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the **CALVIN**
ORUM

Professor Van Til's Apologetics

**The Calvinist and
Social Responsibility**

The Minister's Reading Habits

Correspondence

Book Reviews

VOL. XIX, NO. 4

**TWO DOLLARS
A YEAR**

NOVEMBER, 1953

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Professor Van Til's Apologetics

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Part III. God and Human Knowledge

THERE are a few special passages in Van Til on which comment is necessary, but the comment is not useful until these passages are presented in full. I regret that so much space will be given over to quotation, but these passages have a special importance and are unusually difficult to understand. All of them have to do with Van Til's way of distinguishing between Christian and non-Christian logic.

I

Hodge says somewhere that human reason is entitled to insist that revelation must be able to pass the test of being free from self-contradiction; man has the right to refuse belief to the contradictory. Van Til takes this as an occasion to "improve" upon his predecessor. He says that it raises the question of human predication, i.e. of man's ability to make statements, and adds that with respect to the basis of predication theism and anti-theism differ totally. "Theism holds that all predication presupposes the existence of God as a self-conscious being, while anti-theism holds that predication is possible without any reference to God. This at once gives to the terms *is* and *is not* quite different connotations. For the anti-theist, these terms play against the background of bare possibility. Hence *is* and *is not* may very well be reversed. The anti-theist has, in effect, denied the very law of contradiction, inasmuch as the law of contradiction, to operate at all, must have its foundation in the nature of God. On the other hand, the anti-theist, from his standpoint, will not hesitate to say that the theist has denied the law of contradiction. For him the belief in an absolute, self-conscious God is the rejection of the law of contradiction, inasmuch as such a belief does not permit man to test the revelation of God by the law of contradiction as standing above that revelation. The conception of an absolutely self-conscious God definitely limits the field of the possible to that which is determined by the plan of God. . . . If then there is such a fundamentally exclusive difference of opinion on the question as to what the law of contradiction itself is between theists and non-theists, it is quite out of the question to speak of the law of contradiction as something that all men agree upon. All men do agree upon it as a formal principle; but the two

classes of men differ on the question of its foundation and application" (*I.S. Theol.* 38).

I comment as follows. (1) Van Til does not define the law of contradiction. How then am I to tell how what he thinks it is, differs from what someone else thinks it is. He supplies a word, but not a statement of what it is to which the word applies. Thus the whole section quoted is "at loose ends." (2) The law of contradiction is usually stated in a symbolic form something like this, "A cannot be both B and non-B." This is a "formal principle." It says nothing about what particular things exist or what properties they possess; it says only that, e.g., if a thing is a circle it is not also not a circle, and that any argument is invalid if any term in it is so used that in one use it means B and in another use it means non-B. And Van Til says that all men do agree on this formal principle. If he is correct, they all agree on the law of contradiction; and the remainder of the passage must be about something else—not the law of contradiction, though Van Til uses this term as a name for this other topic, whatever it may be.

(3) Van Til himself says that theists and anti-theists disagree on the "foundation and application" of the law of contradiction. This must mean, I suppose, that they differ on the question of God's existence. Of course, they *must* disagree on that topic if (a) the terms "theist" and "anti-theist" mean what they seem to mean, and if (b) the term "God" is defined as a theist defines it. But does a theist hold that "all predication presuppose the existence of God?" Yes, if this form of words means only that unless God created me I would not exist and could not make statements. No, if it means that I cannot make a statement and verify its truth unless I first check my statement with a like statement being made by God. To suppose that I have to check with God's knowledge before I know the truth of such a statement as, "It is now 10:00 o'clock P.M., Eastern Standard Time, on June 4, 1953, in Lexington, Kentucky," is to fabricate a fantasy. I add here, with an eye to a later passage of Van Til's, that as I verify the truth of this statement, I am not making myself, or man, the "final reference point in predication" (whatever this phrase may mean). If it is 10:00 o'clock here now, *that* is the reference point, and none is needed besides. (4) Now, what is meant by Van Til's statement that "anti-theism holds that predication is possible without any reference to

NOTE: This is Prof. Jesse De Boer's third and final article on the new Apologetics.

indicates J de B doesn't know what he's talking about

God?" Perhaps only that the anti-theist denies God's existence. This does *not* give "is" and "is not" different connotations. The theist and anti-theist could not *differ* on God's existence unless "is" and "is not" *mean* the same for both of them. I could at this point play a game in the way Van Til suggests, by reversing "is" and "is not" or their equivalents in sentences uttered by the anti-theist, and thereby produce *agreement* between the theist and the anti-theist on God's existence. "God, as you define Him, does not exist," says the anti-theist to the theist. Van Til suggests that the copula in this sentence may be replaced by its contradictory. So the anti-theist really says, "God *does* exist." What is Van Til saying, besides the point, true by definition, that the theist and anti-theist differ on God's existence. I fear that I can't guess the answer.

(5) It is misleading to say that the anti-theist denies the law of contradiction because he denies God's existence. Does he say that a circle is also not a circle? Is Van Til merely raising dust? Of course, he takes away most of the force of his statement by qualifying it with the phrase "in effect." And to say that the anti-theist denies the law of contradiction because he insists on the right to test for consistency a revelation which claims to be divine (there have been several "revelations" which needed such testing), is to say nothing like the statement that the anti-theist denies the law of contradiction. Incidentally, how could one communicate if he did deny the law of contradiction in the sense of saying that a circle is not a circle (assuming that the definition of "circle" is the same in both uses)?

(6) There is no use for the statement that the anti-theist, by denying God's existence, sets the law of contradiction against the background of bare possibility. Does Van Til mean to say that if I denied God's existence I would be committed to believing that I could square a circle? Of course, he does not specify what the anti-theist is committed to. And to say that the theist is able to limit the possible by reference to God's plan is not to help the theist predict tomorrow's weather or the discovery of new drugs for treating cancer. Here again Van Til uses words not to inform but to frighten.

II

At this point I bring forward a set of Van Til's ideas which belong together, though I have already called attention to one of them. In the preceding paper I quoted a passage from *I. S. Theol.* 39 which contains the following sentence: "If we are to have *coherence* in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience to the eternally coherent experience of God." This sentence means to say that no statement of mine is true unless it corresponds with a statement made by God. Now, there are several passages in which Van Til states his view of the character of the alternative to this

doctrine about what makes a statement true. The alternative means ultimately that there is no basis for making statements, for predication. ". . . we should challenge the wisdom of this world. It must be shown to be utterly destructive of predication in any field" (*Challenge* 40). The alternative also means that man is made "the final reference point in predication" (this phrase occurs in *I. S. Theol.* 172). Unless, that is, I start from the sovereign God as the foundation of the being of all creatures and of the laws of logic or reason, I am reduced to saying that rational laws and principles of being are common to God and man and that I am ultimate or autonomous because I share in being and in reason with God. I now quote several of Van Til's statements on which the above analysis are based.

Man, he says, "must begin and end his system of thought either with himself or with God. And since Aristotle does not begin with God but with man (that is, with himself), he ends his system with man (that is, with himself)" (*Challenge* 8, Van Til's parentheses). "The Roman Catholic starts his philosophy with the idea of 'being' in general" (*Challenge* 9). "The true Protestant refuses to say as much as one word about 'being in general.' To speak about 'being in general' is, in effect, to deny the self-sufficiency of God. It is to subject God to a standard that is above Him. It is to shift man's final allegiance away from God to an abstract principle of being and logic. And this in turn amounts to shifting man's allegiance away from God to man himself" (*Challenge* 10). In Romanist thought, because of its affirmation of human freedom and its use of the concept 'being in general', "God and man are in their freedom confronted with a necessity of the logic that dwells in being. It is abstract rationality rather than the nature of God with which man deals when he engages in the logical manipulation of the facts of the universe" (*Challenge* 13). Van Til goes on to say that Romanism tacitly affirms the ultimacy of the human mind, that man's mind shares with God "in the same abstract generality of being and of logic" (*Challenge* 14).

I select for comment only a few of the notions found in the paragraph above. (1) For the present I pass over Van Til's statements about Roman Catholic theology. (2) Van Til has never provided a single good reason for defining truth as correspondence with the nature and knowledge of God. Of course, if I am making true statements about God's nature and knowledge, my statements will be true because, or in the sense that, they assert what is the case in this instance, viz. God's nature and knowledge. But then a better definition of truth, if the correspondence theory is to be used, would state that it consists in correspondence with whatever object the statement is about. (At this point it may be helpful to remember that Van Til often uses idealist language in speaking of what truth is). A

To be true it must, however, correspond with God's determining of the distance.

statement about the distance of Louisville from Lexington is not made true by correspondence with God's knowledge of the distance. This distance itself justifies the statement, and to verify or test the statement one checks the distance, by standard procedures for measuring distance; one does not lay the statement alongside a statement made by God. Van Til seems to be forgetting one aspect of the doctrine of creation, viz. that God's creatures have definite properties and that man is equipped to notice them.

Should be limited.

(3) Let me put a question to Van Til which is justified by his way of talking about truth. If one of my statements is made true by correspondence with God's knowledge, if, that is, a statement is made true by agreement with a higher level statement, what must God's statements agree with in order to be true? With other statements of His own? And these with others? If every true statement is a copy or duplicate of another true statement, then Van Til is merely offering a new twist to what some folk mean by Platonism. It is necessary to deny Van Til's entire account of what makes a statement true if one is to avoid absurdity.

(4) His talk of logical law being, on the non-Christian (and Romanist) assumption, an abstraction from both God and man, and of rational principle as an abstraction standing above God, is a product of a habit of fabricating difficulties for an ulterior purpose. Similar to the present fabrication is his view of the difficulty about universals and particulars which I have analyzed in the preceding paper. Van Til seems to be reifying laws instead of bearing in mind that they are general characters of things; he is Platonizing in the worst sense of the term. Incidentally, Van Til himself appears to be subjecting God to logical law. He writes, "God did not, *Because he could not*, look up to an abstract principle of Truth above himself in order, in accordance with it, to fashion the world" (*Apol.* 10, my italics). It is the character of whatever object a statement is about, whether God or distances, that justifies a policy of avoiding contradictory statements about the object.

(5) Finally, I deny that non-Christians hold that man is "the final reference point in predication." This phrase is impressive; there is no doubt that it awes the reader more than it informs. Non-Christians deny the Christian God (this is a mere tautology, unless "deny" can mean "know about but resist"—as may well be the case), but there is no necessity in virtue of which they cannot measure a distance as it is. I suspect that Van Til is operating with idealist and pragmatic assumptions when he talks as if (a) no statement is true unless it copies another and (b) unless man makes his statements conform to God's statements he has to make them conform to other statements made by men. Whatever assumption he is employing, I deny that the non-Christian cannot conform a statement to a natural object and test its truth by appealing to the object.

He himself is not the reference point, whatever this may mean. There is no sense in saying that a non-Christian has to translate the sentence "The grass is wet" into the sentence "I think the grass is wet."

