

# THE CALVIN FORUM

A MONTHLY

That New Deal

From Close Observation

Calvinism and Islam

A Missionary Challenge

As To Leadership

Past and Present

Corn, Cotton, and Pigs

Is Crop Limitation Wrong?

Christian-Theistic Methodology

A Christian Logic?

"God's Hunchback"

A Sketch

Rembrandt

# The CALVIN FORUM

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# The CALVIN FORUM

VOLUME I

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH., JANUARY, 1936

NUMBER 6

## EDITORIALS

### Hands off Christmas

FOR weeks prior to the twenty-fifth of December we are permitted to forget Christmas not even for a single day. On the twenty-sixth we emerge from what has been called the Christmas Spirit and proceed to forget all about it—as far as those to whom we are indebted for our Christmas indulgence will allow. However, the values of the day should be far more important and should last much longer than that. Our attitude in this matter has been persistently prospective and rarely retrospective. The latter usually gives us a far saner perspective of the entire matter. As we see it now it was the merchants that proved to be the real beneficiaries. It was a day in which humanitarian and social agencies took advantage of the spirit and practiced their theories. We may be happy to take note of the fact that business spurted and that the cup of the milk of human kindness seemed to overflow, but we should deem it tragic that we have forgotten what it really was all about. Via the press and the radio we were regaled with deeds of love and cheer. We listened to songs in which the melody rather than the sentiments proved to be effective. We busied ourselves about the temporal and material, and, of course, received values that failed to abide. We forget because we receive only passing things. One of our difficulties lies in the fact that the Church has been and is surrendering the day to commercial and humanitarian interests. Of all the great days of the year, she should zealously guard this one and claim it as her own and dedicate it exclusively to the Son of God. It is His day—His birthday. All other interests should be told persistently and effectively, "Hands off." I wonder if we shall then proceed to forget about it on the twenty-sixth.

H. S.

### Authorities on God

ABOUT a year ago Leuba, the psychologist, interrogated via the questionnaire American scientists as to their belief in God. He found that 38% of the physicists believed in God, 27% of the biologists, 24% of the sociologists, and 10% of the psychologists. Now this survey would be as innocent as it is useless, if it weren't for the fact that the atheists and the agnostics point to these statistics with unjustifiable pride and that many are regarding belief in God as an indication of mental mediocrity. What are these figures worth? They are worth a good deal in the evaluation of the mental bent of the scientist. They are worth nothing

at all for the determination of the existence of God. There is a peculiar American *naïveté*, which manifests itself in the position that when a man is an authority in one field, he is so in all. We prize Jack Dempsey's opinion about matters that have nothing to do with pugilism. We cherish the ideas of Henry Ford about problems which are very remote from automobiles. We might as well ask a preacher for an authoritative statement on matters of finance. The only authority on God is, after all, God. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." The scientist as a scientist has no authoritative statement to make about God. Such statements can be had only from the man through whom God speaks.

H. S.

### A Comment on Leadership

OUR Roosevelts, our Borahs, our Hoovers, our Thomases, our Coughlins, our Townsends, with their frequently contradictory programs, compel us to reflect on the nature and quality of leadership. To what extent are not these leaders but the mouthpieces for the expression of the loud, discordant, strident tones that well up from the millions of our people, representing the desires, the fears, the hates of the several groups or classes in our population? Do the combined voices of the few leaders do much more than give utterance, give direction to these many pleas, griefs, charges? Is not theirs but another clamor, more clearly enunciated, more pointed perhaps, but clamor still?

Do not these leaders reveal the almost insurmountable obstacles to real leadership? They do reveal how easy it is to be led by the followers rather than to lead, merely to protect something already achieved rather than to advance, to "wrap up something in a napkin" rather than to put it to use, to rely on the sidewise glance rather than the forward look, to think of the present pattern of the institution rather than of the needs of the individual, to think in terms of oneself as leader rather than of the true needs of follower and reader alike, indeed, to advance oneself in spite of follower or of the need that evokes the leadership itself.

Times like the present bring out strongly the tendency of the leader to reveal his own limitations, to proclaim his own feelings, his own emotions. How difficult for the leader to be a real instrument and to regard himself only as such! To be a fit instrument he must see beyond himself, beyond his class. He must envisage the particular need or desire in its setting of

acts these laws, or by what color they may be called. It seems that Calvin also had this in mind when he wrote in the *Institutes* the following: "The moral law, therefore, with which I shall begin, being comprised in two leading articles, of which one simply commands us to worship God with pure faith and piety, and the other enjoins us to embrace man with sincere love, this, I say, is the eternal rule of righteousness, prescribed to *men of all ages and nations* (italics mine, H. W.) who wish to conform their lives to the will of God." And further Calvin writes: "Ceremonies might be abrogated without any violation or injury or piety, as the precepts of duties and love remain of perpetual obligation, notwithstanding the abolition of all these judicial ordinances. If this be true, certainly *all nations are left at liberty to enact such laws* as they shall find to be respectively expedient for them, provided they be framed according to that perpetual rule of love, so that, though they vary in form, they may have the same end."

