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Worldly Literature and Christian Truth: Concerning the Antithesis

"As a Lodge in a Garden of Cucumbers"

Our Distorted Conception of Education

Francis Bacon on Hindrances to Learning

Correspondence

Book Reviews

Index
The CALVIN FORUM

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Contents

Articles

Literature in a Christian College...J. G. Vanden Bosch 219
Witnessing to an Apostate Generation.............................. Richard R. De Ridder 223
Our Distorted Conception of Education...................................Neal Rensenbrink 227
Francis Bacon on Hindrances to Learning.........................Steve J. Van Der Weele 230

Correspondence

From Nigeria......................................................R. Recker 232
From Ceylon......................................................A. G. W. Foenander 233
The Evangelical Library....................Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Chairman 233

Book Reviews

A Master Republished..........................Jacob H. Bruinooge 235
A Christian Tragedy............................................C. Huissen 236
Experiment in Mercy....................................Helen Van Laar 237
Notable Criticism............................................J. G. Vanden Bosch 238
A Christian Novelist........................................Franklin Van Halsema 238
The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration.....................Cornelius Jaarsma 239

Index  Vol. XVIII, 1952 - 1953........................................... 240
Literature in a Christian College

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LITERATURE occupies a prominent place in the curriculum of any liberal arts college. There is good reason why this should be so. If, as it has been described rather freely, it preserves for us in artistic form the best that has been felt and thought, literature deserves to play a leading part in the educational process, especially when this process has reached the college stage. The ideal of Christian education is to produce the full-orbed man of God. Without orienting a student in what the race has achieved in the realm of literary art as well as in other areas of activity throughout the ages in obedience to the cultural mandate given to mankind at the dawn of history, this aim will scarcely be attained.

Consider some of the benefits accruing from a knowledge of literature. To begin with, literature provides entertainment of a high order. Not only does it relieve the strain to which the daily task subjects, not only does it banish care and worry, but it also is responsible for mental activities that give pleasure and issue in refinement. He who has developed a taste for the enjoyment of good poetry and prose is never at a loss what to do with his leisure moments and knows how to turn even his leisure into lasting good. But if literature brings delight, it also is a source of valuable information. Those who hold that beauty is its own excuse for being may contend that aesthetic delight is the sole aim of a literary work, but the great writers of all ages have also been thinkers and according to their own frank confession have aimed at giving expression to worthwhile ideas. Furthermore, there has gradually come into being a body of knowledge of a special kind, sui generis, which is distinctly cultural in value and which a person should know to be completely educated. To the facts and information constituting this body of knowledge constant reference is made in the books one reads. Culture, after all, is cumulative. There is, too, what has been called a commonalty of culture, to which access is secured only by means of reading the world’s masterpieces. All this being so, the affirmation that the study of literature has high disciplinary value can safely be made. Too often the reading of poetry or literary prose is regarded as being merely a pleasant diversion, but it is more than that: it is excellent mental exercise as well.

This, of course, is viewing literature at its best. Admittedly, if there is excellence to be observed, there is also degradation. Much of what modern authors offer the reading public sinks to the lowest levels of indecency; much of it is not art. It seems to be bent on glorifying sin and startling innovations. Not all the ideas that have been arrayed in the garb of poetry and prose can stand the scrutiny of the Christian reader. Selection, therefore, is imperative —selection according to the standards of the good, the true, and the beautiful.

It is at this point that marked differences arise. Reject all books that are not specifically Christian, say some, for literature is “either of the Spirit of Christ and the regenerated consciousness or of the spirit of the abyss.” Proper emphasis on the absolute spiritual antithesis demands this. Others swing to the opposite extreme, as does Matthew Arnold, English poet and critic, in regarding poetry to be “an ever surer and surer stay” in life, superior even to religion, or as still others do whose evaluation of the feeling of the beautiful is so appreciative that they make the aesthetic experience a substitute for the faith, hope, and love of religion. Poetry by them is placed either above the Bible or alongside it, and its high destiny is to serve as man’s best guide in life.

With neither of these positions can the Christian agree. He neither overvalues nor undervalues. There is literature not positively Christian that contains valuable truths, and there is literature that contains error and immorality. Neither total repudiation nor total affirmation will do. Just as books written by believers may contain error, so books written by unbelievers may contain truth or fragments of truth, and even instill respect for high morality.

II

Biblical teaching is on the side of him who so distinguishes. Man, created in the image of God, even in his fallen state has remnants of that image left in him. “Whoso sheddeth man’s body, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Genesis 9:6). Certainly, there is enough of that divine likeness left in him to make it possible to have respect for what is good and true and beautiful. Were this not so, the Greeks could not have produced the civilization that at its best is still the admiration of scholars and artists, the Romans could not have evolved their admirable system of laws based on the concept of justice, and decent and orderly living in state and society would be impossible. Did not Stephen in his address to the council speak with a measure of respect for the pagan culture of Egypt by which Moses had been educated for his life task?
Do not characters like Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and Darius serve as examples of pagans who at times gave utterance to fragments of truth?

Furthermore, God does not leave himself without witness to men, for there is a general revelation in nature and in history through which God speaks to them. The universe is meaningful because God made it the embodiment of ideas, which man, created in his likeness, is able to read and understand. The work of the Holy Spirit also needs consideration. He is the Spirit that operates not merely in the sphere of saving grace, but also in the sphere of the natural. It is the Holy Spirit who, brooding on the deep, transformed chaos into cosmos, and revealed himself as the divine agent of order and beauty; who endowed Aholiab and Bezaleel with the artistic skill to build the tabernacle; and who, as we read in Job, garnishes the heavens with beauty. Thus it has come about that God throughout the ages has raised men who were endowed with insights into the good, the true, and the beautiful, without which civilization could not have been what it was.

Against this thought background we can explain certain interesting quotations from pagan sources that we find in Scripture. In his address to the Athenians Paul quotes one of the heathen poets as saying, “For we are also his offspring,” and he does so to bring home the truth that God is both creator and sustainer of men and nations. The point here is that Paul quotes from a pagan author to clinch an idea. Had there been no grain of truth in the expression, he could not have done so. In his sublime discourse on the meaning of the resurrection Paul borrows from the Greek poet, Menander, the expression which by that time had probably become a pro­verb, “Evil communications corrupt good manners” to warn the Corinthian believers that it is dangerous to give ear to the contentions of those who deny the resurrection and that from listening to such denials there may flow reckless and sinful living because all evil is contagious. Writing to Titus, his “son after the common faith,” Paul adds this quotation from one of the Cretan prophets: “The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies” in corroboration of the charge that some in the Cretan church were guilty of teaching for the sake of dishonest gain things they ought not to teach. And Paul adds the significant comment that this witness is true.

Does not the thrust of the thought expressed so far lead inevitably to a denial of the doctrine of total depravity? By no means. If the natural man happens to be a poet, he is one not merely by virtue of the remnants of the image of God in him, but above all because the Holy Spirit qualifies him by a twofold activity. The Spirit checks the disintegration of these remnants in him and it enables him to use the powers inherent in these remnants, in connection with God’s revelation in nature and history, to enrich his fellowmen with his visions of truth and goodness artistically expressed. Without this qualifying operation of the Spirit and general revelation he could not be a poet.

III

A consideration of the place of culture in the plan of God also sheds some light on our subject. Since literature is an integral part of the cultural process, in a sense even the bloom and the fragrance of it, such consideration is pertinent. According to some, all cultural activity outside the church has no value except to reveal the folly and the futility of the cultural strivings of sinful man. What sinful man produces, no matter how important it may seem, is mere chaff, fit only to be burned. So gloomy a picture is hardly warranted by Scriptural teaching. The cultural command which man received from his Maker at the very beginning of history leads us to expect a brighter consummation of all things. The task of populating the earth and of subduing nature was assigned not after, but before the fall, to mankind therefore as a whole, not solely to the elect. Sin did not absolve mankind from the performance of this task, but made it more difficult. What history shows is that, whether consciously or unconsciously, both believers and unbelievers have been laboring at this task and the sum total of man’s cultural contributions will somehow be freed from all sin and pollution that may cleave to them and will be garnered in the new Jerusalem. “And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it” (Rev. 21:26).

In keeping with this Scriptural position was the attitude of the Christian church in its early period. Writes Dr. Herman Bavinck:

However much it might be on its guard against paganism, it never despised or condemned natural life as in itself sinful. Marriage and family, secular calling and military estate, the swearing of an oath and the waging of war, government and state, science and art and philosophy—all these were recognized from the beginning as divine institutions and as divine gifts. Hence theology began to form relations with philosophy; the art of painting, as practiced in the catacombs, attached itself to the symbols and figures of antiquity; architecture shaped the churches after pagan models; music availed itself of the tunes which Greco-Roman art had produced. On every hand a strong effort is perceptible to bring the new religion into touch with all existing elements of culture. (Calvin and the Reformation, p. 102.)

Apropos of our subject Calvin has this to say in his Institutes:

So oft, therefore, as we light upon profane authors, let us be put in mind by that marvelous light of truth that shineth in them, that the wit of man, howsoever it be perverted and fallen from the first integrity, is yet still clothed and garnished with excellent gifts of God. If we consider that the Spirit of God is the only foundation of truth, we will never refuse or despise the truth itself where­soever it shall appear, except we dishonorably use the Spirit of God.

Until well into modern times such literature as was studied in colleges was that of Greece and Rome. The study of classical languages and their literatures constituted the backbone of any curriculum. Of
contamination with the spirit of paganism there does not seem to have been much fear, though the excesses of the Renaissance in Italy might have inspired it. Even today churches believing strongly in an educated ministry insist on prescribing a liberal course of study. The introduction of literature written in the vernacular does not in any way alter the nature of the problem, for such objections as maybe raised against the study of the classical literatures can with equal force and justification be raised against much of modern writing.

IV

If literature is one of the activities involved in the cultural process, it follows that it is a mirror of the life of a people. It does not stop with reflecting the important aspects of civilization; often it reflects such intimate experiences and events as escape the notice of the daily chronicler and the historian. The motives, the agonizings, the rejoicings of sensitive souls; the struggle for existence, religious beliefs, the persistent conflict between good and evil, dreams and visions of the good life—such is the stuff of which prose and poetry is made. The product of the creative imagination and of “the poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling,” literary effusions have been given “a local habitation and a name,” and charm as well as enlighten, and enlighten as well as charm. For insight, therefore, into the genius of a nation one cannot afford not to familiarize oneself with a nation’s literary offerings.