III

There is a set of passages in which Van Til tries to show that the non-Christian, because, as Van Til alleges, he has a false notion of the law of contradiction, cannot account for or deal with the occurrence of novelty. If the law of contradiction is said to rest upon God's nature and knowledge, Van Til says, the man who says so can meet new facts and, so to speak, do justice to their novelty. If, however, a man says the reverse about the law of contradiction, i.e. if he says this law is an abstraction independent of God, then new facts lose their novelty. "In that case facts lose their novelty for man when he sees that they work according to the law of contradiction" (*I. S. Theol.* 39). At another place Van Til says, "There is false staticism involved in all non-Christian forms of thought. If one allows that anywhere at all man deals with facts or laws that are not based upon the self-conscious, everlasting self-affirmation of God, one is to that extent bound to a static or fatalistic view of reality. There can be nothing new on a non-Christian basis" (*I. S. Theol.* 171).

As I read this I remember an earlier quotation from Van Til where he says, "Science" thinks that it deals with a stream of time out of which the absolutely novel proceeds constantly" (*C. T. Evid.* 57). The difficulty with this last sentence is that one has only Van Til's word for what "Science" thinks!" (Incidentally, this is very bad grammar: science is not a conscious agent.) Also, the context of this sentence makes clear that Van Til classifies "Science" under non-Christian thought, so that this sentence hardly agrees with the statement, quoted near the end of the preceding paragraph, that the non-Christian fails to acknowledge the novelty of facts when he notices that they conform to the law of contradiction. More basically, Van Til is simply misinterpreting both the non-Christian and the law of contradiction. The non-Christian has no more difficulty with novelty than Van Til has, and the law of contradiction simply is not a predictive formula serving to coach one on what to expect from one day to the next. It might be hard for me to acknowledge that the cow I see today is the horse I saw yesterday, but the law of contradiction is not what produces the difficulty. When a horse is a horse, it is not also a cow; that, perhaps, is a way in which I can interpret (or exemplify) the law of contradiction. If a horse becomes a cow, it would be silly of me, by appealing to the law of contradiction, to talk as if nothing new has come to be. As for Van Til's statement that the non-Christian is committed to false staticism (just what is this, and how does it differ from true staticism?), I judge that no one has use

for it. Perhaps Van Til is again appealing to Bradley's fallacious argument against change; plenty of non-Christians have seen through that.

Van Til, however, has more to say on this topic. ". . . it is only by stressing the comprehensiveness and the inexhaustible character of the idea of revelation that the processes of learning and history have genuine significance. If man is made the final reference point in predication, knowledge cannot get under way, and if it could get under way it could not move forward. That is to say, in all non-Christian forms of epistemology there is first the idea that to be understood a fact must be understood exhaustively. It must be reducible to a part of a system of timeless logic. But man himself and the facts of his experience are subject to change. How is he ever to find within himself an *a priori* resting point? He himself is on the move. . . . Every effort of man to find one spot that he can exhaustively understand either in the world of fact about him or in the world of experience within, is doomed to failure. If we do not with Calvin presuppose the self-contained God back of the self-conscious act of the knowing mind of man we are doomed to be lost in an endless and bottomless flux.

"But granted that man could get started on the way to learning by experience on a non-Christian basis he could add nothing new to what he already knows. There would be nothing new. If it was known it would be no longer new. As long as it was new it would be unknown. Thus the old dilemma that either man must know everything and he need ask no questions or he knows nothing and therefore cannot ask questions remains unsolved except on the basis of the Reformed Faith. To affirm the incomprehensibility of God is in the interest of saving men from scepticism. By presupposing the God of eternal self-affirmation man can get on the way to learning because he knows God when he appears upon the scene. He has knowledge of self for what he really is. He also can add to his knowledge since the new facts that he learns about are already known and not new to God. Therefore they are related to what man already knows in true coherence" (*I. S. Theol.* 171-172).

This piece of dialectic contains more errors and fallacies than I have time to notice. (1) What is meant by "true coherence?" Van Til does not say. (2) Why is Van Til so exercised about "saving men from scepticism?" Is this a reason for accepting the Reformed faith? Sometimes Van Til writes as if he is more anxious to establish human knowledge than to defend the truth of Reformed Christianity; though he often displays the opposed interest also. (3) How does one go about recognizing a non-Christian form of epistemology? Christians and non-Christians have agreed often enough on what knowledge is and on methods for obtaining knowledge, though they must, by definition, disagree on the list of objects known by man (though this does not hold if

"non-Christian" may mean "man who knows God but resists Him"). (4) It is simply false to say that in every theory of knowledge offered by non-Christians it is stated that nothing is known unless it is known exhaustively or that nothing is known until everything is known. Plato and Aristotle both denied the thesis which, it may be presumed, Van Til attributes to them. The talk about "a system of timeless logic" is another case of idealist borrowings, and I refrain from further comment on it. (5) The fact that cows change and that I change does not mean that I cannot at a given moment make a true statement about the state of a cow at a given moment. Van Til appears, in making up the puzzle about man's needing an "*a priori* resting point" if he is to make a true statement, to be making the old blunder of Hegel, that of supposing that because a true statement about a past freely chosen action is necessarily true the action itself was necessary and not free. Van Til's demand for an eternal system of statements is exactly of a piece with idealistic logic and metaphysics. (Incidentally, would Van Til please point to an "*a priori* resting point" so that I can look at it?) (6) Calvin certainly said that God exists as the creative cause of all finite existence and operations; it is equally certain that he did not appeal to idealistic logic in order to provide divine duplicates of human statements. (7) The puzzle about how a man can learn what he does not already know is not insoluble; in fact, it is an artificial puzzle made up by people who have first committed themselves to arbitrary assumptions. Of course, when Van Til brings the puzzle forward, I suppose it would be impolite to charge him with denying that my child can learn (or has learned) that the light goes on and off when I push the switch on the wall. But if this is not what Van Til is denying, what is he denying—or saying, for that matter? That the infant cannot learn about the light switch or his own name unless he relates these bits of information to God? Does the child need to know God, and himself as God's creature, and his own learned information as duplicates of God's information, before he can learn what he did not know a day before? Van Til's puzzle is a fabrication. And certainly a philosopher is out of his depth if only the Reformed faith can rescue him out of such puzzles. One becomes suspicious when an apologist constructs just those puzzles that give him occasion to appeal to Reformed belief. And finally, the Reformed "solution" proposed by Van Til (I am far from conceding that this is, or that there is at all, a "Reformed" solution) does not succeed. The puzzle seems to concern how I am to relate *my* new information to *my* old information. If there is a puzzle here, what good does it do me to learn that God has solved it? That doesn't alter my condition. I would still be puzzled. In fact, I would now have a further piece of information to exacerbate my difficulty.

IV

My discussion of Van Til's views of the knowledge of the natural man will be brief. I have already remarked on several of his views which bear on this topic.

I quote first a short passage which requires little comment. Van Til says, "Non-Christians think of reality as one whole, inclusive of God and man, and consequently they think of Reason as everywhere virtually the same, whether in God or in man. Human reason is said or assumed to be potentially divine" (*I. S. Theol.* 21). This might be useful if it were more accurate to fact and clear in its intent. I suppose that Mohammedans are non-Christians; but it is wrong to describe them as Van Til describes non-Christians. But suppose the term "non-Christians" is limited to anti-theists. Since they deny God's existence, they would hardly bother to say that human reason is divine or that reason is the same in God and man. Then Van Til is applying to them a form of words which they themselves would have no use for.

"The non-Christian takes for granted that we can intelligently think of this universe as being self-existent and as having its meaning in itself. The non-Christian takes for granted that the world of our senses can be known truly, if at all, even if we do not know whether God exists" (*I. S. Theol.* 23). While it is false to say that the finite world is self-existent, what is gained by speaking as if this view is unintelligent or unintelligible? I can think of what this theory means. To refute it one has to point out those characters of creatures which indicate that they are creatures. Augustine and Thomas worked heroically on this problem; Austin Farrer and E. L. Mascall are doing so today, but not Van Til! As to Van Til's last remark, I have contended that a non-Christian can make true statements about the ordinary properties of sensible or natural objects—after all, things *have* these properties and man *can* notice them without at the same time attending to creatureliness. One does not have to know God's relation to apples to learn how long it takes Winesaps to ripen. I contend that the non-Christian is not, in virtue of being non-Christian, disabled from doing science or acquiring ordinary empirical knowledge.

Of course, the anti-theist is wrong about God, and this is of capital importance. But, supposing that one has in mind a man who denies the God of theistic belief, what is the good of saying that he places the being and knowledge of God on a level with man's being and knowledge, that he correlates man and God (*Apol.* 9)? How can he correlate man with something that, in his view, does not exist? I complain once more of Van Til's vague language.

What does the natural man know? "We are well aware of the fact that non-Christians have a great deal of knowledge about this world which is true as far as it goes. . . . This has always been a difficult

point" (*I. S. Theol.* 26). Well, it has not always been as difficult as Van Til has made it. To understand the problem, says Van Til, the Christian must be careful not to relax his hold on a fact which may be phrased by describing the natural man as a rebel or covenant breaker, and on what the fact implies. (Some people give the name "antithesis" to this fact; I call attention to Van Til's applying ethical terms to it.) He goes on to say about this fact, "This implies that he (the natural man) knows nothing truly as he ought to know it. It means, therefore, that the "natural man" is not only basically mistaken in his notions about religion and God, but is as basically mistaken in his notions about the atoms and the laws of gravitation. From this ultimate point of view the "natural man" knows nothing truly" (*I.S. Theol.* 26). "So far as he works in terms of his own principle, the natural man misinterprets all things, flowers no less than God" (*I. S. Theol.* 27).

A good deal of this is a play on words. What is the bearing on man's knowledge of the application to man of such ethical terms as rebel or covenant breaker? A bit of analysis is required here but not forthcoming. Again, the natural man has knowledge; no mistake about that, this knowledge is even *true!* It is true as far as it goes. How far is that? He has knowledge, but he is mistaken about atoms and flowers. In what respect? Either Van Til avoids the task of being specific, or else he is saying only that the natural man fails to recognize the created status of atoms, flowers, etc. To say then that the natural man "knows nothing as he ought to know it" is to say only that, while he has ordinary knowledge and science, he has not Christian beliefs about God and His relation to the world. Now, of course, this isn't news; besides, as I have said several times before, the non-Christian's error here does not indicate that he has not science. Christians are just as liable to make blunders in science as are non-Christians, and there is no remedy but to try again and do better.

Yet, after saying that "basically" the non-Christian "knows nothing truly," Van Til goes on to say that in some profound sense, "deep down in his mind" (*Apol.* 58), non-Christian knows exactly the same things about God as does the Christian (not *all* the things that the Christian knows, but at least *some* of them). After all, St. Paul said *something* like this in his *Epistle to the Romans*. "The intellect of fallen man may, as such, be keen enough. It can therefore formally understand the Christian position" (*Apol.* 44). This is obviously the case: Christian doctrine is not opaque in its rudiments, it is not nonsense. "The natural man has knowledge, true knowledge of God, in the sense that God through nature and man's own consciousness impresses his presence on man's attention. So definitely and inescapably has he done this, that, try as he may, man cannot escape knowing God. It is this point that Paul stresses in the first two chapters of *Romans*.

