, Eadie, Ellicott and Lightfoot tradition. His work went through fourteen editions in the nineteenth century and ten editions in the early twentieth. In addition to its rock-rubbed conservatism and its warm thrub of spiritual vitality, it is characterized by erudition and sanity of interpretation. The author is a modest but competent recorder and interpreter of the historical material of the Word of God. The ample section devoted to Intertestamentary History and the interweaving of prophetic and epistolary literature enhances its usefulness. With respect to Pauline history beyond that recorded in the book of Acts, Maclear subscribes to the standard conjecture which dates back to the testimony of the Early Church to the effect that after his first imprisonment, Paul was released, visited previously established churches in Asia Minor and Europe, made his long-anticipated journey to Spain, and died a martyr in the reign of bloody Nero. This republication is valuable and in the format in which it appears is in marked contrast to the fine print and minute type of previous edition. It bids fair to be extremely useful.

John H. Bratt
Calvin College

LIBERALISM TODAY


URING a long teaching career Professor Berkhof has also been engaged as a popular lecturer upon theological themes. In this book six of these public lectures have been collected inasmuch as they deal predominantly with the evil of modern religious liberalism. The title page significantly begins with a verse of Scripture—"If the Foundations be Destroyed..." Modernism, consequently and correctly so, is set forth as a method, a temperament of the modern mind, which has shifted from the acceptance of an external, absolute authority found in the Bible to the subjective and shifting authority of the human consciousness.

Professor Berkhof discusses such interesting subjects and problems as "The Social Gospel," "Calvinism Versus Modernism," "The Missing Chain in Modern Liberal Theology," and "Liberalism Adrift." In each case the analysis is penetrating, the criticism is fair, the statement is crystal clear. As an example one may take the first chapter which deals with the Social Gospel. The author indicates its evolutionary and naturalistic basis, its pantheistic conception of God, and its lopsidedness in stressing the social organism to the neglect of individual salvation (Cf. Calhoun, The Cultural Concept of Christianity, reviewed in these columns in May, 1951). Secondly, the wholesome emphases of the social gospel are duly credited, e.g., its unselfishness, its concern for the world, and its practical Christianity. However, Professor Berkhof finds the Social Gospel to be fundamentally unsound and mischievous. "We should not be insensible to the internal corruption of the new Gospel" (p. 29). In the last lecture the author indicates his acquaintance with contemporary theological thought. He opines that though the old liberalism is virtually dead a new liberalism has taken its place in the form of the Crisis Theology of Barth and the Realism of Niebuhr. Although the necessity of revelation is recognized by these men, they do not desert the underlying assumption of all liberalism, viz., that the historical and scientific method is valid in theology as everywhere else. "Like the Barthians, the Christian realists also reject the idea of a special revelation of God completed in the distant past, embodied in Holy Writ, and now our objective possession. Revelation is contemporaneous, a movement in which God condescends to meet divine-human encounter, which has decisive significance for man, and in the light of which he must plan his life" (p. 155).

To conclude, this little volume is excellently bound, is conservatively colored, and unreservedly recommended. The proof-reading is excellent on the whole, but this reviewer cannot resist mentioning one irritating error. On page twenty-seven the word "expiating" is printed instead of "expatiating." My heartiest congratulations to the author in whom the words of the Psalmist are daily being fulfilled:

"They are planted in the house of Jehovah; They shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; They shall be full of sap and green: To show that Jehovah is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Ps. 92:13-15).

Henry R. Van Til
Calvin College