Thus, for example, American literature is an index of American culture. For an understanding of the soul of America, insight into the spirit of American poetry and prose is essential. The Mathers in their writings shed valuable light on colonial Puritanism; Franklin is an exponent of eighteen century rationalism; the Declaration of Independence reveals the influence of the natural rights theory; Cooper brilliantly portrays the frontier which has left an indelible stamp on American life; Emerson in his Transcendentalism illustrates the swing away from Christianity with its faith in objective standards towards pantheism and subjectivity; Thoreau is the apostle of the back to nature movement; Harriet Beecher Stowe interprets the moral idealism that lived in the hearts of nineteenth century Americans; Mark Twain shows how a mechanical view of the universe leads to a fatalistic pessimism; Carl Sandburg’s poetry breaths Socialism; Jack London is a popularizer of Darwin’s doctrine of the survival of the fittest. With fine intuitive insight Henry Van Dyke styled his interpretation of American culture to the French The Spirit of America, and A. H. Quinn viewed his analysis of the meaning of American literature as being the key to The Soul of America.

V

One of the highest satisfactions of teaching literature, especially on the college level, is the abundance of opportunity it affords for the study of ideas, or philosophies of life, from a Christian point of view. Though it may belong primarily to the domain of the beautiful, literature always has content, has something to say about God, man, and nature; it touches life at many points. Since life is so constituted that it is religiously conditioned, religion is basic in all that man does, not least so in all that he thinks. Hence, for a proper understanding of an author’s view of life, or leading ideas, the teacher is constrained to explain what the author’s religious convictions are. He may have occasion to point out what influence Scripture has had on the subject-matter, and even on the imagery and style, of the work. Tennyson’s Flower in the Crannied Wall, a poem of only six lines, cannot be fully understood unless one knows that the poet cherished pantheistic notions about the nature of the relation between God and the world as his The Higher Pantheism unmistakably reveals. Only in a world conceived pantheistically in which lines of demarcation are blurred can one speak of proceeding from a knowledge of the finite to an adequate knowledge of the Infinite. So, too, the consideration of trends and movements often sheds light on choice of subject, moral tone, artistic feeling, and even style. No better illustration of this can be adduced than the poetry of Alexander Pope, which with its clearness, regularity, polish, and coolness reflects the rationalism of its time. Another illustration is Silas Marner, an interesting story setting forth the idea that a man who has lost faith in a just God and in human love may be reclaimed by a little child, but it cannot be owned as a full-orbed Christian novel. Certainly a man who sank as low as did Silas Marner has grievously sinned and needs the supernatural grace of repentance and faith to be restored to the favor of God. But George Eliot had repudiated Christianity and built her novel on the Positivism of Comte so popular in the nineteenth century.

In introducing religion a Christian professor should be discreet and tactful, discussing Christian truths only when a real occasion warrants doing so. Irrelevance defeats the best of purposes and may do more harm than good. It may create in students disrespect for the teacher and aversion to Christianity. The professor, however, should avail himself of every reasonable opportunity, for in doing so he demonstrates the rationale of the college as well as benefits his students. As a matter of fact, he is expected to do so, and because of agreement with the Christian ideals of the college he serves he can do so with sincerity and with due respect for the proper conception of academic freedom. He feels at home in the atmosphere of the college, and he enjoys the unspeakable privilege of freely expressing his own convictions. He need not hide them for fear that he will offend the authorities or his students. He cannot be satisfied, and indeed is not, with presenting theolog-
ical concepts objectively, merely as historical facts, without approval or disapproval. He calls white white, and black black and does not hesitate to indicate departures from the faith. But he should never resort to anything that savors, be it ever so little, of coercion. He should respect a student's personality. Neither should he give the impression that he is merely riding a hobby.

Not only a sensitive loyalty to Christian truth, but also a certain broadminded fairness is a requirement in a Christian teacher. Though he must be devout and have the ability to trace ideas to their religious rootage, he must be fair enough properly to evaluate ideas that have no specific Christian flavor. In his *Rip Van Winkle* Irving embodied the thought that people who are ultra-conservative are sure to awaken some day to find that the world does move—a sound idea, but not specifically Christian. In his *Eternal Goodness*, Whittier sings the alleged superiority of the simple and warm faith of the Quaker to the cold intellectual religion of the Puritan and closes with a touching confession of his personal faith in the love of God. In the poetry of Poe, one meets with hardly any content except weirdness and sorrow and despair, but the music of his lines is unforgettable. He who cannot make distinctions between the good and the worthless in a literary work and allows all his judgments to be shaped in terms of the absolute is not likely to be a good teacher of literature. Furthermore, the artistic ability of an author is not always commensurate with the fervor of his faith and the excellence of his moral idealism. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a powerful novel and deserves a place in the history of American literature, but Harriet Beecher Stowe's art is not the art of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Stories like *Gates Ajar*, *Ben Hur*, *The Circuit Rider*, and *The Girl of the Limberlost* deserve praise for the fine moral idealism that breathes through them, but artistically they are decidedly inferior. Once again, a well balanced catholicity of taste is essential in judging literature fairly. The tendency to be tolerant with moral blemishes in the name of beauty the Christian teacher will carefully avoid.

VI

A final important objective in teaching literature in a Christian college is the ability to criticise works of literary art. The presses are laboring beneath the burden of reading material processed by them for an unsuspecting reading public. Books and periodicals issue from these presses in such overwhelming number that readers are at a loss what to choose. In their bewilderment they rely on the judgment of critics found in daily papers, magazines, and book club estimates, and allow their taste to be warped, their thinking to be misdirected, and their mind to be soiled. For these critics altogether too often resemble authors in respect to thought and moral sense as closely as the proverbial two peas in the same pod. In spite of automobile, radio, and television people still read and will read. To solve the problem of their reading by resorting to some kind of Index as the Roman Catholics do is futile. The more prohibition, the more transgression. The man who is Reformed to the marrow of his bones does not surrender to others his right to choose his own books. Though he may accept cheerfully the advice of those whom he knows he can trust, he makes his own choices. The best solution of the problem is to teach students what to look for in evaluating a piece of literature or anything that pretends to be literature. They must learn to discriminate between the flimsy and the solid, the ephemeral and the enduring, the base and the truly sublime, and between what is Christian and what is not Christian.

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Witnessing to an Apostate Generation

During our former pastorate in the state of Kansas we had several opportunities to travel through the scenic Rocky Mountains of the State of Colorado. Occasionally the road would take us through a deserted mining village or "ghost town." One occasion particularly remains vividly with me. The road we were traveling went through the center of this "ghost town." The homes were deserted and had fallen into a bad state of repair. The signs on the store front were hardly legible, and those things which once had been traded and sold there had long since been removed from the shelves.

It was not hard, however, to form a mental picture of what life must have been like once upon a time in this little village. One could almost hear and see the children playing in the streets, the miners setting off each morning for work in the shafts or to explore other diggings; the homes were probably filled with the same proportions of joy and sorrow, prosperity and poverty, laughter and tears, love and disunity as one would find anywhere else in the world.

As we drove through the town we saw near the edge of the village what once was a small church. It was easily recognized because of its spire standing sentinel-like in the desolate scene, pointing men to higher, greater, better things. It was a parable. The stores, deserted homes, silent mine shafts, rubbish dumps all told a story of the search and struggle for the material that for a while had inspired hope in men's breast, but had ended in pitiful failure. In the midst of this scene was that church. Though its pulpit no longer sounded forth "Thus saith the Lord" to men, its spire still stood silently pointing men heavenward. And everyone who would pay attention could still sense the pointed message it declared.

Such a place the church always fills in our world and generation. It points men heavenward. Though not of the world it is in the world and declares to men the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, which can put meaning into their lives. Surrounded by ruin, decay, deserted hopes, vanished ambitions, struggle for power, and misery, the church speaks to men of things that abide eternally, established in the heavens of treasures that neither moth nor rust can consume, and which thieves cannot steal. We rejoice as Christians that we have a part to play in bringing these glad tidings to men. If we have been numbered by grace among those workers who have been set aside for special work in this respect, let us be glad that we have such inspiring hope and light to lighten men's burdens and to bring men to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. For we are Christ's witnesses.

The Christian Worker's Problem

In performing this office the Christian worker faces a real problem. The world to which he witnesses does not receive his message with gladness. In fact, it is often cold and indifferent to the truth. One who is projected upon the American scene as a witness soon finds that he is dealing with an apostate generation, which fact makes the work both difficult and arduous.

In contrast to our foreign mission endeavors there are certain features about our domestic programs of evangelization that simply cannot be ignored. In the first place, a heathen people is in the main ignorant of the things of God; this cannot be said of our nation and people in the same sense as it can be said of the heathen. In addition, the pagan usually does not have a fixed judgment about the church, whereas we find in our American world a class of people who in their own minds are satisfied that they know what the church is and what it ought to be, and waste no time in expressing their judgment. We must also bear in mind this peculiarity that according to the opinion of many of our mission workers on the home front eighty to ninety percent of the people with whom they work have had some connection with the church within the past one or two generations. This cannot be said of a heathen people; they do not presently stand in legal relationship to the covenant. We also bear in mind in considering our various mission programs that in our heathen mission work we speak in percentages of workers (ordained and unordained) to population as follows:

3 missionaries per million population in French Indo-China, 56 missionaries per million population in Africa
30 missionaries per million population in South America
20 missionaries per million population in Korea
19 missionaries per million population in Central America
15 missionaries per million population in India
14 missionaries per million population in China

whereas in the United States we have 1,448 ordained ministers per million population.

A second distinction which we must bear in mind in connection with our home evangelization programs is this: our modern apostasy is vastly dif-
ferent from any previous apostasy in the Christian church. Professor D. H. Kromminga spoke of this
difference as follows: "the early church put the apostates down and out; in our modern apostasy the
apostates have taken over, and have put the church out." This leads to the strange situation we often
face in American church life that the liberal and modern church claims to speak for the whole church,
and those who have no place within the fold of God's true people are frequently the ones who set the
standard for God's people! We even find the orthodox church imitating upon occasion (or what is
worse, coveting) the program and ideals of the lib­
eral church.

This complicates the problem of the Christian worker. He has a duty not merely to the unchurched
masses of our land, but he soon realizes that there are multitudes who are in churches where they are
receiving stones for bread. The response to the Back to God Hour witnesses to this fact, as there is
a considerable volume of mail received regularly from listeners within such churches who deplore
their situation. The Christian Church has a duty to
their situation. The Christian Church has a duty to
workers. He has a duty not merely to the unchurched
masses of our land, but he soon realizes that there
are multitudes who are being fed a counter­
factual Christianity under the guise of truth.