Man has the sense of deity indelibly engraved upon him. He knows God and he knows himself and the world as God's revelation. This is objective revelation to him" (*I. S. Theol.* 27). "Paul makes bold to claim that all men know deep down in their hearts that they are creatures of God and have sinned against God their Creator and their Judge" (*Challenge* 5). In other words, all creatures bear the mark of creatureliness, and no man can fail to notice this. Speaking of the mind of man *as such*, Van Til says that "it is naturally in contract with God's revelation. It is surrounded by nothing but revelation. It is itself revelational. It cannot naturally be conscious of itself without being conscious of its creatureliness. . . . Calvin speaks of this as man's inescapable sense of deity" (*Apol.* 56). When Van Til says (*Apol.* 44) that unbelievers have what Hodge calls "mere cognition" but not "true knowledge" of God, I suppose that "mere cognition" means "knowledge" and that "true knowledge" means "knowing and loving." If I am right, and my interpretation seems to agree with Van Til's describing the opposition of "natural man" to God (the antithesis) in ethical terms, there is no difference with respect to certain essentials, on Van Til's own showing, between Christians and non-Christians in respect of their capacity to know what is the case, both as to nature and as to God Himself.

The reader ought to be as shocked as I am by Van Til's turnabout on this question of what the natural man knows. I have presented passage after passage in which Van Til argues at length and in a variety of ways that the non-Christian "knows nothing truly," that he has no basis for predication. As soon as I turn to the few passages in which Van Til discusses directly the natural man's knowledge, I am told that every man is made in God's image and is bound to notice that every finite object is a creature of God. What was the point or purpose of all the passages of the former type? Is Van Til playing a game with the help of an equivocal use of the term "know?" Does he intend in the end to say that since the natural man does know God and creation he also is equipped to do science and to make true statements? I confess to being baffled, and I have no means of guessing what Van Til intends. I present what he says and invite the reader to look closely at it and to reflect on it.

To conclude this section I offer two brief remarks. (1) It is true, of course, that the natural man resists God, rebels against Him, refuses to glorify Him as God. But there is nothing at all in this to justify a single part of Van Til's overly ambitious project of undermining the non-Christian's knowledge by arguing that the non-Christian has no basis for predication. There is *no* validity in *any* of those arguments of Van Til which are intended to show that the Bible and Christianity must be presupposed if science and ordinary knowledge are to be true, and that the non-Christian is unable to make true state-

ments. (2) If Van Til means to say, in what he finally says about what the natural man knows, that the natural man knows science *because* in some profound sense he knows God, he is again mistaken. Just as natural science does not depend for its truth upon the scientist's holding correct opinions about God and Scripture, so the natural man's knowledge of God is not what enables him to do science successfully. Whether Van Til does mean this I cannot say. Still, I am entirely convinced that there is an enormous mistake at the center of his apologetics.

V

I had intended to write one more paper, but in view of the extent to which I have already taxed the patience of readers of the *Forum*, I have decided not to do so. I think that my three papers have presented and examined some fundamental views of Professor Van Til. The projected paper would have discussed Van Til's inaccuracies in restating the views of important writers of various periods, including Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and the able contemporary French scholar, Professor Etienne Gilson. My notes on passages in which Van Til fails to state correctly and fairly the views of these people, and of others too, provide matter for a long essay. But the chief purpose of the projected paper was more practical or pedagogical than theoretical (viz. to warn readers of Van Til against taking him as an authority on other thinkers, to impress on them their responsibility to check his statements with the actual writings which he misrepresents, and to remind them that it is dangerous to shore up the Reformed faith, or any belief whatever, by bad scholarship). Thus I am content to conclude these papers with a few remarks indicating topics which would have been discussed fully in the fourth paper and with a general observation at the end.

As for Van Til's treatment of Aristotle, let me remind the reader of a point made in the first paper. It is indeed odd to notice that, after speaking of Aristotle's God as an "It" and as no God at all, Van Til then *defines* the Christian God in the very words of Aristotle. Further, I am convinced that Van Til does not show that he understands Aristotle's use of the concept of being. Time and again he accuses Aristotle (and Roman Catholics) of positing something called "being in general" or "abstract being" as a principle which is shared between God and creatures (e.g. *Apol.* 8, *I. S. Theol.* 211-214, *Challenge* 8-21). Aristotle, of course, did not "know" or use the doctrine of creation, and this has serious consequences. (I am as convinced as Van Til is that Christian theology and philosophy have to depart from Aristotle's metaphysics. I am equally convinced that my conception of Christianity suffers, i.e. I hinder my own understanding of my faith, if it is placed in contrast with a distortion of Aristotle.) Aristotle simply did not conceive of "being" as an ordinary univocal or generic concept. He insisted,

and more than once, that being is not a genus. He did not talk of being as if it were the most general and abstract property which may be predicated of everything in the universe. In fact, it was Aristotle who first explained the analogous character of basic metaphysical concepts, and early Christian theologians profited from his work. It is unfair and incorrect to characterize his concept by using the term "being in general." The same critique holds of Van Til's comments on Thomas' use of 'being.'

Furthermore, Van Til is entirely wrong when he states (*I. S. Theol.* 165) that Romanism does not take seriously the doctrine of creation (see also *Challenge* 11, 13, 19). He is wrong if I am permitted to check his dictum with the *Summa Theologica*. I beg Van Til, and also folk who have taken his dicta on Romanism as reliable summaries, to take the trouble to read a few sentences from Thomas' *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Questions 44 and 45 (on creation), and Questions 22 and 23 (on providence and predestination). I predict that they will find Thomas using language with model clarity and simplicity; they will also find that he is perfectly capable of elaborating the fundamental Christian conceptions of God and His absolute sovereignty. Van Til accuses Romanism of refusing to acknowledge God's sovereignty because of its desire to assert the freedom or autonomy or ultimacy of man; he adds that human freedom amounts to independence from God (*I. S. Theol.* 165, *Challenge* 13, 16). Again he is entirely wrong. I refer again to the passage in Thomas listed above; they will show, if Thomas may speak for Romanism, that Van Til is wrong. In fact, the *Westminster Confession* (Article II of Chapter V) suffices to show that he wrongly interprets human freedom as implying a limitation of God's sovereignty.

And finally, I confess to being baffled by the way in which Van Til, after quoting some lines from Gilson, misstates what Gilson says (*I. S. Theol.* 221-224). Gilson writes that reason, as employed by Aristotle, *did not* make the distinction between essence and existence which become central in the

reflections of Augustine and Aquinas on the contingency of the entire being of finite things. Van Til comments in the following way: You see, reason *cannot* deal with existence but only with essences, and Gilson himself says so. Well, this is marvelous! Van Til quotes Gilson and immediately distorts what Gilson says, equating Gilson's *did not* with *cannot*. If reason *cannot* do something, then obviously neither Augustine, nor Thomas, nor Van Til can do it. Yet they do it! What happens here is a trifle worse than a verbal slip.

Now my final observation. I confess that my criticisms of Van Til have been sharply worded. Usually this asperity of expression has been directed at ideas and arguments and should not be read as addressed to a person. On occasion, however, I *have* directed sharp words at the person, as at the end of the foregoing paragraph. Let him who takes offense make a thorough analysis of the statements and arguments of Van Til and of the views of the men he so unjustly attacks! I am convinced, not only that Van Til's apologetics is riddled with glaring ambiguities, with bald fallacies, and with misinterpretations of the thought of other men, but also that his writings are capable of damaging the intellectual habits of those who read them. Indeed, I have witnessed the existence of that effect in certain young theological students. Scholarship suffers when great texts are distorted. The Reformed scholar is in peril of presumption if it is hinted and alleged that now for the first time a purely Reformed theology is being developed. And to cap it all, the purist version is impure, tainted not only with fallacious reasoning, but, what is still worse, with the logical and metaphysical legerdemain of absolute idealism. I suggest that Van Til's apologetics, because it does not grow out of painstaking and complete mastery of great Christian texts, ancient, medieval, and modern, is twisted and victimized by the categories and techniques of the idealists whose works he read in his student days.

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A Calvinistic Social Ethic

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IT has been suggested that the Christian Reformed Church has emerged from an era of isolation into a period of adjustment. During the years in which the small but strongly cohesive group of Dutch Reformed believers was consolidating its foothold in this country, it guarded its religious heritage zealously. As the recipient of a system of religious thought based on God's Word and elaborated by continental theologians into a body of principles designed to provide a comprehensive view of life, it regarded as one of its chief tasks the preservation of that system of religious and moral ideas. During the years of isolation the task of preserving the historic Christian faith was simplified, perhaps, by the lack of reciprocal influence between the small Reformed community and the larger "American" society. In the current period, however, the problem of preserving the received doctrine will undoubtedly be considerably more difficult.

Not only will the task of protecting the rich religious heritage be intensified, however. A related problem will be encountered as the traditional principles, the precepts regarding one's attitudes toward the world in which he lives, are subjected to review in the new setting. An integral part of the system of thought to be preserved was the idea of a comprehensive view of life, the idea that the Calvinistic doctrines contained an ethical imperative and a moral guide for the Christian in every avenue of activity. During the present period of adjustment, in which the members of the Reformed community have been breaking out of the cocoons of separation, this idea, too, will surely undergo considerable testing.

I

One of the aspects of this comprehensive ethic has already become the subject of concern and controversy; namely, the question of the role of the believer in the society in which he moves, the relation of the Christian to the person with whom he comes into contact in his work, in his social activities, in every day affairs. There has been evidence in the writings in our Church papers of a lively interest in this question. Unfortunately, however, the comprehensive Calvinistic ethic seems to provide the basis for widely divergent interpretations. There is a current position which claims that the Christian must not associate cooperatively with his fellow man; and there is a view that he must not dissociate himself from his contemporary. There is a conten-

tion that the Christian has one obligation toward his fellow man, the unbeliever, and another duty toward his fellow man, the Christian; and there is an alternative contention that he has but one obligation toward all men. Certainly these interpretations vary considerably and there is an urgent necessity for clarification lest there arise a justifiable suspicion concerning the validity—and the significance—of the well-worn phrase, the Calvinistic "world and life view."

It is encouraging, however, that this pressing question has received more attention recently than in the past. With a view to stimulating this interest, I would like to submit a few thoughts on the subject of man's relation to man from the Christian standpoint—and on the implications of this relationship. Needless to say, I do not pretend to exhaust this broad subject, nor profess that these ideas are altogether original. Nevertheless, it seems to me that a discussion of the social ethic contained in the Calvinistic interpretation would be very helpful in organizing our ideas about the responsibility of the Christian to his fellow man, and thus in helping us to face the practical issues of the day, individually and perhaps collectively. It is hoped that comment will be elicited both from those who stand to lose little by disagreement and from those who stand to gain little by agreement.

