The Key of Knowledge

William Spoelhof

All re-enrolled and newly enrolled students who now form the student body of Calvin College for the academic year 1955-56, the administration and faculty bid a hearty welcome. You are part of a population of 2,400,000 young collegians who are now being matriculated in the American colleges and universities. This is an all-time college enrollment record for the United States. Calvin too boasts of its own similar all-time record, with an enrollment of 1530 students.

Individually, you are one of 2,400,000 or, more comforting, you are one of 1530. Does that make you feel insignificant? Not that such a feeling on occasion is harmful — in fact, it can be excellent therapy. I wish, however, to assure you that you as an individual do count. Despite the fact that, by force of circumstances, education has now to do with mass lots, it is still, by its own inherent nature, an individual enterprise. But even more significant, as a Calvin student, you as an individual do count, for we hold out the hope and expectation that you as a part of the college, which is, I trust, the key of knowledge.

I wish to speak to you about the key of knowledge, basing my remarks on Christ's rebuke to the scribes: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye took away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” These words, I believe, are significant to the members of the faculty and student body as we begin afresh to concern ourselves with a new academic year.

Such figures of speech as “lamp of learning,” “pillars of wisdom,” and “key of knowledge” are of such universal usage that their origin is scarcely traceable. The ancients and the moderns of all advanced civilizations have used them. The symbol of a key applied to knowledge is especially appropriate, for it has ever been the symbol of authority and of giving access to, both of which qualities are inherent in knowledge.

In Jesus' day, according to good authority, the symbolic key was given to the student of the Law at the time that he became officially a scribe — that is, when he was permitted, after years of study, to interpret the law in his own right. Christ's scathing rebuke of the scribes was directed, therefore, against the professional bearers of the key of knowledge. It is from a review of their profession and their transgression that we can arrive at a good statement of our own educational objective. We shall, therefore, look at:

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the study and interpretation of the law was chiefly the business of the priests, but this eventually changed. The more the reverence for the law increased, the more its study and interpretation became a profession in its own right. Thus there grew up a class of scholars who devoted themselves solely to the study of the law, even though they were not priests. The profession was called scribe or lawyer. Scribes were the professional students of the law and became the teachers of the people. By the time of Christ this had become a very exclusive profession, with its own terms of admission and its own code of ethics.

The names given to the scribes in the New Testament indicate their professional status. Scribes are varyingingly referred to as scholars, students, of the Scriptures, men of letters, or those who make a profession of literary studies, students of law, lawyers, and doctors of law. Their profession assumed titles which, although originally polite address, became fixed ranks, such as rabbi (my lord) and rabboni, the more respectful title. The scribes were the professors and students of their day.

In social status the scribes belonged to the upper class and received and demanded every mark of respect. As a class, they controlled the thought-life of the people, whose entire existence centered about the law. The law, with its elaborations, became for the Jew his only guide in doctrine and life, faith and practice. The hold of the scribes upon the thought-life and educational processes of the Jews was well-nigh complete. They were the holders of the key of knowledge, if any one class of people ever was.

It was to this professional class that Christ directed this telling blow: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” And Christ boldly administered this coup because the profession which controlled the thought and education of the people had developed a series of transgressions. Let us note the scribes’ abuse of the key of knowledge.

**Their Abuse of the Key of Knowledge**

The scribes, proud possessors of the key to a vast treasury of knowledge — at least so they thought — must have been shaken out of their complacency by Christ’s rebuke. Their vulnerability was, I believe, four-fold. They took away the key of knowledge by their intellectual pedantry, by their intellectual pride, by their intellectual dishonesty, and by their intellectual disunity.

As you know, a pedant is one who, *inter alia*, lays excessive stress upon trifling details of knowledge or upon strict adherence to formal rules. You readily recognize in this a description of a scribe, do you not?

The scribes were curators of a rich heritage. The law and the prophets had been entrusted to their care. That was their key of knowledge. The aim of all education among the Jews, in the home, school, and synagogue, was to make the entire people a people of the Law. This regnant idea bore real fruit, for the Jew regarded the law with such veneration that he would live for it and die for it. As Josephus said, “Even though we be robbed of our riches and our cities and our other goods, the law remains our possession forever.”

Under the reign and leadership of the scribes, this glorious tradition, the richest possession of the people, was, however, subverted. That is not an unnatural process when dealing with a tradition. That is a real and present danger which confronts us in our use of our rich heritage. As in history, many times later and many times before, tradition was destroyed by addition and subtraction.

To the law and prophets the scribes added intolerably burdensome interpretations. They reduced the practice of religion to the form of law. In due time, formal satisfaction of the law became the highest ethical achievement. Such formalism led to amplifications and elucidations which, in turn, were regarded as having equal validity with any part of the law or prophecy. Such accretions are not uncommon in the process of adherence to a tradition. In the hands of the scribes and of the teachers and students of that day the key of knowledge was being warped and made unfit.

Alongside these additions was a subtraction. From the law and the prophets the scribes subtracted the spirit. Their relationship with their covenant God became a *quid-pro-quo* arrangement: ‘I’ll do this; you give me that. They used the law, not to bring them to a knowledge of sin, but they took out of the law its spirit, and they substituted for it externalities which developed a self-righteousness. Subtract from any tradition its spirit — and you can make this very concrete by saying “the Protestant-Calvinistic-Reformed tradition” — and you have left a sham and a show. You have left the accidents, but not the substance. Such a subtraction, despite — and
Continuing our mathematical figure of speech: It is a law in mathematics that no digit can be divided by zero. Where it is done despite the rule, all types of irrationalities occur. So too when the scribes applied the law and the prophets with their additions, which were numerous, and their subtractions, which left zero — when “dividing the word of truth,” so to speak — all types of irrationalities occurred.

“Wee unto you, scribes, for ye have taken away the key of knowledge.” They did so by their pedantry, but not only by pedantry. They entered not in themselves and prevented others from entering also by their intellectual pride.

Pride both leads to legalism or formalism and issues from it. That pride which leads to it is pride before oneself. “All these things have I kept . . . . What lack I yet?” The pride that issues from legalism is the pride before others. “I thank thee that I am not like other men.”

I need not establish the accusation of pride in the case of the scribes. Their very remark which touched off Christ’s rebuke, spoken in the context of the outside of the cup being clean, the chief seats, and so on, was one of pride. Said they in effect: “In talking this way to the Pharisees you are insulting us too.” As if they were beyond such treatment!

Intellectual pride is an anomalous thing, and especially so when it is paraded under the banner of religion. Education should, by its very nature, produce humility, and he who is truly educated will be truly humble. The contrary, alas, is frequently true. Education in the context of a religious commitment should be double insurance for humility — but, alas, this too is frequently not true.

The rich heritage of the scribes contained, as does our own heritage, these two proverbs, the first separated from the second by but two pages in our Scriptures: “A prudent man concealeth knowledge,” and “Wisemen lay up knowledge.” These say to us in effect: “Lay up a store of knowledge, but bury it in your very soul and person.” By doing this, it will emanate in an educated personality, which cannot be hid. Therein lies the difference between a pedant and a scholar. And what holds for secular knowledge also holds for spiritual truth. It is only when the deep spiritual truths burrow down deep into our hearts and souls and infuse our whole being, only when God’s Word, the Law, is hid in our hearts, that we shall reveal ourselves as thoroughly committed, completely dedicated, Christians.