In order to meet this apostasy (which seems on the
increase) we must know what is the error of the modern crisis in man's moral and religious relation­
ships. In Scripture we find several causes of apostasy
listed. We shall have to judge in what degree each of
these has contributed to the defection of modern
man in his flight from God. Scripture teaches us
that apostasy results from:

1. Persecution (Matt. 24:9, 10): "Then shall they
deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill
you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my
name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and
deliver up one another, and shall hate one an­
other."

prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray."

3. Temptations (Luke 8:13): "And those on the
rock are they who, when they have heard, receive
the word with joy; and these have no root, who
for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall
fall away."

4. General worldiness (II Tim. 4:3, 4): "For the
time will come when they will not endure sound
d doctrine; but having itching ears, will heap to
themselves teachers after their own lusts; and
will turn away their ears from the truth."

5. Defective knowledge of Christ (I John 2:19): "They went out from us, but they were not of
us; for if they had been of us, they would have
continued with us; but they went out, that they
might be made manifest that not all are of us."
(See also the context of this passage).

6. Moral lapse (Heb. 6:4-6): "But as touching those
who were once enlightened and tasted of the
heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the
Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God,
and the powers of the ages to come, and then fell
away, it is impossible to renew them again to
repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves
the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open
shame."

7. Wilful sinning (Heb. 10:26): "For if we sin wil­
fully after that we have received the knowledge
of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice
for sins."

8. Unbelief (Heb. 3:12): "Take heed, brethren,
lest haply there shall be in any one of you an
evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the
living God."

Man's Basic
Apostasy

One thread runs through and characterizes all
these descriptions and causes of apostasy: man's
basic apostasy is his wilful denial of his revealed and
previously accepted relationship to God. When this
relationship is denied: (1) Man loses the conscious­
ness of sin. Witness the "five percent" scandals and
RFC probes in our government. The defense of
those under investigation was "we did nothing il­
legal" as though even the law no longer had a spirit,
but was only letter. (2) Human worth and value
decreases. There is no more "dignity of man." (3)
All authority becomes relative or is destroyed.
Respect for law vanishes. Man becomes a law to
himself, "master of his fate, captain of his soul."
One will always find a combination of these causes
operating to produce the resulting apostasy in a man.
Our problem is not simple. It requires a keen mind
to see why a man has become what he has, and our
work with him will be intensely personal. Mass
evangelism may have its place, but it can never re­
place the concentrated, individual, personal ap­
proach to and work with the unbeliever. We must
also observe that a part of our problem will lie in the
fact that each reduplication of this apostasy becomes
more pathetic and absurd. It also becomes more
terrible. It is not simply that each new generation
repeats the error and mistakes of previous genera­
tions, but each carries forward in its own catastrophe
the unresolved evils which have been sown as seeds
before and now are producing fruit.

At the same time we must not make the mistake of
thinking that the modern man is totally and bliss­
fully unaware of his condition. There are times
when he is honest that he realizes that his apostasy
The Christian Worker's Approach

In seeking to witness to such a world and to the modern apostate generation the Christian worker's approach will be characterized by the following:

1. **The Christian worker must make it very clear in all his labors that he is bringing a divine message to men.** His witness to be effective and accomplish its purpose must be prefaced with "thus saith the Lord." It is precisely in this that the Christian message is distinct from all philosophies and ethical systems: the Christian message is not the product of man's imagination or man's ingenuity. Precisely because it is divine it has the right to demand obedience from men. "Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who giveth his Holy Spirit unto you" (I Thess. 4:8).

2. **The Christian worker must also make clear that he brings the message in obedient response to a commandment that the Church has received from its Lord.** The church has received the "go ye into all the world" as its commission, and hearing, has lovingly obeyed. Our obedient example is also witnessing. Because it is this, any witness that is half-hearted, lacking in enthusiasm or zeal, and which does not itself command the respect of men because it is consistent with our life, will not inspire men to the performance of their duty. For this reason one who is in the place to which God called him, and is doing the work for which God qualified him is never sacrificing. He would be sacrificing only if he were not in his rightful place. The apostles were given the unexpected command after their arrest: "Go, stand in the Temple [where they were arrested] and speak to the people all the words of this life"—that is, not merely a doctrine, but something to which they themselves had obediently responded. He goes forth singing "Let the world see Jesus in me."

3. **The Christian worker must make it very clear that he speaks for and represents the church of Christ, which is His body, and into whose fellowship Christ calls men.** It is very plain that this is most effectively shown through ordination. By this solemn rite men are set aside by the church with precisely this function. Their life and message is crowned with an authority vested in them by Christ through His church. Now the above approach is not easy to practice. Many of the people with whom we have to do have fixed ideas concerning the church; most of the views they hold are not complimentary. Still we must show in our labors for them and with them that the very church and body of believers they oppose so violently at times and with which they want nothing to do is ministering to them a witness designed for their eternal good. The church through its witnesses says to them: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good" (Num. 10:29). We ought never to create more problems for ourselves by compromise on this score. It is especially on this point that we need clear thinking. It does not help to separate the witness from the established church. The Christian worker may never leave in men's mind the impression that he is the one that is so vitally and personally concerned about their salvation. Christ through His church seeks and saves the lost, and Himself adds to the church those who are saved.

4. **The Christian worker must recognize that the character of the generation to which he is witnessing demands concentrated and consecrated witness.** There is no armistice in this battle. Apostate man is fleeing in a vicious circle. Like a man lost in a desert, he comes back again and again to his starting point, only to find he is walking in an extended circle. He finds in the end that he has not rid himself of the Christ after all. Our generation has fled from the Cross only to find that it comes face to face with that Cross over and over again. Two alternatives are always facing man either of which according to God's good pleasure the witness will accomplish in man: either be saved by the Rock who is Christ, or be crushed to death beneath it. Since apostate man wilfully chooses to turn against God, his contradiction is rooted in his spirit to which his flesh is prisoner. The truth that will free him is always personal and relational—"Believeth thou this?" (John 11:36). The way of victory that overcomes the world, hell, Satan, and our own sinful selves is Christ. It is never a certain way and Christ; it is always Christ who is the way. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." This men must be shown by word and demonstration. It is no easy task, but rather one that demands concentration of purpose and powers through consecrated life.

The Christian Worker's Comfort

The task that faces the Christian church as outlined above is not easy. Perhaps because it is so hard we have failed so miserably to see the vision in the past. This also the Lord has foreseen and knows, and for which He has provided incentive to faithful labor. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He
that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:5, 6).

We Begin with a Conviction

We bear a seed, and go forth with the only message. This is very precious seed at that, bought with the blood of the Son of God. We know there is “only one name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Conviction of this sort in our work gives us power. We have the remedy at hand. We are neither in desperation nor as a last resort presenting to men the Gospel. It is the hope of the world, the answer to man’s apostasy.

We Let the Situation Determine Our Methodology.

The Christian church and its workers never permit God’s message to be qualified in any way by circumstances. It is our duty in our witness to raise an apologetic to the Truth, but we may never be apologetic about it. “We are all things to all men” (I Cor. 9) for the sake of the Gospel. The problems we face in our witnessing will be many; each situation will demand new and fresh avenues of approach. We are dealing with individuals, each of whom is different. Communities differ. Cultures differ. One of the glories of the Gospel is that it can do for all men what they need above all.

We are Personally Prepared

We have been separated to our tasks by none other than Christ Himself. He has said, “Ye are my witnesses.” The road is not easy; the path will bring many sorrows and much pain. We must expect that we shall often have to sow in tears. Still we may never pray, “Lord, save me from the disgrace of tears,” for in our work tears are no disgrace. The Gospel seed is often watered by heaven with the tears of the saints. We are not dry-eyed Christians, especially when we recognize how great are the issues at stake: God’s honor and glory; man’s salvation.

We Have an Abundant Compensation

Although we sow in tears, we reap in joy and shall surely come again with rejoicing. This compensation is guaranteed by God; “he shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” The men to whom we go, and whom we have found (in the words of Matthew Arnold):

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
One powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest his head,
Like these on earth he waits forlorn,

have become sheaves of full, rich, ripened grain to the glory of God, through seed that was watered by the Spirit with the tears of weeping Christians!

The tragedy of our modern world has been that it has sought to create from the lethargy of death a new world fructified by a Spirit in which it no longer believes. For this reason all its works are still-born, its reforms abortive; the soul of man is left without the power of a vibrant life. An appropriate analogy to our times is found in the apocryphal story of the boyhood of Jesus. As a boy Jesus, together with his playmates, was playing about a mud-hole. They were all making clay sparrows. Whereas the sparrows of the other children remained what they were, namely clay sparrows, those which Jesus touched and upon which He blew became alive and flew into the sky. Our world will ever need that singular touch of His power which will give life to our clay souls, and lift us up to God’s heaven. It is such a liberation to true freedom that we seek to bring to men through Him who is “the way, the truth, and the life,” in order that we who wilfully transgressed may wilfully serve Him and glorify Him from the heart.

“Go Ye Therefore”
Our Distorted Conception of Education

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Knowledge, according to popular notion and the teaching of most schools in America, consists in the accumulation of facts and the mastery of techniques. I suggest that this is a distorted conception of the nature of education and has led to unfortunate consequences.

"Facts" in themselves may be of some use to that twentieth century species known as the specialist, but only because he selects and applies them within the rigid confines of a formalized "science" covering just one aspect of human activity and rationality. He has been taught that knowledge is only knowledge in so far as it has use, and supplies him with the techniques for solutions to problems within his particular sphere. Education has meaning then to the extent that it provides the materials for a "successful" life. The doctor, the lawyer, the engineer, the agricultural expert, the businessman, and even the general type of minister are all examples of modern specialization.

I

To deny that specialization is necessary would be foolish; but to say that therefore the end of education is the gathering of facts and the manipulation of techniques is not only utterly foolish but dangerous as well. It is dangerous because when you ask the specialist to relate his facts to the whole universe of man's knowledge and experience he is stumped; he doesn't know, and in a society where everyone is a specialist it turns out that nobody knows. As a result, education merely for "life"—for a job—is not adequate to provide an answer to man's social and institutional problems, including the maintenance of stable and just government.

Western society has recognized the dangers of specialization but has sought the remedy by extending the application of the pragmatic and supposedly practical approach to education. Whole new areas were wrested from "traditional" control and subjected to "scientific" scrutiny. This liberating movement (away from philosophy and ethics) developed into a program which became known in the United States as education for citizenship. Men saw that society needed not only techniques for individual success but also techniques for social and political success: individual success is necessarily contingent on a stable and well-ordered society. The social sciences were developed to meet this need: sociology, economics, psychology, political science, history, and many more. (That these have in turn separated into independent, isolated compartments in the universities and colleges, thus raising more problems than they solve, has alarmed many experts in these fields but thus far nothing much has been done about it.)