There prevailed at one time among Christian thinkers, and others, a functional or unitary theory of society, a theory which described society as composed of members related to each other much as are the various parts of the human body. According to this theory, society, like the human body, is an organism consisting of functionally and integrally related members. It is not merely a collection of separate and distinct units, each entitled to a private will to accomplish his own independent ends, unconcerned with the ends of the other members. It is not merely the sum or aggregate of independent units added together for selfish, protectionist purposes, but it is a whole, made up of interdependent members who have common origins, similar natures, and mutual responsibilities.

This unitary concept of society, though at one time it was speciously used to condone inequality between social classes and provided a basis for a repressive social policy, embodies, it seems to me, an essentially proper Christian view of man. The Calvinist position coincides closely with this concept for

"Scripture teaches that our race is a unity, and it is essential for us to maintain this. The unity of the race is the foundation on which is built the scriptural teaching of our responsibility in Adam's fall, of original sin, and of the possibility of redemption through one Mediator, Jesus."¹ *The Calvinist affirms* that Adam was the "physical and federal head of the human race,"² and that all men descend directly from him not only in a physical sense, but in a spiritual and moral sense as well. A spiritual decision by Adam placed all men at enmity with God. The unity of man is contrasted in Reformed doctrine with the manner in which the angels are related. Angels were created as separate and distinct individuals, standing before God as separately responsible for their moral behavior. The angel world did not fall as an entire group when rebellion against God rose in their midst, as the human race did. Man's unitary relationship is indicated also in the Old Testament warning that his iniquities would be visited upon his children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hated Him.

In addition to the Scriptural account of a structurally unified humanity, there is the teaching that man is by creation a social being requiring the companionship of his fellow man. God saw that it "was not good that man should be alone," and created for him a companion. It is an uncontested Calvinistic doctrine that a "gregarious instinct, a social impulse, was implanted in man by the One who created him."³ Society is regarded in the Calvinistic formula as one of the special spheres of human organization, coequal with the family, having its own sovereign functions. It is natural, in the Christian sense, for men to seek the fellowship and friendship of their neighbors, and also to develop and cultivate their relations with their fellow men. Just as it is natural for men to utilize and enjoy their endowments of rationality and insight, it is natural for them to foster and make richer use of their gifts for cooperation and association. If it is Calvinistic to stress the development of the intellect, it is also Calvinistic to stress the cultivation of interactivity within and between groups because man's moral social consciousness is also a distinctively human characteristic.

A third fundamental ground for a theory of man which unequivocally asserts his oneness and thus lays heavy emphasis upon his social responsibility is, of course, the law of God. Upon mankind was placed one dominant command with respect to his fellow man and that was to love him as himself. In this compressed and concentrated formula for a proper social attitude is contained the real basis for Christian conduct and action. It expresses the will of God for human behavior not only, but it indicates the fashion in which the creature is to manifest his

obedience to the will of the Creator in this respect. If one loved God he would praise Him by loving his fellow men; if one cared for his neighbor by offering him a cup of cold water or by providing a home for the orphan, he would be obeying and honoring God.

It may sometimes be inferred that this commandment was replaced by the New Testament stress on Christian love toward the "brother," but such inferences can only be misleading, for the law has not been repudiated. This demand, according to the Calvinist, applies to the Christian as forcefully as it does to the unbeliever; indeed, it is only the Christian who, by God's grace, is able in spirit to obey it. It would be a sad commentary on the Christian community if it neglected this universal command—this duty toward all men—because of the greater comfort and convenience involved in befriending those of the household of faith. It would be an accusing commentary on the Christian community if the non-Christian society exhibited a stronger respect for this command of God than it did. The second table of the law places upon men the inescapable responsibility not only to be interested intellectually in the affairs of men, but to act in accordance with that responsibility—for how else shall men be known than by their fruits?

II

It would seem clearly proper in the light of these Biblical and Calvinistic doctrines to accept an unitary view of society, a view that emphasizes the obligation of men to regard their fellow men and their problems and misfortunes as matters of deep personal concern. One's neighbors, according to this view, are not thought of as people who can be forgotten or neglected or dismissed as having no importance, and with whom one will have nothing to do. Men cannot be described as a group of individuals, separately co-existing, or merely geographically contiguous, like trees in a forest or like houses on a street. They are rather a related and mutually responsible group, performing their tasks in life and fulfilling their purposes only as they work together, collectively, cooperatively. Any person living for his own selfish ends, refusing to think in terms that imply a community of persons and failing to acknowledge the reciprocal duties of its members, lives in violation of his nature. Just as a building girder, lying unused in a junk yard, or a word, alone and without context, is not serving its purpose and strictly speaking is not a girder, or a word, so a human being, out of touch with his fellow men, acting in his own interest, and failing to acknowledge his social commitments, is not true to his nature and creational purpose. The concept of an individual, as an isolated unit, is incompatible with a Calvinistic concept of society. The only sense in which the term individual can have meaning is that which conceives of him as being a member of the community, a part of the group. As such the individual member

³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁾ M. J. Bosma, *Exposition of Reformed Doctrine*, p. 87.

²⁾ H. H. Meeter, *Calvinism*, p. 103.

has great and inescapable moral obligations to God and to his neighbor.

The implications of such a theory of society for Christian action would appear to be abundantly clear. No argument is advanced to distinguish between the believer and the unbeliever, to imply one kind of behavior by Christians and another by non-Christians, for the law is a teacher to all men. No basis is presented for special behavior toward those of like precious faith, although some may find reason for contending that *additional* responsibilities may rest on the Christian for behavior toward his brother. Rather, the deposition is that, with regard to one's neighbor, whoever he might be, Christian or non-Christian, brown or pinkish-white, rich or poor, there rests upon man an obligation to serve his fellow men, to accord them every consideration, to cooperate with them in the pursuit of common worthy ends. Social responsibility is a facet of man's nature, not something totally foreign that need be imposed from without by erecting a system of rewards and punishments that play upon his desires for personal gratification, nor something that need be induced within by appealing to his egoistic and individualistic impulses, for it is already implicit in his nature. Those who would base a social ethic upon the narrow view that men will respond only to appeals of self-indulgence and self-protection ignore one of the innate characteristics of men.

If such is the Christian concept of the nature and duty of man, why is it that we have failed to accept and acknowledge our assignment? The answer to be sure lies in the depravity of fallen man, the refusal to assent to the Divine will. But this answer can explain only the failure of the unbeliever, and cannot be advanced as a continuing excuse for the Christian—and we are here concerned with a Christian social ethic. For the believer, then, who acknowledges the created nature of things, we will have to look elsewhere for the reasons for his failure to accept his role in society.

One reason might very well be the view that once man had sinned and society had become imperfect, the original unity of mankind was destroyed and the reciprocal obligations involved in that unity were abrogated. According to this view, perhaps, the body of Christ, the unity of believers, was substituted for the social organism, and the command of love to the brethren replaced the command of love to the neighbor. But this concept would place the Church in the same sphere with society—a clearly faulty identification, and hence untenable.

Another reason might be that as a result of sin the Christian's primary function is to evangelize mankind and that his social responsibilities have become unimportant until the primary task has been accomplished. This view, however, is also untenable, since the Calvinist regards the gospel as the whole of God's revelation and not as consisting only in bringing the message of salvation by faith.

A third reason might provide a more accurate explanation for the failure to accept Christian social responsibility, though it again provides no adequate justification for such failure. The influence of humanistic philosophy in the American culture has been strong and it may be that the Calvinist community has unknowingly absorbed much of its thought, unconsciously weaving it into its own pattern of moral principles. There is undoubtedly an astounding resemblance between the individualist doctrines of the social and economic humanists of the past two centuries and the views held by many Christian Reformed people today with respect to the individual and the group. A sharply cut example can be found in the philosophy practically followed—and condoned—in the avenues of trade and commerce where the individual's pecuniary gain is the criterion of proper and successful behavior. This resemblance is also displayed in the frequent description of the state as an organization whose proper role is to protect individuals from each other, to restrict the activities of each person in order that no one's rights will be infringed upon any more than he interferes with the rights of others; that the state function minimally because its chief purpose is to limit and restrain the aggressive tendencies of offensive persons, and to punish or prevent these aggressions. It would prove highly illuminating, I am sure, if someone were to trace the fealty to economic individualism in the American Calvinistic community to its philosophic origins.

III

Whatever the true reasons may be, however, for the abandonment of the earlier stress on social morality, the time is ripe for a reassertion of this approach, if not in the hope of reorganizing contemporary society, at least in the hope of remaining true to the Christian concept of society out of which social progress may emerge. Practically, the concept of social unity provides a foundation for a positive Calvinistic ethic. If it is true that humanity is composed of functionally related members and that every man is unique in that God has appointed him to a special work⁴ in that social organism, the task of the Christian toward his neighbor becomes very clear. Every Christian bears the responsibility to contribute to the extent of his God-given ability to the maintenance of such social conditions as will permit man to pursue his unique assignment. Each member of the group, whether he be believer or unbeliever, has the obligation to use his talents in order that others may have the opportunity of fulfilling their roles in the organism.

At least two significant implications stand out in this principle of human responsibility. The first involves the role of the Christian in the society in

⁴ C. De Boer, "The Menace of the Welfare State," *Calvin Forum*, October, 1952, p. 28.

which he is placed and in which he comes in daily contact with his fellow man. Not only may he participate in cooperative community enterprises, in business, professional and labor organizations, in civic and political programs, but he must, if qualified by God's goodness, enter into and contribute to these necessary and constructive social activities.

The second important implication deals with the nature and extent of the Christian's responsibility toward those of his fellows who, for reasons beyond their control, are incapable of performing their peculiar functions in the social structure. There are, of course, millions of people whose political and economic environments are so impoverished and whose opportunities for development are so limited that it is almost farcical to talk of their fulfilling their role in society. One need only remind himself of the destitution in which large segments of the world's population are imprisoned, of the conditions of epidemic malnutrition and starvation in Asia or of the deprivations of freedom of thought and worship in wide sections of the world, or even of the lack of opportunities for development and maturation for millions in our own country to realize that the magnitude of man's task with respect to his fellow men is enormous. If these millions of our fellow human beings are to perform their functions, the Christian community had better concern itself with the problems of effectively eliminating the barriers to such performance and had better undertake the task of relieving this tremendous burden. It is quite obvious that the Christian Reformed group could not hope to achieve very much by itself, but it can and must support those of its neighbors who have already initiated programs and projects to alleviate distress and poverty in the world. Wherever it finds tragedy and despair it must strive, in concert with others, to remedy the conditions that have produced these evils. Wherever it finds organizations devoted to the correction of injustices, it should support them with enthusiasm. Whenever policies designed to eradicate inequities or to improve social conditions are introduced, such as social security, unemployment insurance, and a host of others, the vigorous approval of the Calvinists

should be heard in our communities. The Reformed community, instead of defaulting in its obligations to society by leaving the promotion of human welfare to others, should assume a position of leadership in advocating programs of human rehabilitation, and exhorting that righteousness shall prevail throughout the land.