The law and the prophets, which should have made men humble, were turned into channels of pride and arrogance. The scribes had taken away the key of knowledge.

Also intellectual dishonesty prevented the scribe from entering into the vast treasury of knowledge. Just as pedantry issued into pride, so pride developed dishonesty. The intellectual dishonesty of the scribes was all-pervasive. As pride manifested itself as pride before one self and pride before others, so too the dishonesty of the scribes displayed itself as external and internal. While cheating others, they were also cheating themselves. “Ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne,” said Christ, “but ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers” — a thorough disregard of their own preachments — not at all unnatural; the key of knowledge had been taken away. Dishonest to others, but also to themselves. Building tombs to the murdered prophets became their guise for honoring the prophets. Really, they were deceiving only themselves, for they dishonored the prophets as much as their forbears who slew them, for the scribes ignored their essential teaching and preaching, and ignored their testimony of Christ. By doing so the scribes turned away from the key of knowledge; they entered not in themselves and prevented others from entering in.

Pedantry, Pride, Dishonesty — these are serious faults, but you feel immediately that we have not yet touched the nub of the matter. These were symptoms, not the cause. The real and basic fault of the scribes lay in what may be called their intellectual disunity. In their system, and in the system of those who follow their pattern, deed — not motive — counted. For them practice, not value, was the motivating force and, by such promptings, religious, moral, and intellectual, life lost its unity to be split up into manifold precepts and duties.

To define the integrating unity which the scribes lacked and which lack issued forth into pedantry, pride, and dishonesty, leads us to a consideration of the Use of the Key of knowledge.

Our Use of the Key of Knowledge

The knowledge of which Christ spoke is comprehensive knowledge. It is a knowledge of salvation, yes — but much more. It is a knowledge of the law and the prophets, yes — but much more. It is the entire scope of God’s revelation existing in all its relationships. This is knowledge, broadly conceived. It embraces everything that is knowable.

To enter into this vast treasury of wisdom and knowledge God gives us a key. This key is, in a sense, his special revelation, true; but, more concretely, the key is Christ himself. Christ! Of whom Paul was inspired to write: “In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Christ, the fulfillment of the law; Christ, the crux of all prophecy “from Abel to Zacharias,” was the key to knowledge. It was against him that the scribes had set themselves. And, turning away themselves, they sought to block the approach to Christ among the people. The scribes built tombs for the murdered prophets, but from Christ, without whom the law and the prophets were ineffectual, they
turned away. By this willful act they turned away from the key of knowledge.

It is through Christ, by the renewing power of the Spirit of God, that God's great revelation once again becomes knowable. Through him the darkened understanding is refashioned to make men partakers of the brightness of Christ. It is in that sense that we can say, "In thy light shall we see light." Knowledge thus explored and cultivated achieves a unity. Universal knowledge thus approached at a college or university will — to use the language of a Newman in describing a living tradition—produce the "genius loci," which should imbue and form every individual who is successively brought under its shadow.

Why does Calvin College exist? Merely to teach courses in Bible, Reformed Doctrine, and Calvinism as separate courses? Merely to train professionals who, save for a habit of prayer and worship of convenient length and time and place, are just as secularistic in their outlook as the next man? God forbid! Secularism, you know, need not be as radical as communism. It can also be cloaked in the garb of respectability.

Mere secular respectability, which education can furnish, is no real gain. T. S. Eliot, in his poem, describes this type of secularism when he wrote:

And the wind shall say: Here were decent, godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls.

I have heard education defined as an inculcation of an informed sensitivity to values. That is good — very good, in fact — provided sensitivity to values is produced and illuminated by the cross of Christ casting a cosmic light. For that will define value. For then not separate courses, but a Christian world and life view will be taught. Mere skills and techniques will then not be our sole achievement, but value judgments will be attained. This key of knowledge will then open a life.

Without that key of knowledge the understanding of man is darkened, being alienated from the life of God. Paul describes such a one as a mind without light, a soul without God, a heart without feeling, a life without real virtue. "But," continues Paul, "ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus." Christ, the teacher and the tuition. The two brought together in that divine act of teaching, both in giving and receiving instruction, when Christ is in us and we are in him.

**Must We Rethink Christian Education?**

* Cornelius Jarsma

**PART I**

We might begin our discussion in one of several ways. An appraisal of the criticism currently leveled against elementary and secondary schools would get a hearing at the outset, I am certain. While I do not want to minimize the weaknesses of modern education, of much of the criticism one might say that it is an echo of the past, and the new in it is often hastily conceived. We might take our point of departure too in what we as Christians readily recognize as the source of all deviation from true education in the nation's schools. It is very simply expressed in Dr. Van Til's recent brochure, *The Dilemma of Education*, when he says that modern education is "anxious to keep the Christian story from being presented as truth to the pupil." This story must not, in the language of Van Til, "seriously pretend to offer a Christian-life-and-world-view which competes with the philosophy presupposed by the curriculum."

Both approaches, while timely and challenging, would commit us at the outset to an indirect attack upon our problem. We should have to engage in a polemic or in an apologetic. But controversy and defense are not the primary purposes of this lecture. We want to deal with Christian education itself, and in a direct way.

**The Educational Ideal**

What I have to say is stated against the background of two educational ideals, one of long standing, and the other of more recent development, comparatively speaking.

There are those who state the educational ideal in terms of ideas. Learning is the acquiring and assimilating of ideas, it is said. Teaching is the transmitting of ideas. Ideas are, pedagogically at least, treated as sort of entities in mind. Ideas are the prime movers and motivators in human life. A mind equipped with right ideas is thought to be well trained. Thinking is the manipulation of ideas and is therefore primary in life. Everything else that may be said about learning and education is secondary or peripheral. The attainment of factual knowledge is the best discipline of the mind.

Until comparatively recently this was the primary emphasis in learning and teaching. Curricula and classroom instruction were based on it. It has merit. It does not leave the educational experience to the
caprice of immature desire and judgment, as is often the case in modern education. It is averse to one of the greatest weaknesses of current educational practice, namely, permissiveness. It has purpose and program. But it largely ignores the observation of Scripture, "When I was a child . . . ." Recent psychological studies and psychological analysis, and studies in classroom learning have given us a new insight in this Scriptural observation. A child's needs, interests, and purposes, and how he feels about them, are as important as a teacher's purpose and program when one proceeds to set up a learning activity.

Many factors combined to change the educational ideal from ideas to activities. New insights in child life and motivation were attained. Many of these insights, psychologically sound in themselves, were interpreted in terms of a naturalistic view of man as a biological organism or the individuation of a racial impulse or drive. New social and economic conditions by virtue of industrialization and organization made their contribution. Change in religious loyalties too became motivating factors of change in educational outlook. Adjustment to the environment of people and things by attainment of functional knowledge and mastery of skills as needed became the primary emphasis. Ideas and thinking are useful tools in adjustment, it is said. Activity is central and ideas revolve around activities. This Dewey called his Copernican revolution. Not Immanuel Kant, according to Dewey, but he achieved the major revolution in the ideational world. Kant left thinking and ideas central in human experience. Not Dewey. He made them peripheral and functional.