Social subjects were introduced for special consideration in the grade schools and high schools and colleges, and in adult education courses. These were designed to teach morality, that is, good citizenship. All sorts of social values were emphasized and enlarged upon: how to get along with people, how to be honest and courteous and truthful, how to improve admittedly bad social conditions. And when the question was asked that (almost unconsciously in the minds of teachers and taught alike) that of course there must be a reason and a purpose to all of this, the answer was obvious: to preserve our glorious country, to make it stable and prosperous and "morally" strong; which in turn largely meant: so that we can continue safely to apply in our individual lives the techniques for success we learn in school and shop. Thus to social values were added those more political: allegiance to the flag, love for our country, and all those wonderful virtues generally subsumed under the heading of patriotism. (In times of national stress and strain like the present these values have been easily perverted into blatant expressions of reactionary nationalism—from Huey Long through the America Firsters to McCarthyism—which fact has made many pause who at one time were so confident they had found the key to the solution of the problem).

Exactly the same holds true in the field of aesthetics though here the line is even more sharply drawn. Poetry and artistic prose production as well as painting and music are completely ornamental: a mere embellishment to one's life in which one may indulge if he wish, but which he is not to take too seriously. (Philosophy, of course, suffers the same fate). One may, however, wish to express a moral homily in poetic form and that may be useful in so far as it is morally persuasive. Or again one may desire to use poetry as an instrument of social criticism, though that may incur the displeasure of some elements of society, and one must be careful not to overdo it, since it may become disruptive in its effects.

In general, however, one can say that these "cultural" things are nice to have around but hardly have any connection with life as such. They do at least suffice to satisfy the artistic sensibilities of the few, though the great majority are naturally more interested in more democratic amusements. Thus
not only has art—aesthetic beauty and creation—been divorced from human productive activity as such (that is, from man's work), but it has been perverted into the strange and twisted forms of mass stereotyped amusements to fill the "leisure" of the many, thus becoming the real opium of the people.

II

This in vague outline is the place and function of education in American society: first of all to give people techniques for personal success, and secondly to give them the techniques for social and political stability. The churches also help out here: despite all differences of competing theologies all of them together serve a very useful social function: they inculcate a sense of moral reverence, piety, good-naturedness, honesty, patriotism, and as such are mighty bulwarks to the maintenance of that minimum of social order necessary for the pursuit of individual success. (One can point out without being satiric that this is also the function of the church in present day Russia, though there personal success receives less attention than social achievement). All other manifestations of religion which do not serve this supreme end are merely decorative and not really important. And when religion becomes critical of established morality it becomes annoying, perhaps even dangerous, and should be curbed.

The typical moralist eager for desperate glory will shout: whose fault is it? thinking that if he can only isolate and destroy the villain he will "solve" the problem. The point is that it is everybody's fault, and in another sense nobody's. These conditions inhere in our way of life, in our individual and collective behavior, in the way in which we pose and attempt to handle our problems, in our ideas about the nature of man and his destiny, in the "climate of opinion" and kind of mind which we as a nation in conjunction with western society as a whole have developed and are perpetuating.

Though it is easy—and senseless—to point the accusing finger at convenient scapegoats (the educator, the politician, the capitalist), it is possible, nevertheless, to analyze the difficulty in terms of the prominent members of society, those who because of their prestige, influence, power, and ability exercise a broad and pervasive leadership in the community and the nation. They include among many others: the business man, the lawyer, the doctor, the minister, the scientist, the educator, and—though less important—the politician. It is interesting to note in this connection that when something goes wrong Americans have an unfortunate habit of saying "there ought to be a law" and if it isn't passed, or if it is and fails to measure up to expectations, this is due to the usual skuldugery one can expect of politicians. Actually, the politician is hardly in a position to effect answers to basic questions. At best he can only mitigate the consequences of the wrong answers, and if he is really astute and enlightened at the same time, he can through shrewd maneuvering promote the conditions in which right answers can be given a chance to prove their worth.

It is these leaders, then, who in varying degrees dominate society and whose ideas and value-patterns are reflected in the tone and structure of that society. The great majority participate in these ideas and values through an almost unconscious process to which Mr. Toynbee gives the technical name mimesis, which is really a sort of "drill," a mechanical and superficial imitation of the great and inspired originals. One can dimly see then what is certainly a major part of the trouble. The natural leaders of our society have ceased to be either great or inspired. They have become specialized technicians in the art of "successful living" and in devising social techniques to instil a morality which can serve to protect the pursuit of selfishness against the deadly threat of social and political breakdown. In other words they have become an uncreative, dull, unimaginative, and spiritually sterile minority. The rest of the people having neither the time, the opportunity, nor the desire to learn any differently follow along with enthusiasm, perfectly satisfied that this is the best of all possible worlds as long as it provides them a sufficient measure of material wealth to satiate their many and various appetites. There are exceptions both in the minority and the majority, viz., gadflies and critics of many kinds who denounce the system. If their criticisms become too noisy, however, they are drowned out or simply discredited.

The discussion returns inevitably to the unfortunate fact that the conception of education today is rooted in the idea that it means knowledge for something: that is, for personal success and social cohesion. I have suggested something of the kind of mind and ideas about life which such a conception of education induces. The fundamental problem facing any educator today is not to find and communicate new facts and techniques, though these certainly are important and investigation must go on; the crucial problem centers, however, on the kind of mind we wish people to have, the kind of ideas and values and general philosophy of life people hold or reflect. This latter approach emphasizes knowledge of, rather than knowledge for, truth before techniques, and the development of character instead of the mechanical drilling of moral do's and don'ts.

III

Knowledge of involves in the last analysis the nature and destiny of man and his fundamental relationship to God, which doubtless explains why this approach is suspect by the average modern educator who protests that such knowledge is impossible, that these things at best are only values, which in the end are purely arbitrary. And here he is backed up by the whole system itself and by the overwhelming
weight of the dominant minority whose intellectual and moral ancestors have been preaching essentially that very theme for the past several centuries.

To say that knowledge has a religious base, or that religion is grounded in knowledge is something unintelligible to most people nowadays both in and out of the church; and to say that faith must be rational in order also to be real is to risk being laughed out of court, or to risk being called heretical—depending upon whether the one offended is outside or within the church.

A faith, however, which pretends to have any claims at all on the mind of man must insist that its objects are true and objectively real. Thus the objects of the Christian faith are true: God does exist; there is a Creator-creature relationship, man does bear the image of God by virtue of creation; evil has found its way into the world and as an abnormal element must be expiated and atoned, Christ did appear in history as the God-man both to reveal the true God and to redeem and thereby free an enslaved mankind; and even now and for all time the Holy Ghost “over the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.” All these are intimately related and fulfill each other issuing into a single body of truth. To assent to this truth requires an act of faith which in its essence is much more than an act of the will or of the intellect or an emotional experience: it embraces all of these and involves a commitment of the entire personality. This is what makes rationality possible and brings man back into focus with himself and with his fellowmen (although this last is difficult to achieve in a perverted society). All of this is a result of centering education on a knowledge of truth. Such an education develops a mind well-balanced and broadly perceptive: a mind unhampered by either skepticism or superstition, free to investigate all aspects and sides of reality from the lowest to the highest forms. It is not enslaved to techniques but uses them as means to serve the truth.

This is a great and noble program because it rests basically for its success not on the weight of established morality, nor on the authority of pope or politician, nor yet on the dogma of a certain theology, but on the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit working through the minds and lives of men giving them the grace to know that life however menial or sour with sin is a thing of worth and beauty and praise, and restoring to them a knowledge of truth, a passion for creativity, and—especially important—a sense of humor.

What are some practical conclusions which Christians of Reformed faith can draw from all of this? It is a subject for many articles. I would like to finish this one, however, by asking certain questions. Are our Christian institutions of church and school and family sufficiently aware of their proper relationship and responsibility to the civilization and culture of which they are a part and out of which they have grown, and to the nation in which they find themselves? What kind of mind are they developing? Or does that mind only conform to the spirit of the times, differing merely in convenient and morally-abstract non-essentials? In other words what are these institutions contributing to the spiritual struggle of our day? Are they vindicating our proud claim that in our thought and action our primary concern is the glory of God? Or has that too become only an empty shibboleth?

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Francis Bacon on Hindrances to Learning

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F RANCIS BACON is the air we breathe. Mankind has not always, however, nourished itself in the atmosphere of science and technology: indeed, it at one time would have found it quite stifling. Bacon is a central figure between this older world and the new; he is one of those relatively few figures of whom it can be said, humanly speaking, that he directed history to a new road. Bacon's main achievement, it should be noted, was the forensic one: his own contributions to scientific knowledge are slight. It is, then, for his feebleness of the mind and to avoid the errors to count of those hindrances which seem to him to stand in the path of progress and to prevent man's claiming what is legitimately his. Such concluding remarks as I shall make will be selective rather than exhaustive, suggestive rather than definitive.

I

Antecedent to Bacon's pronouncements on the new program for science is a resounding affirmation of the orderliness of at least the physical universe and the rationality of the human mind. By affirming these, he is, of course, placing himself in the great tradition of Western thought, that the mind of man is in touch with reality, that it is adapted to it, that it can come to a knowledge of it. But Bacon acknowledges more than most thinkers both the potentialities and the limitations of human knowledge: that man, on the one hand, is capable of knowing far more than he has ever dreamed of—capable, too, of using this knowledge to improve the human situation; but that, on the other hand, nature is highly subtle and complex, and that every conceivable resource is required to overcome the inherent feebleness of the mind and to avoid the errors to which it is prone.

One important hindrance to learning, then, is one which does not yet involve the subject of methodology, but consists rather in a negative attitude towards knowledge itself, questioning its possibility, efficacy, and, indeed, its legitimacy. There is, for example, the paralyzing effect of despair, experienced by those who are impressed—unduly, says Bacon—with the frailty of man's nature, the brevity of life, the inadequacy of man's mental equipment, and the obscurity which surrounds reality. These people are to be dealt with charitably, and persuaded to a new hope, to a vision of the possibilities of the future. More serious, and an attitude more inclined to elicit Bacon's impatience, is that of those who assume that their religious position rules out secondary causes, which are to be the basic concern of the new science, or that the new discoveries will threaten their religious suppositions, or that "learning shall undermine the reverence of laws and government." Then, too, there is the notion that it is not worthy of man to handle the data of matter. And, finally, there is the "littleness of spirit," arising from pride, which prompts some to assert that their art has advanced as far as human effort can carry it, "... and all for the miserable vain glory of making it believed that whatever has not yet been discovered and comprehended can never be discovered or comprehended hereafter."