The scope of the social task is immense and one is inclined to hide behind its enormity, but what of the implications of the Christian ethic for the individual members of society? To what extent must the individual burden himself with the misery of the unfortunate and the oppressed—who are, of course, his neighbors? The answer again seems perfectly clear and inescapable. Every capacity, every endowment, every dollar he has is not his own, but is a gift of God. The teacher, the scientist, the businessman, the farmer, and the laborer have all been endowed with undeserved gifts, not for the purpose of establishing an estate upon this earth, but for the purpose of doing the will of God. And the will of God includes an instruction to man with regard to his fellow—that he be given every opportunity and every consideration that we have ourselves. The warnings of the prophets, the Old Testament year of Jubilee, the parable of the good Samaritan, the example of the early church: all provide an unmistakable summons.

The doctrine of Christian stewardship, of course, laid down the same injunction, drew forth the same implication. But the potency of the stewardship doctrine seems often to have been watered down to the point where it is applied to the marginal asset, the surplus talent, rather than to the whole of one's abilities and possessions. The impact of the stewardship doctrine may have been turned aside for lack of a basic understanding of the concept of a functional unity of society, and of the principle of social responsibility toward one's fellow man. The Calvinistic social ethic, if one existed, has become grievously anemic. Perhaps an inoculation with an old serum in the form of a reanimated Christian theory of society may help to invigorate the social consciousness of our Christian Reformed community.



The Minister's Reading Habits

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IN the April, 1952, issue of the *Calvin Forum* an article of mine appeared, headed *One Great Need: An Appeal to Seminary Students*. It was a plea for thorough and scholarly methods in preparing for the great task of preaching and shepherding.

The article has elicited some comments. In May, 1953, a retired minister of the Christian Reformed Church wrote, "As a retired minister I have many occasions to listen to brethren preachers, and there is too much tendency to prepare sermons without sufficient research and mental athletics. Often a sermon is a bundle of platitudes with an emotional appeal or attitude thrown in here and there to satisfy the 'earnest' hearers, but one cannot call the product a new structure. Your article may be a cry in the wilderness; but, if read, I am certain it will prove an encouragement to many a struggling, studious minister. Our men have capacities, powers, and talents, but lack time e.a. necessary for concentration of mind, etc. to really produce." In September, 1953, the same retired pastor writes "We have been strengthened in our conviction that we wrote the truth and did not overstate."

What to say of all this?

Our present-day environment and setup are, on the whole, antagonistic to thorough preparation for the pulpit. Singing, catchy melodies, liturgy, emotion are the order of the day. "There is too much preaching already," an Episcopal minister informed me: "my sermons are never longer than ten or twelve minutes; 'Continued in our next' is my motto."

A three-year seminary course punctuated by much outside work to enable the student to "pay his way through school," over against a five-year study period abroad: it is pitiable indeed. Perhaps another article for ministers (as suggested by my retired colleague) might prove helpful rather than appear condemnatory.

Some words of encouragement are long overdue, for the tempo of modern life is increasingly hostile to solid reading. First we had the radio, with a stranger walking right into our living rooms with his "Do it now; today is the time" suggestions; but now it is television with its time-robbing, ninety per cent worthless stuff. For all that, a minister who fails to understand that reading is one of his chief duties for which the time must at all costs be redeemed, is bound to end a failure. To build up a

congregation one must remain a step or two ahead of the intellectuals in one's church, in at least one or two fields; and this is no small task. What, then, should an average minister read?

I

It sounds almost like a platitude that a minister should read in his Bible more than his parishioners do. But who would deny that some ministers fail to do so? Are there none such among us who read a single chapter at "the family altar," and for the rest study a text to distill a sermon from it? Do such give God sufficient time to speak to them? ("But a minister is not just a minister—he is also a member of the human race. I do, of course, read the Bible regularly and prayerfully; but I have not forgotten that the men of God whose words and deeds fill that book did not shut themselves off from daily contact with the world. They led themselves tremendously active and vigorous lives. So, too, any minister today must be close to the very pulse of living, from its first cry to its last (Norman Vincent Peale).") Consequently, much outside reading must be done. However, let us not run ahead of ourselves.)

Said the late Reverend B. H. Einink, "Most of our ministers never look at their Dogmatics after graduating from the seminary." Exaggerated? I am inclined to think so, If, however, there is only a small element of truth in that statement, it is bad enough.

All of us have weak memories, and strong "forgetters." Listening to classical examinations of candidates to the ministry over a period of thirty-seven years has convinced me that too many of our preachers have never grasped where the problems in theology lie, or no longer know it, let alone knowing the solution to these problems. They have a general impression of which direction the expected answer lies.

One result of this is a fear of a broad reading program; such men feel rather shaky; they instinctively feel unable to cope with opinions that might run contrary to their prejudices.

Another reason for ignoring Dogmatics is that systematic theology is far from popular today. Our growing Americanization forces a tendency in the opposite direction. The children of those pioneers who spent the long winter evening with an improving book how often think in terms of a motor trip

to Florida in January, followed by a similar excursion to Alaska in midsummer.

Yet a sermon without a doctrinal foundation or background—even though not itself in the field of Dogmatics—is apt to end in generalities and vagueness. Doctrine nowadays has to be spoonfed, in small dosages and in concentrated form. This can be done only by men whose dogmatics have been so thoroughly assimilated with the very warp and woof of their personalities that they can make things profound look simple. And this calls for a life-long study of theology.

II

A minister should read the daily newspaper: "We listen to the radio" is not enough. Then, too, in our own church some sixteen or more publications now appear regularly, and the minister should read in most of these.

In addition to all this odd-moments' work he should take a look at *Theology Today* and the *Westminster Theological Journal*, the latter if only for its excellent and enlightening book reviews. And how a man can even moderately claim to understand the religious atmosphere in which he lives without the weekly reading of *The Christian Century* is completely beyond this writer.

They who are fortunate enough to be able to keep, through reading, in touch with the Netherlands, that fountainhead of Reformed theology and church-life, should read at least one such paper as *Gereformeerd Weekblad*.

All of this, together with either *Newsweek* or *Time Magazine*, to trace God's finger in *l'histoire contemporaine*, will consume much of a minister's leisure time. Half hours and quarter hours will have to be rescued from the "wasted" hours of which there are too many in most lives.

Yet it is only after all this has been disposed of that a minister's more serious reading task begins.

If a man is satisfied with reading one or two commentaries to gather his sermon material—for sermons that must be made week upon week, twice a Sunday to the same listeners—his sermons will lack that small measure of originality or individuality that should mark every man's efforts; and he will become co-responsible for the oft-heard complaint, "Most of those Christian Reformed ministers all preach alike." Commentaries should be read chiefly to awaken out of the unconscious mind thoughts planted and half buried there as a result of much earlier reading.

Long and quiet hours of reading, together with much thinking—the hardest but most fruitful of all human labor—will prevent such ideas as the one recently exhibited in a Christian Reformed paper, when a minister voiced his opinion that "the unbeliever's system of knowledge, as a result of sin, is

basically false (*altho* because of God's common grace it contains relative truths)." There is, of course, no such thing as a "system of knowledge." Nor is there any "relative truth." A man has an aggregate of knowledge. It consists of the sum total of accurate information he has concerning facts. His basic philosophy may be his "erroneous system." But that is a horse of a different color from a fictitious "system of knowledge." It is his underlying philosophy whereby he traces his facts to their origin and relates them to God and man. "Facts are stubborn things," and they are true, no matter who discovers or enunciates them. The man who fears facts because they are pointed out to him by one whose basic philosophy is false, is bound to remain bigoted and sectarian.

Take a recent example in hand. "As among the prickly aloe plants occasionally an unexpected rose-bush may blossom forth," so on my recent vacation I picked from among much trash another Pocket Book volume for the negligible outlay of twenty-five cents. The title: *The Man from Nazareth*. The author: Harry Emerson Fosdick. Now, I do not need any one to inform me that Doctor Fosdick's evaluation of our Lord is far from adequate. Yet, I have seldom encountered a book which in so small a compass gives so much scholarly and documented information on the way of thinking of Jesus' contemporaries, and why they re-acted toward Him as they did. So I prize the book; and I intend to read it again, and incorporate some of its *truth* (factual information) in future sermons.

III

Yes, a minister should read widely. He should be like the bee that gathers its honey from many flowers. "The first thing, I have told my students as an ex-professor of Homiletics, 'they should do is to read poetry; for that develops the imagination.'" So said Dr. Frederick Loetscher upon my first visit at his Princeton home.

And how is the minister going to do it all, in spite of the fact that too much work is thrown into his lap that should be done by a secretary or an elder? By "giving heed unto his way." For one thing, God did not call a minister to be half a mechanic. Nor does a congregation pay a minister a salary to do his wife's washing and ironing. A preacher need not plant his own potatoes.

Then, too, there are two secrets that must be learned. The one, already referred to, is that of mastering tidbits of time: The other, that of developing a taste for reading. When a man feels depleted after two or three mental explosions on a Sunday, replenishing his mental stock on Monday morning should be to him relaxation rather than hard work. One should acquire the habit of feeling lost without a book or a paper in one's hand, at least upon one's knees.

Self-made John Bunyan lived sixty years—and left sixty books from his own pen. Karl Gutsall, restless pioneer, traveled incessantly, and left behind two books in Japanese, one in Siamese, seven in German, five in Dutch, more than sixty in Chinese, and numerous books in English. Talent, that? Nonsense; it was hard work. Genius? No doubt; but the genius that spelled five percent inspiration and ninety-five percent perspiration.

Nor has age anything to do with it. No more than the muscles in the blacksmith's arm grow flabby, need a minister's brain go limp. At the funeral of my sixty-two year old brother in Zeist, Netherlands, it was recently stated that when his body through prolonged illness had grown too weak for him to do his own reading, he had others read to him by the hour because "his active mind needed fresh supplies of information continuously to give him food for thought."

On the other hand, years ago an intelligent elder said of a former minister, "When that man first came to town, he could put rings around me in our weekly Bible class; but now, after ten years, he has his library left, but I do not yield an inch of ground to him."

So the slogan is "Carpe diem!" "Lege, lege, semper aliquid haeret!"

Perhaps we shall have to learn from the late J. Van Aniel, one of whose secrets was that of "speaking a fitting word upon occasional contacts, so as to redeem valuable hours from time-robbing special calls."

As for me, when I weary of reading, and of the solitude it imposes, I take heart from the hopeful anticipation that I may hear some day—in spite of much imperfection along other lines—the welcome words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

From Our Correspondents

752 Giddings S.E.
Grand Rapids 6, Mich.
October 12, 1953

The Editor,
The Calvin Forum.