In general it may be said that the activistic ideal is the moving spirit of educational reform today. It is just beginning to take hold in the average classroom. I think a survey would show that most classrooms still hold to the former ideal, at least in practice. But even there the traditional has been weakened considerably. One might say that the larger number of classrooms practice neither thoroughly. The heart has been taken out of the traditional. The modern has not been completely assimilated professionally, and is often resisted by community tradition. So we are doing neither well in most cases.

If we as Christians had no alternative but one of the two briefly described, our choice would not be difficult. We must choose the traditional. The modern is fraught with license and chaos. Educational confusion today is partly the result of doing a mediocre job in both. If the modern is carried through consistently, it can be said of this education what someone said of Dewey's Reconstruction of Philosophy, namely, the title of Dewey's book should have been the Destruction of Philosophy. Activism in education destroys all true education.

But we do not have to choose between these. In Christian education the traditional has always been tempered by good Christian teachers because they loved children for Christ's sake. They did not have the psychological insights we are blessed with today, but they did have an approach to child life which achieved a more personal result than a training of the mind. They were good teachers in spite of their educational ideal as much as because of the merits in this ideal. It should be said that Christian teachers have profited from the recent insights in child life too. Modern education has not been without beneficent influence in classroom instruction. It has humanized the teaching process in the sense of dealing with a child as a child and not merely as an object to be taught.

Christian education has another alternative. Not only does it present the Christian story as truth, in the language of Van Til, but it comes with a true, though always inadequate, conception of a child. Both are necessary to educate. There is a body of truth which constitutes the norm and content of genuine education. There is a child as a creature of God who is endowed by God and has a divinely ordained destiny, and develops according to God-ordained ways. The educational ideal in Christian education is, therefore, neither knowledge-getting or discipline of the mind, though these are not excluded, nor is it adjustment to the environment, which too is necessary when understood rightly. The Christian educational ideal is personal in character. What I mean by personal should become clear as we proceed.

I turn to what I would call some primary considerations in reflecting on our subject. They are really foundational or elemental, but because they do not have equal value foundationally, I prefer to call them primary considerations. I speak of five such considerations: education is a normative science; a Scriptural anthropology; the whole person as subject; education and higher learning; and the school as educational agency.

Education is a Normative Science

I am using the word education to include educational theory and practice. The word science is used in the sense of a systematized body of learning based on research.

Education is a normative science because it seeks to change life, and the attempt to change life requires goals, patterns according to which change is to be sought. No education is without norms. Even education for a changing social order has a goal in change itself. But not all areas of learning are normative. Psychology, for example, describes the data of its observation. It has criteria for interpretation. But as a science psychology seeks no change in life, or ways or modes of living. Counseling will work toward a change of life, but it is an art that employs the findings of psychology.

As a normative science education defines its own goals. But in so doing it functions in the totality of
Education is a distinct science because it has data of its own which it describes and interprets. The data of a classroom learning situation, the data of instructional supervision, the data of curricular organization, the data of teacher-pupil relationship, the data of pupil-pupil relationship, the data of the slow learner, and of the rapid learner, and the like are discrete educational phenomena not covered by any other science. Recording of these data and their interpretation belongs to men schooled in this area. No philosopher would pose as a physicist, nor vice versa, though each may make some observations in the other's field. Likewise an educator is a man of science who, all things equal, speaks with authority in his field of learning in the classroom.

Finally, education appraises the contribution from auxiliary sciences. No science stands by itself. Together the areas of human learning constitute one grand whole. But man can study the whole only by momentarily fractionizing it. So the educator takes one fractional part. But his data interrelate and overlap with those of other areas. All the sciences make contributions to one another, but each one is more indebted to some than to others. So psychology and sociology are today major contributing areas to education. It has been said that in the last fifty years education has been growing closer to psychology, and in the past twenty years to psychotherapy. Every discrete field of learning has the privilege and obligation to appraise the contributions of related sciences with reference to their validity in the observation and interpretation of its own data.

I say that it must be a primary consideration in thinking about Christian education that we view education as a normative and discrete area of learning and research.

**A Scriptural Anthropology**

Another primary consideration in our reflection upon Christian education in modern times is the fact that the Bible tells us very clearly who a child is. Our conception of the nature of a child is a basic consideration, truly foundational in education theory and practice.

When I refer to the Bible in this connection, I am well aware of the fact that the Scriptures do not give us the data of child psychology. Primarily for theology is the Bible a source book of data. But the facts we observe in child life have the setting of the very nature of his being. Neither psychology nor philosophy can give the educator what he needs to interpret observed data in child life. Only the Bible gives us this. And theology comes to our aid as it interprets the Scriptures.

What does the Bible tell us about a child that helps us view him rightly? First of all, the Scriptures tell us that a child is a religious being. We read in Gen. 2:7, “then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.” And in Gen. 1:26, “And God said, Let us make man in our image . . . .” The principle of life in the living being called man is the breath of God. In distinction from plant and animal life, man's life is that of spirit. God used the component elements of the created world to form man, but He gave him the life of the spirit. In his capacity as living being whose life is spirit, man can be image of God, created in God's likeness. That is, he can be the Self-expression of God as Person. Man is a person because he is an organic unity in the spirit. The relationship of man to God in man's very being, not merely as a creature of God but as a child of God, as son of God, in a creatively sense, we designate by the word religious.

Both psychologically and educationally this terminology is important to us. It gives us a distinctive terminology. We are not saying merely that man as a living being has among other qualities the capacity for religion, to worship and serve God. The modern educator can accept this too. No, we are saying that man is a religious being, that religion and religious describe his very essence and thereby the totality of his life. He is rational because he is a religious being. Likewise, he is moral, social, aesthetic, free, and responsible because God created him as organic unity based on spirit life.

As religious being man is the Self-expression of God on a creaturely level. Man fulfills his divinely ordained purpose when he expresses in his total person the qualities of the spirit in harmonious relationship. Of this man was capable before the fall, because as religious being his relationship to God was right. Man had righteousness. But in the fall man voluntarily disrupted this relationship. He lost righteousness and with the loss of righteousness he, as
religious being, lost integration in his person. Sin is the absence of righteousness and the resulting disintegration of person. Instead of the Self-expression of God, the religious being became the self-expression of the unrighteous man in total opposition to God.

What I have said, only too briefly, about man as religious being has many educational implications. Let me use only one illustration: Modern education makes much of self-expression in learning. When doing so, it distinguishes between representational expression and creative expression. It minimizes the significance of the former and seeks almost exclusively the latter. The difference is obvious, is it not? When a child reproduces a lesson from a textbook, he is expressing himself representationally. When he is working on a project or problem and uses ideas from a book to carry on his task toward a desired end, he is said to express himself creatively. What modern education seeks is expression in which a pupil uses the representational to express his own understanding and feeling with integrity and in form acceptable for that purpose. This view of learning fits into the whole scheme of thought that views man as a biological organism with human potentials. The potential in man is realized in self-expression, the self being the developing consciousness of the human qualities.