These hindrances to learning will disappear just as soon as those who are responsible for them become aware of the high dignity of human learning, and realize that to uncover this knowledge is to do nothing less than to bring glory to the Creator. But to be so persuaded is not yet to be in possession of the proper tools and methods of learning. Intense and severe disciplines are necessary, disciplines which mankind has heretofore been unwilling to impose upon itself.

The subject of method involves the process by which the impressions of the material world, having been registered by the senses, pass into the reason and the understanding. The possibilities for deflection are innumerable, and humanity has not been very successful in avoiding them. What is needed is "a true and lawful marriage of the empirical and the rational faculty."

II

One barrier to attaining a proper method lies in the nature of the mind itself. The human mind undisciplined and untrained, insists Bacon, is not a fit instrument for the discovery of truth. Indeed, the intellect is far more prone to error than are the senses, and it is incapable of judging "except by means of induction and induction in its legitimate form." For woven into the very fibre of the mind
are pre-dispositions, affections, and emotions of all sorts which vitiate the disinterested search for truth. For example, it is the nature of the mind to seek spiritual certainties, and it will seize upon any discovery which will serve to uphold man's dignity and assure his well-being. Coupled with this is man's tendency to construct elaborate philosophical systems, a practice usually engaged in before sufficient data have been gathered, and very often involving a pet notion which becomes the point of orientation for the whole system. Then, too, there are personal idiosyncracies which tend to distort the facts in accordance with the results that the individual anticipates in his inquiry. The mind must be purified of all these pre-dispositions and undergo "the true and legitimate humiliation of the human spirit" before it is qualified to attain to truth.

But the senses also have their limitations. They can perceive only particulars and can give no account of general ideas. What is more, the senses are gross, and many qualities and processes escape them. However, unlike the intellect, the senses, when provided with the proper aids, have the capacity to correct their own errors.

Mistaken ends can likewise weaken the mind from pure learning. Curiosity, entertainment, love of debate, lucrative ambitions, and even baser ends, will never minister to the success of the new program. But a far more serious error is that of attempting to discover the secret things of divinity, which belong properly to the area of revelation. The human mind, says Bacon, is not equipped to penetrate the mysteries of God; the best that men can hope to do—and there is no limit to the quantity of knowledge men may legitimately acquire for the alleviation of their condition—is to know and understand the laws by which God governs the universe.

III

But there is yet another obstacle to learning, one which unlike many of the others, we could have avoided. We have permitted ourselves, says Bacon, to be saddled with historical accretions. Having done so would not be so serious if our concern with the ancients had improved the quality of our minds. But the quality of the human mind is a given, and not all the learning of the world can improve it. The mind is in that sense timeless. The examination of nature with this still limited mind, then, would seem to be a sufficient task for man. But, alas! we have undertaken, in addition, the exploration of this vast historical legacy, mistakenly assuming that the oldest and most widely transmitted beliefs are the truest, and, again, that it is the most pure, the most accurate, the most satisfactory representations of truth that are preserved, rather than the verbiage and refuse of disproven theories and foolish speculations. Purging the mind of this historical antiquity is a sine qua non of any future advance in science.

One of the basest things we have inherited from the ancients, Bacon notes, is the method of logical demonstration by the use of the syllogism. Since this procedure is mainly verbal, endless casuistry and refinement upon refinement have resulted, and this has all degenerated into wit and irrelevant subtilties. The basic error in this method lies in this, that the propositions which make up the syllogism are all too frequently abstracted hastily and inaccurately; that is, they are being formulated without regard to particulars. True, the outside propositions can be linked together by the middle terms; but if these propositions are faulty and reflect a disregard for the facts of nature, then the entire syllogism is diseased. The proper procedure is to begin with induction. From there, one divine—always with proper caution and due hesitation, imposing weights instead of donning wings, exercising not acatalepsia (denial of the capacity of the mind to comprehend truth) but eucatalepsia (suspension of judgment), and constantly returning to the laboratory—more inclusive axioms, until a general principle, or form is obtained, one which will illuminate an entire area of particulars. But the return from this infinite regress must also be taken slowly and cautiously, and no unexplained exception may be disregarded. Neither simple enumeration, nor mental gymnastics will give us an accurate account of reality; rather, only that "which is extracted . . . out of the very bowels of nature." Only as these conditions are met can man enter upon his inheritance.

IV

There is, of course, much for us to learn from Bacon. The mental disciplines he imposes, for example, have perennial validity; witness his castigation of mental inertia and lassitude generally, his opposition to religious and other types of obscurantism, and his defense of the educated man as opposed to the man of the world who regards experience as an adequate substitute for education. Then, too, his emphasis on the coherence and orderliness of nature, and on the adaptation of man's mind to the universe, require our assent. And I for one would uphold his sincerity when he asserts that it is a fulfillment of the divine mandate to discover the facts of nature and to display the relationships and interrelationships of its parts, and that to perceive these patterns is to do honor to their Creator. And if one is tempted to object as Horatio did to Hamlet, "There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave (or study) to tell us this," I would reply that Bacon has stated this all with the gift of lucidity and penetration that was his; that he has, indeed, expressed much of it classically.

But Bacon also set in motion many forces which have determined the structure of modern thought and life, forces which have helped to shape the tremendous problems which contemporary civiliza-
tion faces. Bacon had said: “Only let the human race recover that right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest and let power be given it; the exercise thereof will be governed by sound reason and true religion.” Viewing these words from our perspective, they seem a piece of tragic irony. Bacon’s successors did not observe his stipulations respecting the religious use to which knowledge was to be put. But Bacon cannot escape blame for much of the mischief which has resulted from the separation of knowledge and faith, science and morals, reason and revelation. He relegated ethics to the area of man’s integration into the social and physical worlds which were to be founded on the basis of the new science. The philosophy of history which was outlined in Augustine’s City of God, and which saw in history the pattern of good contending with evil, was replaced with the notion of scientific progress and the improvement of man’s lot upon earth. Bacon, further, did his work within the framework of the typical modern thinker, accepting the basic commitment of modern thought that experience is its own witness, and accelerated the process of sealing this world from the world of the spirit by insisting that this world is explicable in terms of itself. He contributed much to effect that shift of attention from man to nature, a shift highly characteristic of the Renaissance, which has resulted in a greatly increased understanding of the physical universe and a proportionately diminished understanding of the nature of man.

V

But the most significant thing of all remains to be said.

By typical modern thinkers, from the Renaissance to the present, including the crisis theologians of our day, God has been relegated in man’s thinking to a point progressively removed from the universe which He created, from the affairs of men and nations, from human experience and the destiny of history. Bacon was one of the first in that unbroken procession, its spiritual godfather, in fact. In his tendency towards an amoral concentration on things, he all but precluded religion as a reality, and since his time a religious view of the world has become progressively more difficult to maintain. I like Douglas Nash Bush’s summary of the matter: “Bacon not only brought philosophy down to earth, he confined it within the four walls of a laboratory in which Plato and Aquinas and Shakespeare and Milton, would have suffocated. That is why, though we recognize Bacon’s intellectual power and our vast debt to him, we do not go back to his works for vital nourishment.”


From Our Correspondents

FROM REV. RECKER
Baissa, Nigeria
April 27, 1953

Thank you for your letter of March 9 which I received the day before yesterday. I would like you to send me the back issues which I have not received as yet—October-March. Enclosed find a check for six dollars to extend my subscription for three years. I meant to take care of this while in the States, but it was one of the many things which I forgot to attend to.

I enjoy reading the Forum while I am out on trek in some village back in the hills. There sitting in a simple hut, it takes me back to the world we know. Being out here in primitive surroundings causes one to hunger for the contact which the Calvin Forum and other worthy journals provide. Far from the center of the life of the church which has sent us out, we all the more realize the need for all the different facets of the life of the established church. At times we feel that we miss much in fellowship of kindred minds out here, but we also rejoice that contact with the great people of Africa has been a blessing and an enlightenment. God has given also the African rich gifts. Africans are interesting people, not only, but a challenging people. We thank God that He is establishing His church in our area of Nigeria, as well as throughout this vast continent. However, we of the church of America that has enjoyed decades of uninterrupted blessing should support the young African church with her leaders with much prayer. God grant us the grace to have the entire world on our heart and to exhibit in a worldwide way by our prayers and works that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

A woman of Baissa recently said to me, “Have patience with us, for we are such sinners, and we know so little!” I thank God for such a statement. In that humility of faith there is a bright hope for the future of the African church.

We send you greetings from Baissa. God bless you in your work on the Forum.

Sincerely yours,
(REV.) R. RECKER
Missionary of the
Chr. Ref. Church

THE CALVIN FORUM * * * JUNE-JULY, 1953
I WAS moved to write to your worthy journal upon reading the letter of your correspondent from South Africa, J. Christian Coetzee. He reminds your readers that the Dutch landed in South Africa in 1652. I am certain that your readers will be interested in knowing that the Dutch came to Ceylon approximately ten years earlier. The first Protestant ministrations began at Galle on October 6, 1642. Your Forum has carried a complete history of our Church written by Mr. Harry Collette. However, I am certain that you will welcome this further information.

The Dutch Reformed Church is located in the midst of the Orient. We are becoming more and more conscious of this providential placement. Once a large and strong church, at present we are limiting our witness to Colombo, Galle, Matara, and Yakala. The latter is a mission effort in the North-central Province. We have seven congregations in Colombo and one each in Matara and Galle. Mission work is being done among the Sinhalese and Tamil by the Churches of Colombo. We have a Tamil Minister, Rev. Louis Hitchcock and two lay evangelists, Mr. L. M. Charles and Mr. Samuel Mendis. The missionary unions of our churches also engage in a mission effort. But our task has all too long been neglected. Ten thousand villages in Ceylon are not hearing the Gospel today.

In our struggle to hold out for "the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints" the Dutch Reformed Church owes much to the Christian Reformed Church of America. The short, though striking, stay of the Rev. John O. Schuring did much to awaken our Churches to first things. With his strong leadership the General Consistory finally ended the attitude of halting between two opinions. They took a definite stand for the historic reformed faith in maintaining the three Standards of Unity, in general, and the Doctrine of Limited Atonement, in particular. One minister has been dismissed for denying this doctrine openly; two other ministers of the church who have aided and abetted the consequent schismatic group are presently being investigated. The four remaining ministers stood firm for the faith of the fathers. Two of the latter received their training at Calvin College and Seminary, Rev. Lionel Felsianes and your correspondent; while Rev. Richard Metzel­ving received his training at the old Princeton Seminary during the days of Dr. Vos, and Dr. Warfield.