Dear Dr. De Boer:

THE latest issue of *The Calvin Forum* carried a total of four regular articles. Three of these were in criticism of approaches and emphases characterizing some of the positions held by Prof. C. Van Til of Westminster Seminary. It is, of course, anyone's privilege to differ from this recognized scholar in the fields of Reformed philosophy and theology. It is doubtlessly a good thing that views propounded by certain Reformed scholars are carefully weighed by other Reformed scholars. Yet I regret that the major part of a whole issue of our *Calvin Forum* is devoted to a criticism of one and the same author, an author and authority who has been held in high esteem in Reformed circles for many years because of his ability and because of his loyalty to our historic Calvinistic commitments.

However, what grieves me is the tone and general thrust characterizing the first two contributions under discussion.

The actual titles of the three articles are objective. They read as follows: "The New Apologetic," "Professor Van Til's Apologetics," and "On Brute Facts." But the cover page lists them as follows: "The Jungles of Westminster's Apologetics," "An Exercise in Ambiguity," and "Apologetics by Inconsistency." And page seven carries this sub-title for

the second article: "A Linguistic Bramble Patch."

Why should the staff employ these offensive headings? What good can they produce? And the thrust of these latter titles comes to the fore in the first two articles repeatedly. Why should this be?

Furthermore, is it fair, wise, and Christ-like ever to use ridicule when one discusses the views of a fellow-believer? Should we use this barbed weapon in our polemics at all? I for one do not think so. It cuts and smarts; it beclouds and drives apart. It does not tend to clarify, convince, and win.

We of the Reformed faith form but a small minority. Let us not attack each other uncharitably, nor stimulate blind prejudices and uncalled-for separations by faulty methods of discussion; but let us discuss our findings and considerations objectively and with mutual appreciation. Let us criticize frankly and severely if need be, but let us ever do so in the spirit of the Master who said "I am meek and lowly in heart." And let us give evidence of the fact that we have learned to take to heart the admonition of the Apostle (Phil. 2:3), "in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself."

Moreover, we need each other!

We must work together toward a solution of our common problems related to a common assignment.

We are not antagonists. We are brethren and co-workers; we are allies! And Westminster and Calvin are two kindred training camps, serving the self-same cause. We have a common enemy and a common warfare.

We cannot afford to foster unnecessary antagonisms and separations. We may not do so!

Nor should we be disturbed if we cannot immediately see eye to eye on every issue. Particularly not if the issues are complex and still in the discussion stage.

I am confident, Mr. Editor, that I am voicing the sentiments of hundreds of your readers. And—lest I be misunderstood—I would address these words to *all* our leaders and writers for their most earnest and prayerful consideration.

Fraternally, yours in Him,
MARTIN MONSMA

Iron Springs, Alberta.
Sept. 25, 1953.

The Calvin Forum,
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Dear Editor:—

AS a regular reader of *the Calvin Forum* I have often wondered if some of the articles which are presented could not be put into language which is a little more readable to the common man. I must confess that many of them are too deep for me. I can read them and re-read them and I am still wondering what I have read.

We are at present digging into the problem of the Antithesis and Common Grace, matters which contain depths which are possibly too deep for the greatest philosophers. There is however a level it seems to me that the common man can understand. The Word of God is such that it speaks to children as well as to adults. We are even told that unless we become as children we cannot as much as see the Kingdom of God.

Now I may be wrong but it seems to me that in writing on the Antithesis many who claim to believe it are nevertheless trying to get rid of it or at least are trying to tone it down. It furthermore seems to me that many of us are trying under the cover of Common Grace to make it comfortable for ourselves in this world which is at enmity with God.

Surely this is not the purpose of these discussions.

When our Synod adopted the three points in regard to Common Grace it put in a very strong warning against using these points as a loophole to let the world into the church. Is this not what is happening today?

Our great danger today is not that we are trying to flee out of the world but rather that we are becoming conformed to the world. The spirit of ecumenicism is rampant and it is imposing a yoke on us which is an unequal one, against which we are warned. The church in the past has not taken a stand against the evils of Capitalism and the result is Socialism and Communism. Today the pendulum of the clock is swinging the other way and the Gospel of Christ is watered down to a mere movement of social reform. People are getting Christian-

ity and Communism mixed which accounts for the tremendous gains Communism is making.

Many of our people are Socialists and Communists and they do not know it. When the Communists took over China the road was opened for them by the Modernists who mistook Chinese Communism for a mere movement for agrigarian reform. Even some of our own men were fooled by it. Too late we found out our mistake. They did not see the Antithesis. Let us beware! The Kingdom of God is a spiritual and a heavenly Kingdom, not one of this earth.

Fraternally,
JOHN DE JONG

Dr. Cecil De Boer
Editor of the Calvin Forum

Dear Dr. De Boer:

WILL you not kindly place in the November issue of the Forum the following reflections on the Forum's recent attack on the apologetic of Dr. Cornelius Van Til?

I certainly am not opposed to controversy among brethren in the sense of objective discussion of significant differences. We shall always need controversy of that kind. The history of Christian doctrine tells us that it has often served to bring truth to light and to make possible precise formulation of truth. And I have not the slightest objection to an objective expert appraisal of Van Til's apologetic. It is due, and I shall welcome it.

However, I do regret certain aspects of the aforesaid attack. With your permission I shall indicate a few of those aspects.

The reader could easily get the impression that the attack was launched unitedly by the faculties of Calvin College and Seminary. Inasmuch as the Forum is published by a board consisting of those faculties, there would seem to be logic in the contention of "A Letter from Ripon" in the October issue: "The Calvin Forum represents the thought of the combined faculties of Calvin College and Seminary." And yet, few members of those faculties knew that this attack was forthcoming. I for one was not aware of the existence—to say nothing of the content—of the articles concerned until they appeared in the Forum. I think the public is entitled to those facts.

I object to your indiscriminate use of the term "Westminster's apologetic." It could be misunderstood. If you mean that Van Til's apologetic is being taught at Westminster Theological Seminary, you are obviously right. If you mean that Van Til's colleagues are in some measure responsible for the fact that this apologetic is taught at Westminster, you are right again. Beyond all doubt, they deem Van Til's apologetic deserving of a respectful hearing. But if you mean that Westminster Seminary has officially adopted Van Til's apologetic *in toto* and has

set it up as a standard of orthodoxy, you are mistaken.

Here are two institutions of learning—Calvin and Westminster—both committed to the Reformed faith. Each is upholding that faith imperfectly, to be sure, yet, we may believe, earnestly. For almost a quarter century now Westminster has performed that task in exceedingly hostile surroundings. Precisely because of its adherence to the Reformed faith it has been subjected to violent, and in some instances vicious, attacks by Old Modernists, New Modernists, Arminians, Dispensationalists, and such as may be described, for want of a better name, as Hyper-Calvinists. In the face of truly tremendous opposition the men of Westminster have held the fort. Lo and behold, the September, 1953, number of the Calvin Forum, published by the combined faculties of Calvin College and Seminary, launches an attack upon Westminster, particularly upon its Department of Apologetics. At first blush that seems most regrettable, for it is an obvious desideratum that Calvin and Westminster present a united front to the many enemies of the Reformed faith. However, the matter has another angle. It is clear that there exists among brethren within the household of the Reformed faith a sharp difference

on an important matter. To ignore that difference and pretend that it does not exist would hardly serve the cause of truth. Rather, it must be threshed out. Therefore I would not at this juncture demur further than I have done, if the Forum's evaluation of Van Til's apologetic were characterized by objectivity coupled with brotherly love and esteem. But precisely there is the rub. Undeniably the Forum's appraisal is marred at more points than one by disrespect and belligerency. That I regret more than anything else. Permit me to add that I am pleased, but not fully satisfied, with your notice in the October issue, that "no offense to Professor Van Til or disrespect toward Westminster Seminary was intended." The language referred to was as a matter of *fact* both offensive and disrespectful and therefore should, I think, have been retracted.

I hope and pray that, when the smoke of the present battle shall have lifted, the faculties of Calvin College and Seminary and the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary may be seen standing shoulder to shoulder in the defense and furtherance of the Reformed faith.

Cordially yours,
R. B. KUIPER



Book Reviews

TWO WORLDS

THE BOUNTY LANDS. By William D. Ellis. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company. 1952. 492 pages.

TWO WORLDS FOR MEMORY. By Alfred Noyes. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company. 1953. 340 pages.

BETWEEN the raw Ohio woods of *The Bounty Lands* and the purple and fine linen of *Two Worlds for Memory* lies a gap almost as great as that between Abraham and Edison; yet the events are only a little more than a hundred years apart, and a large part of Noyes' career in golden chariots would have been impossible without Thomas Woodbridge's trek with the ox cart. Noyes' palace on the Isle of Wight got part of its foundation from the fruits of the Bounty Lands.

The Bounty Lands is a first book by a newcomer, but its unusual calibre, seems to me, to place it in the rank of such great frontier stories as *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather; *Giants in the Earth* by Roelvaag; *The Limestone Tree* by Hergesheimer, and *Drums along the Mohawk* by Edmonds.

The Bounty Lands has unusual excellence in density of subject matter, vividness of characterization, and consuming interest of plot. The struggling border village of Mesopotamia, Ohio comes alive in its struggles, defeats, heartbreaks, and rare triumphs. Its cultural agony in effecting some farm of civilization, its back-breaking labor in growing food, its courage in the face of savage raids by Wyandots have the density of real life. The character of Tom Woodbridge is magnificently handled. Granite and fire, courage and imagination, unflagging vigor and relentless pluck, these Tom Woodbridge, the hero, had as he built an empire out of earth, daring, and hogs. The story keeps one from bed. It is a simple linear story of struggle, struggle against nature, Indians, and short-sighted comrades; yet it moves in an epic scope. Furthermore, Mesopotamia is the focus of imperial ambitions on the part of Easterners, and one is glad to see ruthless "manifest destiny" outdone by credible intelligence and patience.

The novel has its weaknesses. The plot sometimes becomes cloudy, the threads unravel, the coincidences are sometimes melodramatic, but the interest holds. Woodbridge himself at times becomes incredibly stubborn, and his father-in-law incredibly artful and scheming. The style is plain, unadorned, and sometimes prosaic. The dialog is at very rare intervals marred by untoward expressions.

Tom Woodbridge and Mesopotamia, Ohio laid the course and established the foundations of empire, an empire whose lavish fruit was enjoyed by English lecturers from Dickens to Mr. Noyes, whose world of silks and satins is described in his autobiography *Two World for Memory*.

Noyes was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He made money from poetry; instead of starving in a garret

Noyes spent most of his life in baronial splendor on the Isle of Wight. He had extraordinary friendships, travelled the wide world, and was privileged to become an effective witness to the Christian faith. He debated the vitriolic Edith Sitwell in public, reported the election of the last Pope, ordered Hugh Walpole from his house, and had the money to say what he thought about practically everything.