When we say that man is a religious being the representational and the creative in expression get another setting. Not self-expression with integrity and in accepted form is what we seek merely. Man as religious being is to be the Self-expression of God. The image of God in man is first of all representational, not original. It is derived from man's norm or standard, which is God. It is through the representational that man becomes creatively the Self-expression of God. In Christian education we seek representational expression of God according to His Self-revelation.

Psychologically and pedagogically, however, modern education makes a point. The relationship of the representational and the creative in man proceeds in human development along psychological, not along logical lines. In development the psychological is first. The logical follows. But the logical is the norm, not the psychological. Modern education's mistaken view of the whole distorts its vision of the part. It is typical of modern education to mistake the psychological for the norm.

But let it be said by way of warning to ourselves, that in human development it is likewise a serious mistake to discount the psychological. Christian education does not take its norm from the psychological but it too must deal with a child in his human development. “When I was a child, I spake as a child,” etc.

As religious being man is a two-fold organic unity. As a person he is a living being whose life principle is spirit. We cannot know a man in his soul, or in his heart, or in his emotions, or in his psychological drives. We always know him as a unit, as an organic whole. Neither does he behave as a soul, as a heart, as an emotional being. He behaves as a whole in whom for purpose of analysis we may distinguish various functions. But the organic unity of his person is from the beginning of his life, even prenatally, involved in a broader unity of race and environment, or better called life. Jackie is a person with a history and he can be known only as such. His present behavior is the expression of the unity of his person-in-life. His learning takes place in the context of life. Jackie is not learning as a Nigerian boy, but as a lad living in Grand Rapids, a city in Michigan, of a Christian Reformed family, the son of an ambitious father and an anxious mother.

And the educational implications again are many. When John Dewey said that education is life, he mistakenly made life normative for education. But psychologically and sociologically he stated a scientific fact. A child learns as a whole-person-in-life, and classroom instruction must so proceed if it would achieve its desired goal. This is a child's way. To violate it is to pay the price of violating the unity of life.

But man's unity is a broken unity. Organic unity within and organic unity without are natural to man. But the natural has become unnatural. Man in sin is a broken unity. However, the principle of unity still obtains, be it ever so fragmentary. Realistically we take account of who man has become as a result of sin, but we recognize too that laws of life have not changed. It is only on the principle of unity that any semblance of unity can be attained in a disunity. Only to the degree that the interrelationship of the various functions in man are capable of unity can education take place at all.

For the right understanding of man we must distinguish too between the functional and the moral. The functions of the person are neutral as far as good or evil are concerned. Thinking, feeling, and willing are inherent in man as religious being. He lost none of these when he sinned. He doesn't acquire any new functions when he is converted. But the man as religious being can think evil thoughts. Not thinking as a function, but he is evil. His functions are those of an evil man. A righteous man can think evil thoughts. An unrighteous man can think good thoughts. David was the man according to God’s heart, even when he lusted after Bathsheba. He as a righteous man lusted. His desires became lustful.

This distinction is important in education. Modern education finds the source of a child's problem in maladjustment, that is, in his functions. Now to be sure, evil thoughts must be corrected. Wrong desires must be redirected. Adjustment and readjustment must take place. But education concerns itself not only with functions but with the person. Hence,
Christian education has another source of direction. Modern education makes the learning situation the important thing in teaching. We recognize that this is psychologically significant. But only when a child as a religious being comes to grips with truth in the totality of his life can he develop Self-expression of God in his life. Education as adjustment is at best a very superficial concept.

Finally, the Scriptures clearly point to two kinds of educands. There is a child of God, and there is a child of sin. Child life is not neutral. Roland Allen has well expressed the Scriptural view when he in Expansion (a book on missions) said, "Christian education is education in Christ, and presupposes a certain relationship of the person who receives it to Christ. Eliminate that relationship and the education ceases at once to be Christian for him who receives it." (p. 126) In another book, Education and the Native Church, he makes this striking statement: "Teaching received by a Christian from a non-Christian is made Christian in the Christian mind; teaching received by a non-Christian from a Christian is non-Christian in the non-Christian mind." Two kinds of educands. Christian education is indeed more education of Christians than by Christians. But there are also two kinds of education.

When we study child development in the setting of the Scriptural teaching about man, we get ground under our educational feet that is solid rock, not shifting sand. The facts of psychology and education will find their true significance in this framework. The "old" school did not know or ignored the facts and principles of child development. The "new" school takes advantage of new insights in developing child life, but gives them the wrong setting. Christian education can remedy the errors of both "old" and "new."

(To be concluded in the December issue.)

Creation and Theistic Evolution

Edwin Y. Monsma

The subjects of evolution and creation have recently received renewed attention in the religious press. These two concepts of origin were formerly considered as incompatible and opposite views. But in the last few decades this idea has undergone a significant change. The line of distinction, which formerly seemed so clear and well-defined, is gradually being erased and attempts to synthesize the two views are at times being stressed to such an extent as to make them seem almost synonymous.

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The difference between evolution and creation can no longer be stated in such simple terms as Geesink used in his Van's Heeren Ordinantien in 1907 when he called the one (evolution) a theory of origins without God, and the other (creation) a theory which ascribes the origin of all things to God. Whereas at the turn of the century, under the influence of Huxley, Spencer, and others the concept of evolution received a decidedly mechanistic and atheistic meaning, many present day scientists speak of it in terms of a divinely directed process. Such terms as "theistic evolution" and "evolutionary creation" are finding their way into the scientific vocabulary.

A few quotations from recent publications will illustrate this point: deLaubenfels in his text, Life Science, makes this statement: "Do notice, however, that a thoughtful person finds overwhelming assurance of harmony between the ideas of evolution and creation; some people wisely speak of 'creation by evolution': The religious-minded student has no need to reject science, nor the scientific-minded to reject religion."

Edward McCrady, after having refuted a mechanistic conception of evolution, states: "All that I have in mind is to point out that the advent of Darwinism and modern science has not, as is generally supposed, in any way affected the ancient arguments. If the finding of a watch on a remote island convinces you that man has been in that region, then it is quite unaccountable if you do not recognize the handiwork of a greater mind in the indescribably more complex and more wonderful mechanism of nature. If you can find a watch and not believe it is the product of an intelligent designer, then you are entitled to dispense with belief in God. But I do not believe you can, no matter how hard you try. If the continued study of nature discloses not only innumerable special mechanisms, but also a single, stupendous, overall mechanism capable of coordinating all of the minor processes and producing not merely watches and computing machines, but the men who make watches and computing machines, so much greater the glory of the designer and furthermore, it would merely confirm what the church has always claimed — that there is but one God who created the heavens and the earth and all that therein is . . . ."