With our ministerial ranks thus depleted you can imagine the great joy in our churches when the news arrived that the first twin ministers of the Christian Reformed Church, and their wives, Rev. and Mrs. Clarence Van Ens and Rev. and Mrs. John Van Ens had been led to come to help us. Their arrival shall ever be remembered by the small faith­ful group that greeted them at the docks in Colombo Harbour. The service of induction was a historic event for this outpost. In the sacred walls of the historic Dutch Reformed Church of Wolvendall these men of God were accepted into our ministry by the Presbytery of Ceylon. Already the impact of their efforts is being felt. Our pulpits now are staffed with ministers who are committed to the Reformed Faith. Much needed pastoral calling is being effected. Discipline work is being initiated.

But our need is still great. We need more ministers from abroad if the Church is to really come back to serve her purpose in the island. Our task is overwhelming. Endless opportunities are open to us. The Mission Task of our Church needs immediate attention and expansion. Presently we have six ministers supporting the cause which is dear to all of us. But we have nine churches and unless we give full interest to our churches we may not expect them to meet the overwhelming challenge God has placed before us.

I might write more. There is the radio, street preaching, the need of Reformed Literature, Catechism preaching and teaching, our Church publications. But more later.

May God bless you and us in our common cause.

Sincerely,

A. G. W. FOENANDER

FROM THE EVANGELICAL LIBRARY

THE following statement is a condensation of an article released in The Christian, January 30, 1953, concerning the Evangelical Library, which asks mention in the Calvin Forum.

The Evangelical Library of London is built up of "almost exclusively sound Evangelical works" for the use of Christian workers who are unable to build large libraries of their own or do not have access to large collections of religious writing. Its founder was Geoffrey Williams who donated the growing collection to a body of trustees under the chairmanship of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The books are located today at 78a, Chiltern Street, W.1, London. Totalling more than 100,000 volumes they constitute one of the most comprehensive collections "available for international loan . . ." Puritan writers figure prominently.

"Swift expansion has been the proof that it is meeting a real need, and there is romance in the spread of (the library's) usefulness. Collections of books are being sent to remote parts of the earth. Missionaries in the African jungle and elsewhere are receiving the spiritual stimulus which formerly they lacked while cut off for years from Christian ministry. Even more wonderful still is the fact that
The Evangelical Library “which...is the only one of its kind in the world, is performing a praiseworthy service for God, meriting the prayer help and support of all who know the value of good books, and perceive their transforming influence.”

The impact and influence of the Evangelical Library is exemplified by the following letter which was submitted for publication in the Forum.

THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES OF A SPANISH CHRISTIAN

Barcelona, Spain,
December 31, 1951.

DEAR MR. GEOFFREY WILLIAMS:

I DON’T KNOW too much of predestination, but I cannot help thinking that God determined to save me from early childhood. My earliest recollections are from the time when I was about 7 years old. I was then living separated from my mother (my father having died a little before) in a town not far from Barcelona, where I used to go every Sunday afternoon to the Catholic Church where there were classes for catechising. After a while the priest, noticing my interest, said that he was going to make me an Acolyte to say Mass. This made me very happy and I looked forward eagerly to the day when I would help in saying Mass but I was not to be.” A few days before I was going to see my wish come true, my mother came and took me to live with her again so that my wish was thwarted.

About three years later I began to work in a bookshop and shortly I became a clerk in one of the biggest of Barcelona’s bookshops. I was still working there when at the age of 17 the civil war broke out. When I was drafted for military service I experienced the bitterness of leaving home and mother. Previously I had always imagined that I sought God, but in those tragic moments I did not find God as I expected. It seemed very strange not to have His consolation in those trying moments. I thought that perhaps this was because in so many years I had forgotten to seek God more earnestly as I used to when quite small.

After a few months in the rear-guard there came an order to go to the battle of the Ebro, then in full swing. We thought we realized what this meant, but when after the first day of battle 500 of us were reduced to about 100, we really did know what war was like. What an excellent school this was for prayer. I was indeed in touch with God through prayer every waking moment. Never before did I pray with such intensity. One day during a bombing raid I was wounded by the bombs exploding in the air. Miraculously I was not killed like those at my side, but I was so injured that I had to be evacuated never more to return. The end of the war found me back with my mother.

I determined once again to become a priest. I went to the nearest church and asked to see the person responsible for the necessary steps I had decided to take, but he could not be found-never to see him again. The next day I went to the nearest church and asked to see the prior. I explained to him my desire, and he said that in order to take me in it was necessary that I should have a better knowledge of Latin than I had, and that I must study more and then come and see him again.

I was tired of trying to get in and I began to reflect that perhaps some sort of deity was protecting me from making a greater blunder and perhaps after all I had nothing to lose by remaining in the world, and I even began to wonder whether searching for God was all nonsense.

Now I started in a quite a different direction. I began to follow science which I always liked—unifying science with my love for philosophy and abstract studies. I began to study psychoanalysis. Soon I was completely submersed by it. It became a wonder to me that I did not feel happy, but I imagined happiness would come later when I knew more about it and could cure myself of all past errors, such as supposing there was a God. At last I thought I had found the truth.

But worse was to come. While studying more and more about the causes of unhappiness, I was not finding happiness myself. This puzzled me. Now I said I know the real cause of my unhappiness—it is fear. I feared that if I ceased to look for God for something, I would cease to separate myself from Him something terrible would surely happen to me. But then I would say to myself, does not Dr. Freud say that God is only an idea or a father-complex?

Now I came to a crucial point in my life. I realized that I had to make a decision once and forever for or against God. One thing was certain, I had tried many times to please God by becoming a priest and He would not have it. It was not my trying that again. Then one day when questioning what course to take, I saw an announcement in The Times. It was of The Evangelical Library and it offered evangelical books to all who wished to read them in any country. Of course I had a bookcase full of religious books, but these Jesuits more than any other religious body because they were much more clever. In fact I had wanted to be a Jesuit priest myself. Then the thought came to me: Why not send for some books from The Evangelical Library. I felt sure that I would enjoy evangelical books and decided to ask for them.

Thus I wrote with the result known to you. You referred me to the local branch in Barcelona and through that I got the address of one of the members of the congregation of an evangelical church through the introduction of Mr. Trenchard. In this way God led me for the first time in my life to a church where I discovered men and women who sincerely searched for the truth. I began to see the tragic delusion in which I had been living. I had vainly imagined that I was seeking after the things of God when in reality my heart was set upon material things. God had clearly shown me, Bible in hand, that Christ was a discerner of intents and thoughts and not of things and actions.

One day, Mr. Trenchard, came to see me and asked to see the prior, I explained to him my desire to become a priest. He gave me plainly to understand what it would mean to him to take me in. He said that in order to take me in it was necessary that I should have a better knowledge of Latin than I had, and that I must study more and then come and see him again. I was surprised. I thought that perhaps this was because in so many years I had not allowed these matters to be played with. Then I said I was willing to follow the course of life you suggested to me. I was not to allow you to obey my Lord, putting it to me thus "Well, Pairo, after all, the most that can happen is that you will lose your soul!" This had a very deep effect.

God meant me to know that the “past time of my life should suffice me to have worked the will of the Gentiles wherein I walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excesses of wine, revellings; quitting the meetings and abominable idolatries.” God was calling me...
A MASTER REPUBLISHED


Dr. Shedd’s volumes on Dogmatic Theology saw the light of day more than 60 years ago. They are the product of a life-long interest in philosophical and theological studies, more particularly of a happy career as a theological professor in the department of Systematic Theology in Union Theological Seminary of New York.

We are very happy that the Zondervan Publishing House has decided to republish this great work of Dr. Shedd. When we consider that theological science is constantly advancing through the study of the great theological deliverances of the past and a deepening knowledge of the Scriptures, a study which is stimulated especially by the divergences of contemporary theology, we wondered about the wisdom of reprinting these volumes. After a careful perusal of this first volume we feel that the publishers are rendering the theological world a distinct service by making Shedd’s work available to our public as well as private libraries, teachers as well as students of the science of theology. An erstwhile objection by the reviewer to the republication of older volumes on theology as well as the publication of new works, on the score that most of them were nothing but compilations, was overcome a long time ago. By reflecting upon the doctrinal deliverances of the past a creative mind, such as Shedd’s proves to be, is bound to bring within the purview of the Bible student certain perspectives of the truth hitherto unnoticed.

Dr. Shedd believes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. He is impatient with those who say that by leaning on the theological learning of the past, the theological student invalidates Scripture as the source of our knowledge of God. To quote him, “Scientific and contemplative theology is the child of Revelation. It is the very Word of God itself as this has been studied, collated, combined, and systematized by powerful, devout, and prayerful intellects.”

Though the exegetical work of the learned author does not protrude itself in skeleton-like fashion upon the pages of his treatises on Dogmatic Theology, his doctrinal deliverances nevertheless portray that such exegesis lies at their basis. If this were not the case his work would be without value for the student of God’s Word.

Shedd recognizes that Biblical Theology, which represents the exegetical study of the Bible on the basis of its various units of thought, is foundational to the work of the theologian in systematizing the truths of Scripture. Says he, “The so-called ‘higher unity’ to which the exegete endeavors to reduce the several ‘types’ of ‘biblical’ theology is really a dogmatic system embracing the entire Scriptures.”

By his own admission Shedd is sympathetic with the Augustino-Calvinistic type of doctrine. A profound historical sense protects the author against any charge of ecclesiastical bigotry. Biblical truth appropriated by the sanctified mind, vindicates itself. Like a crystal-clear stream it flows on and on throughout the history of the church, becoming increasingly identifiable by deviations from it, by people who are Christians by profession as well as rank unbelievers who look upon man, contradictorily it is true, as independent of God, as an ultimate who limits God. Of course, if God is an ultimate also, man finds himself in the unenviable position of being baffled by the facts of reality. For Shedd God is the sovereign God whose counsel shall stand.

The author shows a wide acquaintance with philosophical thought both ancient and modern. Plato and Kant are not strangers to him.

Dr. Shedd is a master of words, a lucid writer, a logical thinker, and an author who delights us with his synthetic methods. Synthetic judgments should be based upon a thorough analysis of the component parts of the truth. Of this Dr. Shedd is aware.

Volume I of his Dogmatic Theology is divided into three sections—Theological Introduction, Bibliology, and Theology.