The book teems with vivid personalities whose idiosyncracies Noyes has a real gift in uncovering. What a parade of personalities there is in the book. Swinburne pouring out torrential comment at *The Pines*; Gosse's velvet paw caressing people while the scratches remain; gloomy Dean Inge and his ironic humor; H. G. Wells with his boundless bluster. But in portraying these and many others, Noyes also succeeds in portraying himself. Noyes was a good minor poet, and although he sometimes quotes praise too freely, never confuses himself with Milton. His sense of humor, fundamental kindliness, charm, and religious zeal are obvious. His rare devotion to his art is heartwarming. His courage is unusual. Whatever one may think of his estimate of Joyce's *Ulysses* as a "foul chaos," one must admire his courage for throwing such a glove into the intellectual ring. His mysticism is moving, and with it he combines a remarkably fine sympathy. He says of Voltaire whose philosophy he repudiated, that he is worth studying for the truths in him, "there is immense value in discovering these truths to his readers instead of concentrating on the faults." Above all one admires Noyes' vigorous defense of the Catholic faith, to which he was converted, in the highest places. Mystical awareness, enlightened reason, and experience led Noyes to Christianity. He was given the grace to defend his faith before great men.

What strikes one particularly in the autobiography is its remarkably Victorian temper. Noyes' poetic taste and practice is Tennysonian in its emphasis upon song, sound, and scene. His political sympathies are conservative; his religious faith authoritarian. There is no evidence anywhere of the impact of modern poetry upon his thought or art except through aversion. There is no mention of Eliot, Pound, Auden, or Harte Crane. For Noyes, modern poetry is misdirected, confused, and ephemeral. All this makes of his work a Victorian echo.

Two Worlds for Memory is charming and pleasant, an amusing tour through aristocratic society with an expert guide. It gives a sense of tradition, of the color and style of the highest social circles during the last fifty years. What the volume ignores however is how the other half lives—the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. Noyes forgets Mesopotamia, Ohio. He forgets the raw, rough hands, the flint and steel of the Thomas Woodbridges whose efforts form the foundations for the baronial luxuries on the Isle of Wight.

JOHN TIMMERMAN
Calvin College

2,585 ILLUSTRATIONS

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ILLUSTRATIONS. By Henry Ward Beecher. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids. 675 pages. Prices \$5.95.

THIS volume contains 2,585 illustrations gleaned from the sermons and addresses of a great preacher renowned for the picturesque and graphic manner in which he presented his stirring messages. He has been called the Shakespeare of the modern pulpit. From this book it is evident that he understood that the truths of Scripture, to be appreciated, must be presented in concrete fashion. Herein he was only following the example found in the Bible itself.

This book is a veritable encyclopedia of unusual stories and striking metaphors. All of these are presented under various themes and then again are thoroughly indexed. When compared with other volumes of this nature, it is one of the best which has come to my attention. However, it is still true that the best illustrations are those which arise out of observation and experience so that a volume of this type has limited value.

GEORGE GRITTER
Grand Rapids, Michigan

PRESCRIPTIVE NOT DESCRIPTIVE

WHO KILLED GRAMMAR? By Harry R. Warfel, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952. \$2.50.

EVERY teacher of English should read *Who Killed Grammar?*, a booklet, which, though numbering only eighty-seven pages, offers any language student a vast deal of solid use. He should do so especially in view of the influence exerted today by the National Council of Teachers of English and its publications, among them being the *English Journal* and *College English*, an influence that is gradually becoming stronger.

During the last twenty-five years, a group of linguists has arisen, who, accepting usage as the sole law of language, repudiate the conventional grammar of American English which has been "prescriptive" rather than "descriptive" in character. Since a living language always changes, grammar cannot but be in a fluid state. Not logical correctness, not propriety, not beauty of sound or appearance, but only usage, and especially that of spoken informal discourse, can in any way serve as a basis for the study of grammar. Some have gone so far as to deny grammarians the right to prescribe what is correct and to proclaim the duty of every teacher of English to be so thoroughly trained in the processes of language as to be able scientifically to determine what is proper usage in any specific situation.

Professor Charles Carpenter Fries of Ann Arbor is one of the leading spokesmen of the new school. Both Fries and Warfel were born and reared in the same town, attended the same schools, and are still friends, but Professor Warfel is a severe critic of the new school and its efforts. He does not disagree with the aim of the new linguists to be scientific but accuses them of not being scientific enough. Their non-science, says he, has proved disastrous, so that confusion and a general dislike of all formal language study prevails. On the basis of only a few dubious statements they have ridiculed the traditional grammars. They have made a wrong use of the principle of divided usage. They have not clearly defined either the nature or the boundaries of the

cultural levels which mean so much in their theory. Since any system with rules stands in the way of progressive education, they will have none of a rule-ridden grammar. They reject the old, but do not offer an adequate substitute for it. Professor Warfel does not hesitate to brand their work as non-science and to point out that in many cases their non-science results in non-sense. Says he, "They have done untold harm, and, except as they have added a few facts to the record, they have done almost no good." Professor Warfel is too good a scholar not to buttress his conclusions with a formidable array of facts.

Professor Warfel, however, is not exclusively negative. He lays down fourteen principles which should be observed in the scientific study of language usage. The first of these is a good one and declares the obvious truth, so easily forgotten, that "no one person can learn all the facts about language and that modesty becoming to this generalization is salutary." The second flows from the first and decrees that in usage studies such facts and samples should be selected as conform to the standard requirements devised by statisticians for the proper validation of the kind of evidence used. The remaining twelve breathe as sane a spirit as do these two. In the concluding chapter of the book Professor Warfel discusses several general considerations which ought to be observed by linguists in their scientific endeavors.

I conclude as I began. Every teachers of English should read this book, which is a very important one.

J. G. VANDEN BOSCH
Calvin College

SPIRITUAL RICHES

SERMONS FROM JOB. By John Calvin. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids. 300 pp. Price \$4.50.

JESUS lived intensely. Those who would know fullness of joy must be like him—losing their lives for his sake and thus finding real life. Such a man was John Calvin—maligned by some, ignored by many, and yet recognized as one of God's noblemen.

What was the service he rendered? We think of him as the great reformer of Geneva, as the brilliant author of the *Institutes*, and as the penetrating exegete of Scripture as demonstrated in his commentaries. We forget that in his own estimation, John Calvin was first of all a preacher. This book presents selected sermons from Job which are recognized as being among the best sermons Calvin ever produced.

At the beginning one finds an extensive introduction written by the Rev. Harold Dekker. This introduction is delightful reading and constitutes a valuable guide in evaluating Calvin's sermons. The value of the book is enhanced by it.

Upon reading these sermons one appreciates their practical character, simplicity, and constant theocentric emphasis. They confirm the impression that Calvin was not only a gifted dogmatician but also a careful exegete, and they give evidence of the fact that in the pulpit Calvin spoke with his heart as well as with his mind. He was intent upon presenting doctrine but did so in such fashion that it might be real food for the soul.

It is to be expected that many will be attracted to this volume. It deals with a book which faces us with that perennial challenge of suffering in human experience. It is written by a man who was endowed with exceptional gifts

and for whom many of us have great esteem. Be it understood, however, that in reading these sermons one does not only learn to know Job or become better acquainted with John Calvin, but one learns to appreciate even more fully the Word of God.

One would not preach thus today. It must be admitted that some of these sermons are difficult to understand. There is gold in them but the mining of it is not easy. In fact, the study of these sermons constitutes a real discipline. Many of the sentences are not only lengthy but even obscure. In fairness to the author, however, it must be remembered that they were perhaps much more readily understood as he presented them orally in their original language.

Both publisher and translator are to be commended. May this volume find entrance into many a home and its rich spiritual treasures be stored in many a believing heart.

GEORGE GRITTER
Grand Rapids, Michigan

GOOD TEACHING

THE ART OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING. By C. A. Eavey. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. 1953. 298 pages. \$3.75

PROFESSOR EAVEY is making his days of retirement count. He is making a contribution to Christian educational theory and practice that many Christian teachers will greatly appreciate. In readable style for teachers not deeply schooled in philosophy, psychology, and the like, this book sets forth the basic principles of effective teaching.

The author has become convinced that the educational theory and practice of our time has a vital contribution to make to Christian teaching. But unless carefully appraised in the framework of thinking based on the Bible, so the author contends, modern thinking will lead Christian teachers astray and defeat the Christian objective in education.

This book has many excellent features that are of great value to the Christian teacher who desires to go about his work understandingly. Among these features are the following: the significance of teacher-pupil purpose in the process of learning; the place and significance of felt needs in the experience of the learner; the self-active characteristics of the learning process; the nature and significance of method in relation to the teacher's personality; teaching as guidance; unit planning; the creative character of integration in learning; effective appraisal; etc.

The Christian teacher who gradually wants to break with the assignment-study-recite technique and replace it with a teaching process more in keeping with better understanding of the learning process in Christian education will find many helpful suggestions in this book. He may follow the line of thought with some confidence too, for the author is a Christian thinker who makes an earnest and in many ways successful attempt to pursue a Christian course throughout.

Critical appraisals do bring some things to light, however, which should be mentioned so that the Christian teacher may read with care and judge for himself concerning the validity of the author's views.

The author seems to go all the way with the growth-concept of modern education in the process of learning. He seeks to detach it from the naturalistic and humanistic philosophies of life in which current thinking views the concept,

but thinks that growth as such is an adequate concept for learning and teaching. This becomes evident when the author looks upon teaching mainly as controlling the activities in which the learner engages. Selecting and arranging experiences toward predetermined ends are the primary functions of the teacher in the classroom, thinks Eavey. But does this do justice to direct, person to person communication, so essential in the development of personality through fellowship? The author has failed to see that the growth concept as viewed in modern thought is based on a false conception of personality. A scriptural conception of personality will reconstruct the growth concept to give a vital place to personal communication in learning and teaching. The absence of a scriptural approach to psychology or the soul-life of man opens the way to a syncretism which Christian education must avoid.

Closely allied to the author's failure to reconstruct the growth concept is another difficulty that Christian teachers should consider. While the author does reject the current educational ideal that makes growth its own goal, he is not sufficiently aware of a God-centered concept of life to define the goal in terms of truth and commitment thereto. The author makes personality the goal of education, not personality in general, of course, but personality embodying Christian virtues rooted in the new life in Christ. While it is true that with relation to the world education is man-centered, and human personality is the goal of education, genuine human personality, must be viewed in relation to God, original personality. Education is first God-centered in its commitment to the truth as made known by God and becomes truly man-centered in a derived sense when the learner in his commitment to the truth masters himself and his world of experience. Because of the absence of an effective God-centered concept of life, the author again falls into a syncretism. What we seek in Christian education is not a synthesis of non-Christian thought with the Christian view, but a reconstruction of non-Christian thinking on a scriptural foundation. If this is done with the growth concept and personality as goal in education, the outcome will be a distinctively Christian learning and teaching process.