Let us search ourselves to find out whether we are truly Calvinists, also in the problem of "War and Peace."

Paterson, N. J.

HARRY P. WINSEMIUS.

#### Education for Peace

I read your "Thirty Theses" and find myself in entire agreement with the position you take on the vital issue of peace and war. Permit me to make one comment on thesis 23. The final clause of that thesis I would change to read, "but in cultivating

a genuine *peace psychology*." To my way of thinking there is a vital difference. The reference is primarily to education. We have been cultivating a "war psychology" long enough. The emphasis should be on peace, though not on peace at any price, of course.

The education for peace would involve a revamping of courses in history. Too long the emphasis has been upon major battles and outstanding generals. The great movements in history center about economic issues and problems. I agree with Dewey that our great heroes are not primarily generals and war lords, but inventors and social reformers. Of course, we, who would not make the economic interpretation of history basic but would regard the spiritual interpretation primary, would add our spiritual and moral reformers. If history as taught in the schools were modified to place the emphasis upon peaceful adjustment, we might see an enormous change in the general attitude toward war within a generation.

You understand, I am not forgetful of a number of other things which would have to happen to effect the change we desire. Fact is that even in Christian schools weeks are spent on the so-called great wars, while major social and economic changes come in for a meager half-hour. Your "Thirty Theses" might well be supplemented to add another referring to this desirable change from an educational point of view.

Again accept my congratulation upon sponsoring the publication of so splendid a periodical as THE CALVIN FORUM.

Hawthorne, N. J.

C. R. JAARSMA.

## B O O K S

### A CHRISTIAN-THEISTIC METHODOLOGY

DE NOODZAKELIJKHEID EENER CHRISTELIJKE LOGICA. Dr. D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, Hoogleraar aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam. H. J. Paris, Amsterdam, 1932. Price fl. 2.25.

IT IS generally agreed that a consistently Christian conception of reality is quite distinct from all other conceptions of reality. It is not so generally accepted that this distinctly Christian conception of reality implies a distinctly Christian conception of scientific methodology. Many Christian scholars seem to take for granted that if we are to reason intelligently with non-Christians we must have a common or neutral methodology.

But are not one's conception of reality and one's conception of methodology involved in one another? We cannot help but think they are. One's conception of reality is one's conception of the foundation of the laws of logic.

We may take, for example, the Christian conception of reality and show that it has definite implications with respect to the law of non-contradiction. The Christian conception of God implies that "whatsoever comes to pass" in the created universe has been preinterpreted by God's plan. God's logic precedes history. God makes and sustains the facts and the laws of the scientists. The particulars and universals of the created universe are adapted to one another by God. They have their coherence and admit of interpretation by man because back of them is the absolute coherence of God.

Stated in terms of methodology this means that the law of non-contradiction has absolute validity because it has universal application. Truth is absolute. It is this conception of the foundation of the law of non-contradiction that enables us to ask questions about nature and history. It is this conception also that enables us to expect answers when we ask questions about nature and history. Without this conception of the foundation of the law of non-contradiction the curse of Heraclitus cannot be lifted; if "all things flow" logic flows too. Things do not submit to logic if the logic of God does not underlie them. God is the presupposition of intelligent human predication.

Reasoning from methodology to reality we come to the same conclusion. This need scarcely be pointed out if we adopt a Christian methodology. If Christian-theism is involved in your method, you will, of course, discover Christian-theism if you apply your method. If you have put a mouse in your hat, you will, as a true magician, discover a mouse when you take off your hat. Thus your insistence on a Christian-theistic method-

ology, it will be said by our opponents, only helps to deceive the "faithful."

This would seem to be sad enough. We should not wish to catch men by guile of this baser sort. But sad though it be to fool others, it is still more sad to fool yourself as well. He who adopts a "neutral" methodology does the latter. It is a foregone conclusion that if we apply a neutral methodology we can find no more than a finite God. History proves this as far as history can prove anything. None of all the many schools of philosophy, except the definitely Christian-theistic, have offered us anything higher than a finite God; all of them have used the "neutral" method.

It could not be otherwise. It is the logic of the matter. If men are "neutral" in their methodology they say in effect, that as far as the possibilities involved in their investigations are concerned, God may or may not exist. The facts and the laws of this universe may or may not be sustained by God. The law of contradiction does not necessarily have its foundation in God. Thus the law of non-contradiction may or may not have universal application. A may be A tomorrow or it may be *not-A* tomorrow. Thus history precedes not only the logic of man but also the logic of God; God Himself must search for truth. Eve was "neutral" when she put Satan's interpretation of history on a par with God's interpretation of history. She thought that the devil might possibly be right. That seemed to be an innocent attitude. Apparently God did not think so; He punished her with death for her "neutrality" in methodology. To doubt God is to deny Him. Does not this hold everywhere? Neutrality toward God is in effect negation of God.

Those who seek to defend the Christian-theistic position in the fields of science and philosophy ought to be well aware of the fact that "neutrality" is really negation. It is only a happy inconsistency that will lead us to a theistic conclusion by way of a "neutral" path and we should not expect men to follow our inconsistencies. We may do much valuable detail work but we cannot present the Christian-theistic position logically and fully if we adopt a "neutral" methodology. If we do so we place ourselves at the mercy of the enemy at the outset of the argument.