"If today we do not believe in creation, it is in spite of, not on account of the testimony of science. And I mean creation by supernatural means — that

"If there is a difficulty for the modern reader in connection with the Biblical account of creation, it is not the problem of reconciling it with science, but that of accounting for its remarkable adequacy. But it seems to me that there are much more important connections between the theory of evolution and Christianity than questions concerning the degree of scientific accuracy in Genesis. I am confident that the Bible was not intended to be a textbook of science, and whoever reads it for that purpose wastes his time, or, at any rate, misses his opportunity."

Paul A. Moody in his textbook on evolution writes: "In the light of scientific discoveries must we discard the Bible and with it our religion? The whole difficulty here lies in the fact that we try to use the Bible in ways for which it was never intended. It is a book of religion, not a book of science. If that fact becomes thoroughly established in our minds, most of our difficulty vanishes."

Such statements may give the impression that these authors have abandoned the evolutionary position for one of creation. This is, however, not the case, because they are all wholly committed to an evolutionary explanation of origins, as indicated by the following quotations, the first from deLaubenfels and the second from McCrady: "There are no evidences against evolution; it is probably as true as it is likely (but of course not certain) that the sun will rise tomorrow morning." "The evidence that evolution has occurred is, as far as I can see, irresistible; it indicates that all of the higher animals, for instance, have evolved from microscopic single-celled animals by a process of colony formation with progressive division of labor and coordination of functions until the colony achieved a unity and individuality of its own which even includes a separate consciousness of the whole assembly, not the sum of the consciousness of the parts."

From the preceding it is clear that there is nowadays a tendency on the part of evolutionists to speak in terms of creation. There is a similar tendency on the part of creationists to speak of creation in terms of evolution. It is well at a time like this to reevaluate our concept of creation, in order to determine whether the Biblical account of its events leaves room for an evolutionary interpretation. The questions that confront us are these: What does the Bible teach concerning creation? Does this teaching permit us to accept an evolutionary interpretation of this divine work? In other words: Is it possible to harmonize creation with some form of theistic evolution?

The opinions of Reformed scholars on the subject of creation seem to be quite uniform. They lead to the conclusion that the creative work was (1) unique, (2) finished or completed, and (3) good. To consider the implications of these terms I shall quote rather extensively from recognized authorities, first from Aalders' *De Goddelijke Openbaring in de Eerste Drie Hoofdstukken van Genesis*:

"The creative work of God has not been limited to the production of matter out of which then all has developed — but God has made a series of different, created forms to appear out of this created matter by means of an entirely unique process which is in actuality different from his providential guidance as we see it in nature at present."

"It is possible to refer to the so-called secondary creation as a 'forming' or 'preparing' of the world, with this provision however, that one adhere very definitely to the idea that this 'forming' and 'preparing' of the world must in turn be sharply distinguished from providence."

"'Creation' and 'preparation' of the world, that is, primary and secondary creation together form a separate work of God, wholly and completely different from his providence."

"Gen. 1:3 and the following teach us that the divine creative work of each day took place as follows: God said, 'Let there be light'; 'Let there be a firmament'; etc. This presentation alone is sufficient to make us see the 'preparation' of the world as an entirely different act of God than his sustaining providence and rule over this world."

"From all this it is perfectly clear that it will not do to differentiate so sharply between the primary and secondary creation, that only primary creation is considered as a unique work of God, whereas the secondary creation is in reality identified with providence."

The late Dr. Charles Hodge recognized the uniqueness of God's creative work when he stated: "The Scriptures expressly distinguish the power by which things were created from that by which they are continued . . . . Creation and preservation differ, first as the former is the calling into existence what did not exist; and the latter is continuing or causing to continue what already has a being; and secondly, in creation there is and can be no cooperation, but in preservation there is a concursus of the first with second causes. In the Bible therefore, the two things are never confounded."

Berkouwer states: "The confessions distinguish sharply between the divine acts of sustaining and creation."

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8 These quotations are translated from G. C. Aalders, *De Goddelijke Openbaring in de Eerste Drie Hoofdstukken van Genesis*, (Kok, Kampen, 1932), pp. 216 ff.
That creation was a completed work is clearly evident from the first two verses of Genesis 2: “And the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.” This statement is repeated in Exodus 20 and 31 in connection with the giving of the fourth commandment. “In these and other witnesses,” says Berkouwer, “believers have correctly read the unique, once-for-all, perfected character of the work of creation.” In Exodus 31:17 we read: “for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.” “This, ‘and was refreshed’” says Berkouwer, “connotes, does it not, the unique done-with character of God’s created work.”

This completed creation was pronounced “very good”: “God saw all that he had made and beheld it was very good.” What does this mean? A common answer is one which states that every created thing fulfilled the purpose for which it had been created. Such an answer is so general that it lacks content and meaning. A more meaningful answer is one in which the original creation is considered as having been free from sin and its effects. There were no destructive forces at work; no disease, no sudden death, no animals preying upon others, no violent storms or destructive floods. The destructive forces which we see in nature are in the Bible traced back to the fall of Adam. It is because of the sin of man that nature has become disruptive. Any other view has its source in the rationalism of modern thinking which considers pain and suffering, death and destruction as natural aspects of creation. “Rationalism,” says Berkouwer, “traces evil [i.e., physical evil, pain, suffering, etc.] to metaphysical evil (imperfection) and metaphysical evil to the necessary nature of God’s creation. Thus he views evil as an integral ingredient of finite existence.”

But the Scriptures never analyze suffering and death apart from the relationship between sin and judgment. There are many Scripture passages which support this point of view: “And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:11 and 12). “For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation is subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For, we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Rom. 8:19-22).

Did God subject creation to vanity from the beginning, or was it done by reason of the fall? Is this groaning and travelling here by virtue of creation, or is it also the result of man’s fall? Would this creation have to be delivered from the bondage of corruption if sin had not entered? It seems very clear from the Scriptures that we cannot speak of a subjection to vanity, a groaning and travelling, a bondage of corruption in a creation which God pronounced “very good.”

Isaiah 11:6-10 speaks of ideal conditions: “And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea.” This is picturesque and symbolic language. It speaks of a future state which is to come after Christ shall have reconciled the world to God. But it also refers back to the ideal conditions which existed before the fall. Vos speaks of it as an “eschatological picture given by the prophet on the principle of a return of paradise at the end.”

Calvin expresses himself more explicitly when he says: “The prophet’s discourse . . . amounts to a promise that there will be a blessed restoration of the world. He describes the order which was at the beginning, before man’s apostasy produced this unhappy and melancholy change under which we groan. Whence comes the cruelty of brutes, which prompts the stronger to seize and rend and devour with dreadful violence the weaker animals? There would certainly have been no discord among the creatures of God if they had remained in their first and original condition. When they exercise cruelty toward each other, and the weak need to be protected against the strong, it is an evidence of the disorder which has sprung from the sinfulness of man. Christ having come in order to reconcile the world to God by the removal of the curse — it is not without reason that the restoration of a perfect state is ascribed to him; as if the prophets had said that the golden age will return in which perfect happiness existed, before the fall of man and the shock and ruin of the world which followed it. It may be summed up: Christ will come to drive away everything lustful out of the world, and to restore to its former beauty the world which lay under the curse.” For this reason he says that straw will be the food of the lion as well as of the ox; for if the stain of sin had not polluted the world, no animal would have been addicted to prey on blood, but the fruit of the earth would have sufficed for all, according to the method which God had appointed.”