As far as method is concerned Shedd distinguishes between theology which is an absolute and certain science, because it deals with a permanent object and the sciences in general which are concerned with objects that are changeable and therefore less certain. However, as the Creator of the whole universe God has placed the stamp of his will on everything he has made. To interpret the facts in accordance with these laws is the business of the scientist. If our knowledge of sensible data is in a flux, this is not due to the fact that the pattern of nature are elusive because changeable, but because man’s interpretative work is in error. Man’s conclusions may be wrong and therefore subject to correction, but this does not mean that certainty in the a posteriori science is unattainable. If that were the case, the benefits of science would be impossible and some of our temporal securities would possibly have to be junked from time to time to be thrown on the scrap heap of things that proved to be uncertain.

Following Scripture Shedd distinguishes between general or unwritten revelation and special or written revelation. Scripture itself denominates as revelation such things as the heathen’s knowledge of God’s unity, his eternity, his omnipotence, his sovereignty his retributive justice and his benevolence. General revelation represents a form of reli-

THE CALVIN FORUM * * * JUNE-JULY, 1953
gious or moral consciousness which is directly referable to God. God is not only the cause of this consciousness but also its object. Because of the depravity of his nature man vitiates this revelation more or less, for, as Paul says, he holds down the truth in unrighteousness. Shedd teaches that the doctrines of general revelation are sufficient for sinless beings, but they are inadequate for man as a sinner who is in need of redemptive truth. Men may attempt to coordinate the pagan religions with Christianity, but this cannot be done, for the former concern themselves with law while Christianity is redemptive in character; it is gospel.

Written revelation includes the truths of general revelation, the facts and truths acquired by human reflection and observation and those supernaturally inspired truths which relate to man’s redemption from sin. It is through his infallible Spirit that God secures an adequate statement of redemptive truth for us in Holy Writ.

Shedd teaches that God is a substance. What is unsubstantial is nonexisting. Says he, “Whether substance be defined as entity having properties or as entity having power, God is a substance. He has attributes which He manifests in his works of creation and providence, and he has power which he exerts in the universe of matter and mind.” That God is a substance must be maintained in view of the fact that pantheism defines him as an absolute idea. Pantheism in reality negates God, for an idea is mental in character; it is not a being, having objective reality, such as God is. There are those who say that God as an idea acquires reality by positing itself in the finite. This is to deny the distinction between the creating God and the created world. Self-consciousness and self-determination are the two characteristics marking the personality of God.

Concerning the innate idea of God, Shedd, reflecting the teachings of Paul, says “the invisible attributes of God, which are not objects of the senses, and are not cognizable by them, are clearly seen by the mind. The reason is stimulated to act by the notices of the senses, but when thus stimulated it perceives by its own operation truths and facts which the senses never themselves perceive.” It sees God’s everlasting power and divinity. By divinity is meant God’s majesty and excellence. It includes the attributes of God, his knowledge, wisdom, goodness, benevolence, and justice. And yet in spite of God’s revelation of himself in his works and to the consciousness of man, man has become an idolater, having vitiated the knowledge of God by the depravity of his nature. Hence we have atheism, fetishism, monism, animism, pantheism, and what have you. Rationalizations about God have either led to a denial of God as he has revealed himself in his Word or to his identification with the creature. The sinner holds down the truth in the interest of his own unrighteous, ungodly mode of living. Historically monotheism is original. All deviations from the worship of the true God are subsequent. Human depravity is not nullified by the presence of the idea of God in the mind, for God is the author of this knowledge.

To Kant’s objection that the concept of cause, taken from the phenomenal world, does not necessarily argue in favor of the existence of an intelligent First Cause, an infinite God, who created the world, Shedd replies that the “existence of a rational universe implies that of a rational first cause.” It is true of every finite object that it originally was not. Finite objects owe their origin to a cause sufficiently powerful to create them. Hence Shedd argues that “the quantity of being in the effect is not the measure of the quantity of being in the cause.” Nothing less than an omnipotent power can originate anything ex nihilo. Since a cause is prior to an effect and not simultaneous with it, the argument that nature’s existence in time proves nothing more than that it had a temporal author, falls to the ground, according to Shedd. Whatever value we may attach to the cosmological argument, to us it is quite clear that the phenomenal world does not give sinful man the yard stick with which to measure the God of revelation.

Concerning the doctrine of the Trinity to which the author devotes about eighty pages, Shedd says, “It has been constructed on the Nicene basis, but with more reference to the necessary condition of personality and self-consciousness, and the objections to the personality of the Infinite, introduced by modern pantheism.”

God’s attributes are divided into two classes, namely those denoting a passive relation of the essence, as self-existence, simplicity, eternity, immensity, and unity, and those denoting an active operation of the essence, as omnipotence, omniscience, wisdom and goodness. The former are modes of existing; the latter, of energizing. Shedd adopts the time-honored classification of incommunicable and communicable attributes, giving to each class its due in his discussions.

In his chapter on the Divine decrees he says concerning election that it originates in compassion, not complacency, is not partial, is immutable, is irresistible, and is unconditional. He favors the infralapsarian view of the order of the Divine decrees. The Calvinistic doctrines of election and preterition are contrasted with the Arminian views concerning these great truths. With telling effects he sets forth the Scriptural position, showing the inconsistencies of the Arminian position.

In regard to the six days of creation Shedd favors the patristic and mediaeval exegesis, generally speaking, considering them to be periods of time rather than days regulated by the sun. Since physical science is not infallible, Shedd believes that no temporal deliverance of any scientist conflicting with Scripture should be considered fatal to revelation. Like Professor Allis in his work on the Pentateuch, Shedd makes some very pertinent remarks on the subject of the creation of light before the appearance of the sun and moon on the fourth day. Theories antagonistic to creation by Divine fiat, as those of the eternity of matter and of pseudo-evolution, receive considerable attention in this volume and are shown to be logically indefensible and unscriptural.

We believe that the author’s purpose in writing this volume, namely “that it may contribute to strengthen the believer’s confidence in this revelation,” has been and is being achieved in a rich measure.

Jacob H. Bruinoooge
Zeeland Michigan

A CHRISTIAN TRAGEDY


Though in the form of a novel, this is an autobiography. The name of the subject is not disclosed. If memory does not deceive me, the incident of this story has been written up briefly in Gereformeerde Weekblad by Rev. “Voila,” in a department, Belevensissen van een Dominee. It is a story that moves one deeply. It is interestingly written. Once started, you will find it hard to lay it aside.

THE CALVIN FORUM * * * JUNE-JULY, 1953
The story is of a man who has received his death sentence from the doctor. So we are informed in the introduction. Likely he was afflicted with cancer. He had less than a year to live. He harbored a secret in his soul which he must disclose before death overtook him. Together with the progress of the story we are also informed of the progress of the disease. In an epilogue the final struggle is described by his pastor.

This is the story of a man who was an only child, born of worldly parents, was an incurable introvert, had an inferiority complex which he never conquered, was shunned by all his playmates as a child—and he in turn shunned them. However, he commanded a certain measure of respect because his was a brilliant intellect.

He went to schools of higher education and, as could be expected, fell in love with a maiden. The attraction consisted in a similarity of a painting of mother Eve in Paradise which had always intrigued him. She was innocence and purity incarnate. When she responded to his love with a lost faith in women in general and plotted revenge. This revenge was obtained by a moral lapse, induced by a lewd fellow student. Remorse follows and when he meets another maiden with whom he falls deeply in love, he discloses to her his secret because he could not feel at ease in the presence of her purity. But she deeply loves him and they marry. She is a believer, he is not. When the first child is expected, having been aware of the serenity of his wife for some time, he joins her church.

After five years of married life his wife was stricken with fatal illness. This was more than he could bear. When after the funeral he returns to his own room a siege of such violent rebellion overcomes him that he clenches his fists and curses God in the most blasphemous terms, (happily these are not recorded) and feels that his paradise is lost forever. His child enters his room and annoys him. Due to overwrought nerves he strikes the child's face with the back of his hand. A diamond ring scratches the child's face, infection follows and she dies. That is the secret which he bears and does not disclose to anyone until he puts it in the pages of this book.

A period of deepest despair follows and suicide is planned. As he sits by the river bank meditating about the last moments and days, a child runs up to him to divert his attention. The plan is not carried out, and this child now- the happiest children I have ever seen—... They are innocence reincarnate. When she responded to his love with a lost faith in women in general and plotted revenge. This revenge was obtained by a moral lapse, induced by a lewd fellow student. Remorse follows and when he meets another maiden with whom he falls deeply in love, he discloses to her his secret because he could not feel at ease in the presence of her purity. But she deeply loves him and they marry. She is a believer, he is not. When the first child is expected, having been aware of the serenity of his wife for some time, he joins her church.

What to say of this book? It is well written and highly recommended. Especially to all who find it impossible to reconcile God's love with his dealings with men. How many saints have experienced this! The story is a tragedy of the first order, yet one does not become morbid by reading it. It is the story of a struggling soul finding God, but it has nothing of this superficial sentimental hash that is so prevalent in stories of this type. All the religious reactions are normal and psychologically sound. And here we have pastoral psychiatry that is spiritually grounded. The book gives a good hint to all pastors that sometimes you can do more for a person in difficulty by leaving him alone than by action. Once again this reviewer has been reminded that in certain cases lack of action at times may be the best action. Let us see: Does not our Lord so treat Thomas? The danger is not imaginary that today many young pastors think they must operate with psychiatry rather than pastoral theology. The time may not be far distant that the church will more resemble a clinic manned by psychiatric quacks than by shepherds of souls. My respectful salute to the pastor to whom was providentially entrusted the care of this disillusioned soul. Paradise lost became Paradise regained.

C. HUISSEN
Rock Valley, Iowa

EXPERIMENT IN MERCY


What happened in the "Hills of Kentucky"? In the year 1935, one missionary, the author with his wife and two-year old daughter, entered these backwoods hills, alone, unsupported by any human organization, but with an irresistible call within "to seek to prove that the Lord God of Elijah still hears and answers the prayers of His children." The undertaking begins with the renting of a shambled one-room cabin which stood, however, on a three acre "natural park" with seven springs furnishing an uninconvenient but adequate supply of clear, fresh water and all for $2.50 a month.

A few years after the great venture takes form. Its inception is at the point where "Preacher Vogel" receives a "dirty penny post card" with an illiterately written overture to come and get "Zonie's baby" a nine-month old child, bandied about from neighbors to grandparents, to county judge, to teenage mother — a child unwanted, sick, with a corrupted heredity of crime and disease. It is at the same point that Light penetrates Darkness when the "Preacher" considered this base overture as "an offering of an eternal, priceless soul for nothing."