It is especially in the author's discussion of integrating learning that the constant danger of syncretism becomes evident. In his urge to make personality supreme in education, he falls victim to the depersonalization of education characteristic of modern educational theory. Change and reconstruction of experience are made fundamental and unity is more organismic than personal throughout this discussion. Now it should be clear that this view is thoroughly unbiblical when we recognize that the Bible teaches the unity of the personality in the spirit. Then being is primary, and change takes place in the dimensions of being through education. The person experiencing is being reconstructed in the dimensions of life, especially soul-life. The author recognizes the life of the spirit, but fails to make spirit the principle of life in the development of personality.

We as Christian teachers are struggling to attain a clearer basis for and understanding of a distinctively Christian learning and teaching process. Professor Eavey is to be commended for his efforts and his important contribution.

CORNELIUS JAARMA
Calvin College

VALUABLE STUDIES ON DIVORCE

DIVORCE. By John Murray. *The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Belvidere Road, Phillipsburg, New Jersey.* \$2.50.

A LEAFLET published by the *Family Altar League of America* is authority for the statement that forty years ago the homes of fifty percent of Christian people still had a family altar. The divorce rate at that time stood at one in every thirty-three marriages. Things have become rapidly worse in this first half of the twentieth century. Only five percent of professing Christians are estimated to engage in regular family worship now. The divorce rate had risen to a shocking one in every five marriages at the time these figures were computed. Whoever runs, may read the lesson which these statistics teach. Ignorance concerning God's Word and its teachings on divorce is yielding a harvest which ought to make us shudder. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" There is but one answer, and we are grateful to Mr. Murray for his painstaking efforts to point the way. "Thus saith the Lord" is the only antidote to our widespread divorce evil which cries out to God for vengeance as it grows by leaps and bounds. We must get back to God, and back to the Bible, if decency and honor in marriage are ever to be restored to their rightful place again. The book under review is a step in that direction, and therefore deserves both careful study and a wide circulation.

Readers of the *Westminster Theological Journal* will recall that Mr. Murray originally presented these studies on divorce as a series of articles for that publication during the years 1946 through 1949. It was a happy circumstance that it was made possible for this material to be presented in book form. The four chapters which constitute this book deal with the following matters: 1. The Old Testament Provision, 2. The Teaching of Our Lord, 3. The Teaching of Paul, 4. Practical Cases. The author greatly aids the reader by giving in summary clear statements of his conclusions after the thorough and scholarly studies in exegesis are completed.

One might wish that Dr. Murray would find it possible to popularize what he has here presented in such erudite fashion. This reviewer recalls listening to Fulton John Sheen when the latter was presenting a series of radio messages on marriage from the Roman Catholic point of view. Sheen's brilliant presentations undoubtedly seeped through into the thinking of many an average man on the street. Every pastor should avail himself of these valuable studies of Murray to the end that he may become a crusader against the divorce menace which has assumed such alarming proportions in our time. Holy zeal in this matter must be based on sound and scholarly exegesis lest it come to nought. *Divorce* is a book which reveals its author to be an assiduous exegete possibly second to none. His book is well worth the price.

Three remarks in conclusion. First, Murray deals most effectively and convincingly with Roman Catholic views on divorce with which we as Protestants should be familiar and, whenever necessary, prepared to refute. Second, there are those who will surely challenge Murray's conclusion that 1 Corinthians 7:15 in any sense legitimates the dissolution of the marriage bond. Third, it would be a valuable service on Dr. Murray's part if he would give further consideration to the moot question whether those who remarry after having obtained an unscriptural divorce are living in continual adul-

tery or not. The denomination to which this reviewer belongs feels the need of further light from Scripture in this disturbing matter. Reader, if you want something solid to chew on, by all means get *Divorce*, and read it for yourself.

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ABBREVIATION OF AN ABBREVIATION

CHOICE SERMON NOTES. By Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Compiled and abridged by David O. Fuller. *Zondervan: Grand Rapids.* 215 pages. Price \$2.95.

ALTHOUGH Charles Haddon Spurgeon has now been dead for more than sixty years, his sermons are still valued as timely, instructive, inspirational presentations of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon has frequently been called, "The Prince of Preachers," and "A Master Pulpitier." Even a casual reading of any volume of his sermons will convince the reader of Spurgeon's remarkable genius for presenting the profound truth of the gospel of sovereign grace in a most simple and captivating manner. The book under consideration is a compilation and condensation of some of "Spurgeon's Sermon Notes." Knowledge of that fact alone will certainly warrant the recommendation of this book to all who are charged with the task of bringing the message of the Word to the Church of Christ.

Although this book can be well commended it should be noticed nonetheless, that it is a volume of "Spurgeon's Sermon Notes." They are notes on sermons delivered. By the very nature of the case we have here, then, abbreviations of the real sermon delivered. It hardly needs saying that if one would become fully acquainted with the striking style and brilliance of Spurgeon as a preacher it would be more profitable to read a few complete sermons of Spurgeon than to read a whole volume of notes.

It must further be observed that what we really have in Fuller's compilation is an abridgment of Spurgeon's Notes. That makes the present work under consideration an abbreviation of an abbreviation. It is a recognized fact that few if any abridgments are as good as the original work. Fuller has been very careful to keep as much of Spurgeon as possible. He has accomplished this abridgment mainly by deleting some of the excerpts from various authors that Spurgeon had appended to his own sermon notes. However, there are also frequent deletions from the body of notes as such. At times Fuller seems to have been very careful in deleting points which are of little importance to the main body of thought or points which are slightly repetitions. However, there is more than one instance where whole main points of the sermon of Spurgeon have been omitted. And again there are several instances where it appears that some rather important subpoints have been deleted. In short this work suffers because it is an abridgment.

In order to gain the greatest appreciation for the "Prince of Preachers" it would be well first to read Spurgeon in full as presented in any volume of the recently republished Memorial Library Series.

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A DEVOTIONAL WORK BY PROF. AALDERS

HET HOOGLIED. *By Dr. G. Ch. Aalders. J. H. Kok N.V., Kampen, 1953. pp.145.*

THIS is another commentary in the series *Korte Verklaring Der Heilige Schrift*, published by Kok of Kampen, and written by leading Reformed scholars in the Netherlands. This fact, and the name of Dr. Aalders as author, will be enough to commend this little book to those readers of the Calvin Forum who can read Dutch.

Het Hooglied is the Holland name of the Song of Solomon, or Canticles. This has always been one of the problem books of Scripture, and the subject of a wide diversity of exegesis. Armed with thorough scholarship and mastery of the language Dr. Aalders takes a very sane approach. Although the expository value of the book of Canticles is indicated in a general way the commentary as such is limited to explanation. Anyone seeking applicatory material for sermonizing will have to look elsewhere, e.g. in Spurgeon's sermons on the Song of Solomon.

In his comparatively long introductory section Aalders first discusses name and author, and concludes that Solomon was not the author, but that it is a song about Solomon, written by a later poet. Secondly, on the basis of internal evidence, especially reference to Tirza in 6:4 he rejects the late origin of the book argued by many on account of its language, and places it between the division of the kingdom and the rise of Samaria as capitol of the ten tribes. The lengthy third section treats of the unity of composition and general purpose of the Song. It is not a loose collection of Hebrew love songs, but a unified whole. The allegorical interpretation held since Jewish times is rejected, because consistent application is impossible and leads to absurdities. So too the dramatic interpretation, which introduces a conflict between a shepherd-lover and King Solomon. Arguments against this view are found not only in the introduction, but also in the exposition of the text. Dr. Aalders adopts the typical interpretation, regarding the poem as descriptive of the love of Solomon and his bride, but with deeper significance as pointing to the relationship of Christ and the Church. This explains its place and significance in the Canon, to which the fourth section is devoted. A final section indicates some of the facts about the text, translation and difficulties of explanation.

The principles stated in the introduction guide the author in his commentary. There is first of all a translation, section by section. This translation agrees in the main with the New Version of the Dutch Bible, but in a few instances Aalders indicates his dissent. He gives no translation of 3:12, showing that the existing text makes no intelligible sense. Following the translation there is a brief synopsis of the contents, followed by verse by verse comments. In view of the fact that there are only eight short chapters in The Song a commentary of over one hundred pages is not exactly *kort* (short or brief). Although he does not become dry or technical the author gives a thorough discussion of each problem. There are several interesting side-lights on Hebrew words and customs, notably that on the word for "virgin" so much in the public eye in connection with the new RSV. This little volume carries on the lofty standard of the *Korte Verklaring* series.

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AN INADEQUATE ANGELOLOGY

REPORT ON "I BELIEVE IN ANGELS." *By John Linton. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 85 pp. Price \$1.00.*

PERHAPS you have noticed that in the last decade there seems to have been a revival of interest in the long neglected Biblical doctrine of angels. Almost ten years ago C. S. Lewis presented his fantasy, *The Screwtape Letters*, in which he sought to show the work of the evil angels under the guidance of Satan. More recently we have received from the Netherlands Arjen Miedema's *Talks With Gabriel*, as well as Berkhouwer's notification on the work of angels in his book, *The Providence of God*. To date, however, there is no single orthodox classic which gives thorough study of the doctrine of angels good and evil.

It was this reviewer's hope that in the book under consideration such a needed work was to be found. However, Mr. Linton explains in the forward of his book that his purpose is not to give "an exhaustive study nor a philosophical dissertation embracing metaphysics, but a forthright presentation of Bible evidence indicating why I believe in angels." In that, he has succeeded admirably well. He has given us a brief lucid presentation of Scripture proof for the doctrine of angels. Mr. Linton has given a somewhat encyclopedic reference book on the doctrine of angels. He is to be commended, however, in maintaining a devotional tone which edifies and brings comfort to the believer.

The brevity of the author has proven to be his weakness, however. Several things which ought to have been carefully considered either have been omitted or glossed over with only casual reference. It is to be noted that the author intentionally omitted a discussion of the evil angels in their relationship to good angels and man. Such a discussion would prove to be profitable to the believer. He has, further, apparently intentionally omitted any reference to the commonly accepted interpretation that the angel of Jehovah in the Old Testament is in reality the Second Person of the Trinity. This discussion is omitted in spite of the fact that at two different times (cf. pp 27, 73) he has mentioned Jacob's wrestling with the Angel of Jehovah. Another omission which is also, no doubt, intentional, is the possible interpretation of Psalm 8 so as to read "thou has made him (man) a little lower than God."

Besides the things omitted there are several other weaknesses in the author's argument. In comparing pages 19 and 47 we find a discrepancy in the author's thought concerning the time when Satan and the evil angels were expelled from heaven. On page 48 Mr. Linton shows his bias by giving a onesided interpretation of Matt. 24:31 as referring to the gathering of the Jews to Palestine at the end time. On page 67 the author speaks of God as suffering in the same way as man suffers.

In short the author's determination to be brief has resulted in an inadequate treatment of angelology. A thorough book on this subject is still wanting.

J. HASPER

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