12 Ibid., p. 280.
14 J. Calvin, Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, I, (Edinburgh, 1850), pp. 383 and 384.
These interpretations lead to the conclusion that what God created was good in quite a special sense. The world as we observe it today is no longer good in that sense.

The uniqueness, completeness, and goodness of God's creative work leads to the conclusion that our knowledge of creation comes to us through special revelation. It is not revealed by what we see in nature today. General revelation can show us the result of God's creative work and the effects of sin upon it, but it cannot show the means by which it was created. We see the product but not the process of creation. As special revelation, the creation account forms part of a whole body of revealed truth and is but one link in a chain of events which forms the substance of our faith. In fact, it is the link which connects all subsequent events with their divine source. We cannot, therefore, consider creation apart from the fall and redemption. A wrong interpretation of what God meant when he pronounced creation "very good," will lead to a faulty conception of the significance of the fall. This, in turn, will affect the interpretation and scope of Christ's redemptive work. A true, Biblical conception of creation can only be attained from its revelational setting. In so far as creation can be interpreted, it must be interpreted in the light of the whole of Scriptures and not merely on the basis of possible translations of words used in the first chapter of Genesis. When this is done, we shall see in the universe not only the marvelous products of God's creative work but also the devastating and ruining phenomena which are the results of man's sin.

IV

Evolution refers to any theory which ascribes the origin of this universe, the world, and the living beings in it, to a gradual development by means of natural forces which are still in operation and which, therefore, can be observed and studied experimentally. Such a process when controlled and directed by God may be called theistic evolution.

There are many forms of theistic evolution. Some prefer to speak of "creation by evolution" or of "progressive creation." Others use the term "progressive creation," but they all accept, to a greater or lesser degree, the uniformitarian principle which assumes that if past events are to be reconstructed, "it is necessary to start from the present whose course of events it is possible to survey." The application of this principle to the more recent period of the world's history is warranted because we have the promise that "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). But when it is applied to explain the origin of things, it takes away the distinctiveness of God's creative work. This is true for any evolutionary conception of origin, theistic as well as others.

The theistic evolutionist does not consider God's creative work as unique because he assumes that the same forces which brought this universe into being are active today in the same way and at the same rate they have always been. By the same token, he does not consider God's creative work as having been completed at the end of the sixth day. From his point of view, creation is a continuous process. Nor does he consider that the universe was good in the sense that it was free from evil and destructive forces when it was created.

According to Berkouwer, "Leibniz carries the germ of the latter evolutionism which considered sin simply as a moment in a developmental process . . . For with moral evil, as well as physical evil, being at bottom a matter of incompleteness, all evil is really metaphysical evil. Metaphysical evil in turn is nothing more than the limitations peculiar to creatureliness. The evil in the world is explained, according to Leibniz, by the structure of creation. From metaphysical evil flows moral evil and from moral evil issues physical evil. A world without evil is inconceivable and impossible." Karl Barth leaves room for a similar evolutionary interpretation in his christological view of creation. In Barth's view says Kempff, "The judgment of God concerning his creative work (that everything was very good) does not refer to creation in itself, but only in Jesus Christ; it, therefore, refers to a sinful world, which must be considered as the best world one can possibly think of . . . In this way real justice is not done to the historical order, creation, fall, and redemption." Berkouwer also states that, "Like Leibniz, Barth proposes that this is the best possible and conceivable world," and he too suggests that such a view is not in harmony with the historic sequence of creation, the fall, and redemption, which is so clearly taught in the Scriptures.

One finds familiar echoes of this idea of an imperfect and incomplete creation in recent writings. Lever states: "If scientific facts plead in favour of the occurrence of diseases, biological death, and of parasites before the occurrence of man, and thus also before the fall of man, then we have to reject the opinion, held by many Protestants, that those occurred only after the fall." Ramm, who calls himself a progressive creationist, writes: "The universe must contain all possible ranges of goodness. One of these grades is that it can fail in goodness . . . But this is the best creation when seen as a whole, an entirety. If there were nothing corruptible, or if there were no evil men, many good things would be missing in this universe. The lion lives because he can kill the ass and eat it. Avenging justice could only be praised if there were injustice; and patient

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suffering could be virtue only in the presence of injustice. 20 "Outside of the Garden of Eden were death, disease, weeds, thistles, carnivores, deadly serpents, and intertemperate weather." 21 Conclusions like these are the result of evolutionary reasoning, because they are based on the idea of gradual development due to natural causes which have not been appreciably affected by the fall.

V

With the foregoing explanations of creation and theistic evolution in mind, it appears quite impossible to harmonize these two concepts of origin, and we must conclude that any attempt to explain creation in terms of theistic evolution is contrary to the evident meaning of the Scriptures. And yet, there is at present a growing tendency on the part of Christian scientists of the orthodox group to swing toward an evolutionary reinterpretation of creation. The reason for this evidently lies in a sincere desire on the part of these scientists to be thoroughly scientific, which to them means the acceptance of certain basic tenets of modern science. Among these are a strict application of the uniformitarian principle and the idea that our knowledge about nature and natural phenomena comes from nature alone. This leads to the further conclusion that the Bible, since it is not a textbook of science but a book of religion, has very little if any thing to say about scientific facts. Questions about the origin, purpose, and destiny of this universe are considered without the light of special revelation. This approach is typically modern. It starts with observed phenomena apart from special revelation and hopes to arrive at the truth by means of natural human reason, forgetting that human reason is finite and fallible. At best, it arrives, or hopes to arrive, at a god or some divine being as the source of all existence. Berkouwer expresses this modern approach as follows: "They have abstracted thought from God's revelation. It has been assumed that the world and its events, apart from revelation, speak their own language and that their speech can be understood and translated by our natural reason. God and His righteousness take their place, not at the beginning, but at the end of this process of thought. God is, as it were, the a posteriori conclusion of analytical thought. And, with this, the Divine revelation is in principle repudiated. It is denied, not in a purposeful disavowal, but implicitly in the structure and process of thought. It is not sufficiently recognized that this world cannot be understood without the word of the living God, that it will, at the most crucial moment, be misunderstood when God's revelation is not the determinative point of departure for analysis." 22

It is in this modern scientific environment that the Christian scientist must work out his cosmological and biological perspectives, and, unless he is on his guard, he will follow the way of least resistance and submit to some sort of theistic evolution. The only way to avoid it is to make God and His word, with its comprehensive revelation of creation, the fall, and redemption, "the determinative point of departure for analysis." This will not lead to a scientific explanation of the creation process which would not be creation if it could be scientifically explained, but to a greater adoration of Him who spoke and it was brought into being, and to a deeper appreciation of what the writer to the Hebrews meant when he said: "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear." (Hebrews 11:3).