With the adoption of baby Audrey comes the conviction to Mr. Vogel that this was to be his task; and then begins the miraculous development of the Galilean Children's Home located fourteen miles from the town of Corbin, Kentucky. The annals of its growth form in large part, a money-problem story. This is necessary, however, in order to prove that having God Himself as the direct administrator of the Home's finances works wondrously well. Besides providing coverage for all expenses, the Lord added gifts which no gold can buy, as expressed in an objective report of a state-wide investigator of children's welfare home. He says, "You will see that these children are happy ... They are the happiest children I have ever seen ..."

From a literary aspect this book could be improved upon very much. The organization of the story material in many chapters is unpruned, the untrimmed elements obscuring the main issues. But it has one redeeming quality. A strong man has written the book so that the strength and robustness emanating from its pages makes the story readable.

The existence of the Galilean Children's Home has substantiated the author's faith that "the Lord God of Elijah still hears and answers the prayers of His children."

HELEN VAN LAAR
Calvin College
NOTABLE CRITICISM


The name of Katherine Anne Porter suggests an author of admirable short stories but this latest book is made up of material altogether different from that which is found in fiction. It contains three different kinds of subject-matter, critical, personal and particular, and Mexican, as her own classification tells us. In the papers belonging to the first genre Miss Porter gives critical estimates of several writers such as Henry James, Thomas Hardy, Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, and others, of which those of Hardy and Willa Cather are easily the best. Whether directly or indirectly, she also lets the reader feel what are her views on life and art. In those styled personal the author pictures scenes of life and manners in the Southland, particularly Texas and Louisiana, where she was born and reared. In the last named group of papers the author describes the Mexico out of which some of her short stories have come. To say that these are of uneven literary value is but to say what one may expect in almost any collection of papers composed on a variety of topics at different times.

For the art of Katherine Anne Porter one cannot help having unbounded admiration. Her style is simple, clear, and beautiful. It avoids excessive decoration as well as a too severe plainness. It has a strong classical flavor. Believing in a disciplined art, she prefers by far the writing of Henry James with its high regard for the adequate expression of delicate nuances of meaning and beauty to the expansive and romantic effusions of Walt Whitman. The restraint that characterizes all good style one finds superbly illustrated in her manner of writing as well as the expansiveness or the inner urge, that comes from having something to say.

Asked whether organizations or religion or system of thought had in any way affected her writings, Miss Porter virtually gives a negative reply as she declares her only aim in writing to have been the discovery and the understanding of human feelings, human motives, and human relations as far as these can be distilled from the observation of them. But though this be her avowed aim, in her critical estimates of authors she inevitably allows her judgment to be controlled by certain definite ideas as to the artistic handling of life and its moral implications.

Especially does Miss Porter do so in her defense of Thomas Hardy whose novels an English bishop had denounced on moral grounds and T. S. Eliot had characterized as diabolical. If she defends Hardy, she also sets forth her views of God and man. Very consciously she prefers the outlook of Hardy, the "Inquirer" as she calls him, to that of T. S. Eliot, the "Believer." Hardy, she declares, had a keen eye for the ills of man and was very sensitive to the sufferings of his fellowmen. In his endeavor to account for these he, obeying his reason and his conscience, could not accept the explanation of Christianity. Repudiating the doctrine of Original Sin, he nevertheless placed the origin of both good and evil in the human heart, but why this should be so he could not say. The wherefore remained for him a mystery, a riddle. Not only does she defend all this, but she also proceeds to argue that the characters of Hardy's fiction are far superior to those in T. S. Eliot's drama and poetry, whom she calls "worthless" and "immoral." One cannot help concluding that there is more of the pagan than of the Christian view of life in Miss Porter.

Life is hard and man's struggle with malevolent forces is a bitter one, altogether too often resulting in tragedy, as is generally the case in Hardy's novels. Nevertheless man is so constituted that he must, in spite of setbacks and failures try to use his intelligence to do better to triumph over the obstacles besetting him. Tragic experience should not smite him into passive submission or make him a victim of frustration. Miss Porter has imbibed too much of the idea of progress current in the nineteenth century, too much of the evolutionary outlook, to be overwhelmed by the sense of fatalistic despair. But the question will not down, was not Hardy a fatalist?

J. G. Vandern Bosch
Calvin College

A CHRISTIAN NOVELIST


About a hundred years ago Cardinal Newman wrote that it was folly to expect "true" and "pure" Christian literature. "It is a contradiction in terms," he said, "to attempt a sinless Literature of sinful man," and he added that to try it is to produce something "not Literature at all." Seemingly with one eye on Newman and the other on the Catholic tradition in letters, from Dante to Hopkins and Thompson, Francois Mauriac has neatly used an art form in a way properly designable as Christian. As the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1952, he is recognized as having succeeded significantly in being both artist and Christian at once. He is the French Catholic novelist who writes literature, something, that is, which is catholic in appeal and neither tract nor sermon. Mauriac wears a badge, but totes no stick.

Mauriac recognizes a problem here, of course. In his God and Mammon he answers Andre Gide's charge that he falls prey to a "reassuring compromise" by which he can love God without losing sight of Mammon." In other words, Mauriac has confronted what is really Newman's question— whether Christian literature is by the very nature of the artistic medium an impossibility. And his answer is typified in his chef-d'oeuvre in fiction, The Desert of Love, first published in 1925 and recently enjoying various reprints.

Raymond Courreges, principal character of The Desert of Love, sheds his adolescent innocence and declares his freedom. He looks for realization of his human will to possess and to love in Maria Cross, ill-famed as seductive while she is but seeking blindly for a love she cannot find. Raymond meets tragic surprise in learning that his restless father also tries to exploit Maria; and both soon discover their freedom is bondage, their free will a burden, and that the passions of the soul meet only stupefaction in the flesh to which they looked for gratification. Mauriac works by implication and by suggestion; the reader is left to draw the only conclusion: love in the absence of Love is a desert— barren, frustrating, enervating.

The Desert of Love is perhaps better described as a "cosmic" than as a "psychological" novel. In any case, Raymond and Maria illustrate how character in good dimension is often attained in a modern novel at the price of attenuated plot; the same is true of Brigitte Pian and Abbé Calou in Mauriac's Woman of the Pharisees. But if Mauriac writes
a novel which is in this sense modern, he does it well. There is no trace of jejune dialogue or discontinuity. His acute insight into psychology of sin, coupled with a wisdom of the ways of men and of God’s way of dealing with them, helps to give his work that texture of authenticity which distinguishes it from a more pedestrian Evelyn Waugh or a more Jesuitical Graham Greene.

Mauriac admits regard for what has been called the “problem of the other,” and he believes Christian fiction can cover the frantic efforts to possess. But these efforts alone—for the state of peace with God—the novelist cannot show; “it is the mark of our slavery and our wretchedness that we can ... paint a faithful portrait only of the passions.” Though we may question Mauriac’s idea of the nature and limits of a Christian novel, we must admit that he has seen the sinner, and has seen Christ; and time will tell his success in artistically representing what he saw. The recent honor paid him would indicate he has not wholly flouted nature’s modesty.

But to speak of Mauriac without speaking of Pascal is worse than talking of Thomas Mann without mentioning Goethe. The Pascalian accent is unmistakable. “Passion,” for example, is a key word in The Desert of Love, which reads not unlike a commentary on the Discourse on the Passions of Love. And although it might be inaccurate to call Mauriac the Jansenist that Pascal was, he does speak of his own “instinctive Jansenism,” and his recent The Stumbling Block makes it plain that his membership in the Catholic community is not without dissent.

It is clear that Forum readers interested in that complex of problems relative to Christian literature will want to acquaint themselves with Mauriac’s work (which includes also poetry, drama and biography). That acquaintance comes easily with the low-cost, unabridged reprint of The Desert of Love by the Bantam Books organization.

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THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION


That this significant work should be reviewed by a non-theologian seems almost incredible. The doctrine of regeneration has occupied a front-line position in theological discussion for some time. This reviewer will not be so presumptuous to think himself competent to praise Dr. De Groot’s contribution to the controversy. It is not as a theologian, therefore, that I want to make some comment on this very fine study. Rather as a student of educational theory and practice, or what we formerly called pedagogics, do I interest myself in this treatise. The meaning of the new life, of the changed heart for the upbringing of children of the household of faith is an unexplored area in Christian education. A better understanding of what God has to say about the new life in Christ, with reference to human motivation is of fundamental significance to the student of Christian education.

One is first of all impressed with the major chapter headings of this book. Following the Introduction they are as follows: The eternal ground of regeneration; The council of God the Father; The historical ground of regeneration; The redemption by God the Son; The author of regeneration; The Holy Spirit; Regeneration is a real change of the heart of man; The various stages of regeneration; The first stage of regeneration; The radical change of heart; The second stage of regeneration; The progressing renewal of a life; The third stage of regeneration; The consummation of regeneration.

It is clear from these chapter headings that the author treats the subject of regeneration as the progress of the new life in Christ Jesus from the radical transformation of heart by the Holy Spirit to the final consummation when the transformed person is placed in the new heaven and the new earth.

In renewing the life of the sin-cursed person, the Holy Spirit places him into vital fellowship with God in Christ. The Spirit of God uses various means of bringing this about. But whatever means the Spirit uses, the Word, that is Christ, is always the mediating reality. Ingrafted in Christ as the vine the sinner is placed into vital fellowship with the Father. It is in this fellowship of love that the needs of the spirit, of the person, become activated and he, the person, reaches out in life for that which builds him up in the service of God.

The ground for the renewing of the heart of man rests eternally in the council of God and historically in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The initial work is that of the Holy Spirit according to the purpose of God. The new life is the life of faith. It is in faith that the person actively participates in his progressive renewal unto glorification. No one is saved without this faith, not even a little child. It is in this fact of faith that we must find the basis for educational theory and practice appropriate for a regenerated life.

I would urge every Christian teacher to read this book if he reads Dutch with some facility. Some one should translate it for our Christian teachers. Our Christian teachers should be thoroughly grounded in Bible doctrine, in theology. Without this foundation Christian teaching in the classroom is going to be meager and shallow, even in the kindergarten. A Christian teacher needs the perspective of this book to understand his task in the Christian school.

A better understanding of the Scriptural teaching concerning regeneration should help greatly to purge from our hearts and minds classical influences in education which are still reminiscent of a human autonomy. In the final analysis there is but one liberating power in the Christian life. This power is the new life in Christ Jesus. It comprises all of the Christian’s life that is worth living. There is nothing common about this. It is all special. There is but one grace for the Christian. It is the grace of the new life, the life of faith. An educational theory and practice for our schools wholly rooted in this grace will give us distinctively Christian education.

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