Freedom may be the emptiest of all words if it means only absence from restraint, or absence of authority. "Freedom of speech," says Dr. Robert M. Hutchins, "is empty unless we have something to say." What good is free speech if we use it to lie and fill the air with bunk? Freedom of worship is empty if we have no God to worship. Someone has said that some of our people here in the land of the free were terribly upset when Russia closed its churches, but didn't even know that their own American churches were open! Freedom of religion?—They were free of it entirely. Freedom from kings, tyrants, autocratic authority?—Of what use is all that we take it as the inalienable right to do as we please? The Prodigal son had that, and it took him straight to a pig-sty. The Emperor Nero had all four freedoms, and he used them all to make himself a scoundrel.

Freedom is no good if you make it an end in itself and divorce it from Divine purpose. "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." That is positive. Not freedom from something, but freedom to something. Not absence of restraint, but presence of possibility. Not just the power to do as we want, but the power to do what God wants. There is a vast difference between Christian liberty and the cheap substitute that our secularism has made of it.

From Horrors and Halos in Human Nature
by J. Wallace Hamilton
(Fleming H. Revell Company)

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FROM NEW JERSEY

Shelton College
Ringwood, New Jersey
August 26, 1955

Dr. Cecil De Boer, Editor
The Calvin Forum

Dear Dr. De Boer:

I have just re-read S. du Toit’s piece (Aug-Sept.) from South Africa and am amazed at his facile manner of justifying the tragic racial policies of Premier Strydom. Suppose it is the case that some natives will receive improved housing and education, there surely is no equality of “justice to all” nor an equal application of “Calvinistic” or “Christian” principles “in all realms of life” in the current population registration program. Strydom has his “safe [political] majority,” but can the authoritarianism of the Nationalist Party withstand the threat of revolution and Communism in Africa?

I suspect that the true spirit of Christian love is missing in this apartheid plan, just as it is missing in the United States wherever race prejudice is manifested. If the Christian churches of South Africa do not seize this opportunity to lift up their voices for the truth before their people and before a politically and spiritually divided world, who will? Surely this is the time for those who are truly Christian to practice the Reformed faith. It is my prayer that they and we will. Now.

Sincerely in Christ,

William W. Paul

FROM KENTUCKY

149 Edgemoor Drive
Lexington, Ky.
September 6, 1955

Dr. Cecil De Boer
Editor, The Calvin Forum
Dear Dr. De Boer:

I always read the letters of your South African correspondent with great interest, but frequently also with deep concern and uneasiness.

Anyone who knows anything about the situation in South Africa knows that the white people in that country face a very difficult problem. But the fact of facing a difficult situation may never be used as a justification for an un-Christian solution. I was shocked to read in Mr. du Toit’s letter in the August-September issue the strange justification for denying native Negro children the right to attend Christian schools, as “the best measure to save them from the influence of agitators.” The trouble with the policy of “apartheid” and all that goes with it is that there is no end to it. It becomes necessary to proceed from one act of repression to another. The next logical step is to ban Christian missionary work and native Christian churches, because the Good News is upsetting, over-turning nearly all of the views of the natural, or once-born, man. The Jews of Thessalonica sought to set the people of that city against Paul and Silas by crying, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.”

Only recently the South African Government denied a 16-year-old African boy a passport to enable him to come to the United States to attend a Christian school. What must Christians in the United States think about such an act?

By “agitation” South Africans generally mean Communist agitation, but this policy of repression provides the Communists with the best propaganda material for which they could ask. By this policy Communism is being aided, and not the reverse. Many persons throughout the world who loathe Communism and all its works are disturbed by such reasoning.

What does Mr. du Toit mean by the ideal of a Christian Republic? What is wrong with the ideal of a Christian Commonwealth? In its present status the Union of South Africa is as free as it would be as a Republic. An outsider cannot escape the conclusion that when Boers talk about a Christian Republic they mean a South Africa in which the Boers, who constitute a very small majority of the population, will ignore the English and the Negroes and treat the latter according to the pattern which has already been set—a pattern which offends the whole world.

I regret that I must write in this fashion. We Americans have sinned grievously in our relations with the Negroes, so that we have little right to pick up the first stone. Let us remember that both the United States of America and the Union of South Africa stand under the judgment of God.

It is especially regrettable when we seek to throw a mantle of piety about our dubious acts by claiming to be Calvinists in doing them. This is to make Calvinism a term of opprobrium.

Sincerely yours,

Amry Vandenbosch

This series of thirteen radio addresses on the Ten Commandments and the cross of Christ is not at all hackneyed but strikingly vivid, and the quotations and references are to the point.

The book is not a systematic exposition of the Ten Commandments. Considering the audience which the radio minister must address, a systematic treatise would scarcely serve the purpose or hold the attention of such a motley group of listeners. The method of treatment employed is rather the one used by prominent essayists such as Carlyle in his Sartor Resartos or Lamb in his Essays of Elia or Ruskin in his Essays. The essay method presents diverse aspects of the topic discussed, explaining and illuminating now one point then another until at the close the reader (or listener) has a series of impressions fitted to make him definitely more intelligent on the subject.

While reading these addresses this reviewer was reminded of a boat trip on a steamer one night as we left the harbor of Holland, Michigan. A huge searchlight on the bridge kept lighting up the surrounding area, with now the lake, then a hillside, then the city of Holland, or one of the resort towns or the harbor exit being conjured up to view out of the darkness. But at no time was the harbor scene in its entirety placed before us. In the same way the reader is led in these discourses from one illuminated topic to another, the author portraying in vivid scenes distinct messages which the law presents as his searchlight brings them into view.

The author of these thirteen “essays” has made us see the Ten Commandments in their broad application to politics, to social and domestic life, to education and science, as well as to the more narrowly religious and ethical life. The illustrations with which he spiced his addresses are not at all hackneyed but strikingly vivid, and the quotations and references are to the point.

A noteworthy characteristic of these addresses is their style. The author does not use heavy Latinized terms, but by preference plain Anglo-Saxon words, as does Hawthorne in his Scarlet Letter. On the whole he tells his story in simple sentences. There is hardly one complex sentence to a page and only infrequently a compound sentence. This makes for easy reading or listening. The diction is elevated, polite, occasionally deviating from literary style to an oral conversational form, as one might expect in a radio address.

As one reads through these thirteen discourses on Law and Love, he is not at all surprised that these radio addresses do captivate the hearts of many listeners. The story is told of a ticket agent in one of our cosmopolitan cities who was serving the radio minister of the Back To God Hour with a railroad ticket. The agent enquired whether he were Reverend Eldersveld, and remarked “I thought you were, I recognized you by your voice.” And, opening the window, he gave him a hearty handshake, informing him that he was a regular listener to the broadcast.

H. Henry Meeter, Calvin College


How did religious leaders of the 1920’s, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, evaluate the changing manners and morals of that decade? What assessment did church groups make of dancing, movies, birth control, divorce, marriage, fashions, and the like, in the “Roaring 20’s”? Can one by surveying what appeared in the denominational periodicals determine the value systems which were at work in these church bodies thirty years ago?

These questions focused the research interest of Dr. Thaman. For her research she received her Ph.D. in History from St. Louis University. Out of her research came this book. Presently she teaches history at St. Mary’s Junior College in Missouri.

Her research hypothesis was that an examination of the editorial comments of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish journalists should enable one to discover how the most vocal groups among these denominations reacted to certain manners and morals of a period. Her purpose was not to condemn or to praise the various opinions. Her research method was to survey what magazines representing religious groups were saying about manners and morals of the 1920’s. The approach was historical and comparative.
The first research problem was which journals to select. The primary criterion for selection was whether the journal was "most officially representative, as far as that is possible, within groups having varying degrees of autonomy — of the respective religious bodies." Three Baptist magazines were chosen, including one speaking for the North and one for the South. Two Catholic journals, The Commonweal, "organ of the laity," and America, "organ of the church," were used. Single papers speak for the Episcopalian church, the Reform Jews, United Lutherans, Missouri Synod Lutherans, and the Unitarians. Two journals speak for the northern and southern Methodists. The conservative and liberal Presbyterian groups are represented by two magazines. A chapter is devoted to the reasons for selection and a brief description of each magazine. Based on the 1916 religious census the denominations represented by these journals constitute 88 percent of the religious population of the United States.

After noting that the religious press was quite pessimistic about the entire decade, because of the uprooting of former mores and in spite of the rising standard of living, Thaman proceeds to specific features of the period and a review of sentiment concerning them.

First, the automobile is viewed with alarm. All groups decried the speed mania and accidents. The Baptists cited evidence that "automobile rides furnished the occasion for 95% of the moral lapses in 200 cases of delinquency among girls." Professional sports and over-emphasis on athletics are condemned, for several reasons — waste of money, waste of time, distortion of values ("professor of Greek gets $3,000 salary, football coach $12,000"), gambling, bodily injury. The Catholics have the largest catalog of sports evils and settle particularly on college football, which brings "over-excitement in the autumn and distortion of values throughout the year, drinking, encouragement of betting and provocation of dishonesty."

The "spectaculars" of the 20's is a term covering flagpole sitting, marriages in a balloon, baptisms on a steel girder, the Ouij Board, Miss America contests and various marathons. On all of these the religious press was found disproving, entreatling, rebuking.

Dancing and, at times, its jazz musical accompaniment, were opposed by the majority of the religious groups and subjected to constant denunciation. "Old dances were objectionable only because they were sources of temptation to sin. The modern dance is no longer temptation; it is undeniably indulgence in fleshly lust," said the Lutherans. The Jewish paper admits that some of the extreme dances need correction, but disagrees with those who would curtail all dancing. "The Methodist outcry against all dancing is a part of the Puritan revival which seeks to take the joy out of life," it says.

The use of cosmetics is criticized by some groups, but smoking by women was violently opposed by every group except the Jewish, although the reasons for opposition shows considerable variation.

During the 20's the motion picture became one of the most popular pastimes in all parts of the country, although talking pictures did not appear until the end of the decade. Sensuous and sensational themes so frequently featured in the new films brought a rising storm of continual and caustic criticism from church organizations. Opposed also in the movies were divorce among actors, stimulus to crime, Sabbath desecration, unreal portrait of life, drinking, illicit love, jibes at religion, etc. Many groups advocated censorship.

As probably expected, all groups were concerned about the rising crime rate and drug addiction, but they differed as to the cause and cure. The Catholics argue for Christian schools, the Methodists and Presbyterians for swifter and tougher penalties, the Unitarians for a more sympathetic handling of young offenders.

In the 20's Judge Ben Lindsey came out with his proposal for companionate or trial marriage and the religious press, with two exceptions, viciously cut away at the idea. The Unitarians favored the proposal and the Jews said nothing about it.

Birth control proved to be a very controversial issue. Lutherans and Catholics were uncompromising in their opposition. Sections of Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians and Unitarians were either tolerant or favorable. The Jewish segment was non-committal. Presbyterians, by action later during the 30's, it would seem, opposed it. On no issue cited in the study was there more disagreement than in this one.

Divorce comes in for strong disapproval of all groups except the Jewish and Unitarian, whose objections might be called mild or ambiguous. Conceptions of the meaning of marriage vary from group to group, as do the suggested remedies. The meaning of divorce and the approved grounds for it, if any, also vary, but there is consensus that the home is seriously threatened, and calls to action follow.

Any person interested in the story of the church's reaction to social problems will find this book valuable. It is a good descriptive study, but no more than that. It never gets beyond historical survey, not even to the point of raising or recognizing insightful questions.

One is impressed with the fact that thirty years later most of the same problems remain. Probably the only thing that has changed is the reaction of church groups to these problems. A study of church periodicals in the first five years of the 50's might provide an interesting time comparison. One wishes that the study would show that the concerted efforts of religious groups had had some impact on the problems. The reverse would probably be revealed — that the problems had made a greater impact on the thinking of the churches. At least, that would seem to be the indicated research hypothesis.
Another significant question which should have been considered in this study is "who speaks for whom"? Are the sentiments quoted just those of the writer? Of the editor? Of the editorial board? Of the denomination? In fact, unless one checked back on the footnote references, and there are over 720 of them, one does not know whether the quotation is from an editorial or from letters-to-the-editors columns. I have thought for some time that one could do an interesting content analysis of letters to editors of church papers. However, it would be illegitimate to let statements in readers' columns stand for the sentiment of the group unless careful controls were set up.

Even if the quoted sentiments were expressed by regular staff writers, the problem remains. Do writers in church periodicals reflect the group opinion? Or are they often the more conservative (in social outlook) members of the group, probably retired pastors? In one reference to this problem Dr. Thaman concludes, "Editors and writers contributing to the press are not necessarily the leaders of public opinion, but they are usually the most prominent in expressing their opinion." What the second half of that statement means, I do not know.

At least one of the papers frequently quoted disavows representing "the theological opinions of individuals or of groups as such."

The point is that good research in content analysis of the mass media must take into account such problems, as well as additional problems of selection, context, emphasis, repetition, and the like. Such research must be objective, systematic and quantitative to permit valid generalizations. This study disregards the important advances that have been made in public opinion research in the last decade and suffers for it.

Finally, a caution about inferring behavior from opinion. Assuming that one has a valid expression of group opinion, it may not be concluded that group behavior is identical with it. Ideology and behavior often are contradictory. This problem is not raised by the author, although she is confronted by it in the chapter on dancing (p. 82). Sharp indictments of dancing are given from Baptist papers—"There is nothing good that anyone can truthfully say of the dance . . . a dancing church member is a misnomer and always a liability." However, it was rumored that "At least 95% of their churches were winking at dancing and tolerating it on the part of their members, and even on Sunday evenings." The church papers then polled one thousand pastors and found that "while dancing is not approved by any of the churches, many of them tolerate it. In rare cases, if at all, do they think of disciplining their members for the breach."

This passing reference in connection with one of the issues studied points to something quite important, yet unrecognized by the author. Similar questions could be raised concerning the other manners and morals that were surveyed.

A content analysis of periodicals of Reformed church groups on these issues would provide an interesting comparative analysis, both in time and between denominations.

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