On the other hand, if we recognize the interdependence of method and conclusion in scientific research we can fruitfully reason with men. We can then place ourselves upon our opponents' position *for argument's sake*. We can be "neutral" for argument's sake. We can see what happens to experience if the "neutral" method be adopted. We can then whirl about with men in their exclusively immanentistic and relativistic

cauldron to tire them out. We may go with our opponents for argument's sake when as men of water they build ladders of water and place them upon foundations of water against a support of water in order to get out of the water a pure temporality. If to save men we should really and not merely for argument's sake enter the cauldron of "neutrality" or bare possibility we should need saving ourselves.

Can there be any doubt as to the urgent necessity of a consistently Christian methodology today? Modern thought as a whole has adopted the position that truth is relative. If the pepperpot of Chance shakes long enough every conceivable kind of configuration of facts and laws may eventually appear; theism may be true today and non-theism may be true tomorrow. This is virtually the position of such men as James Jeans. Such a position is reached by the application of the "neutral" method in the field of science.

To meet such a negation of God as is hidden under cover of the much-praised "neutrality" of scientists we need a humble but bold affirmation that God is so necessary to us that He is necessary in the field of method as well as elsewhere.

Arminianism cannot furnish such an affirmation of God. It says that God is at some points dependent upon the decisions of men. It says that the historical has not been preinterpreted by God. It therewith denies the universal application of the law of non-contradiction. It has compromised with the Irrationalism of modern thought. If anything is clear from Edwin Lewis' book, *A Christian Manifesto*, that is clear. He tells us that "Augustine affirming man's moral incompetency and Pelagius affirming man's moral competency may both be right" (p. 107). He speaks of the necessity of a "structural change" in God, because of certain events in history (p. 170).

Nor is the compromise with modern Irrationalism limited to those who have an Arminian heritage. We have it in Dr. Geo. W. Richards' book, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism*. Dr. Richards tells us we need not concern ourselves with the world-picture given us in Scripture. For him there is no God-interpreted system of truth. So, too, Dr. Donald Mackenzie in his book, *Christianity — The Paradox of God*, toys with the idea of paradox as the really contradictory instead of the merely seeming contradictory. The influence of Karl Barth and Kierkegaard is apparent in all three of these men. Barth himself struggles in vain to combine the motif of absolute Irrationalism with the Christian motif of an absolutely rational, though to man incomprehensible, God. Karl Heim, in his recent *Sprunt Lectures*, makes a false antithesis between believing in Christianity as a system of truth and following the person of Christ.

The question is as to how we are to meet this avalanche of Irrationalism within as well as without the Church. We believe it can be done only if, in reliance on the grace of God, we present a consistently Christian position. If we attempt to work according to a "neutral" methodology we have lost our argument against Arminianism and thus have also lost our argument against all forms of modern Irrationalism.

We believe that this is in the main Dr. Vollenhoven's position. His book gives the necessary discussion of the history of logic in order to establish what I have had to state briefly and dogmatically. The question of a neutral methodology and a neutral starting-point ought to be discussed, it seems to me, among those who wish to be Reformed in their thinking. It does not seem to me that we are really Reformed as long as we try to be neutral. It is a question that every teacher in a Christian institution of learning must face.

C. VAN TH.

## BOOKISH BREVITIES

**VITAL ISSUES, 1935.** *Convention Addresses delivered at the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Reformed Young Men Societies.* 75 pages. Order from the Secretary A. F. R. Y. M. S., 869 Eleventh St., N.W., Grand Rapids, Mich. 25 cents.

**STIMULATING** addresses by leaders of Calvinistic youth. Young people who enjoy convention addresses like these — as is apparent they did from the subsequent discussions recorded — are the hope of the future. Here is a facing of issues of today in sincere and living loyalty to the great verities of our Faith.

**SILVER SEASON, AND OTHER POEMS.** *Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1935. Price: 40 cents.*

**POETIC** gems in which a vital Christian faith, in its deeper as well as its lighter veins, comes to delicate expression. Mostly from the hands of young people, these bits of verse are a fine tribute to the group that produced it. Some forty poems by a dozen different authors.

**JOHN AND BETTY STAM: MARTYRS.** *By Lee S. Huizenga, M.D., F.R.G.S. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1935. Price: 35 cents. Cloth: \$1.00.*

**A** MOVING account of the martyrdom of a youthful missionary and his devoted wife at the hands of revolutionary Chinese soldiers near the village of Miaosheo, in the province of Anhwei, December, 1934.

**THE JOURNEY OF MAN, AND OTHER SERMONS.** *By Jan Karel Van Baalen. Grand Rapids, 1935, Eerdmans. \$1.00.*

**H**ERE are ten truly spiritual sermons. The style is simple and lucid. The reader is never in doubt as to the meaning and purpose of the author. The messages are scriptural, edifying, sound. The Word is honored; the gospel is preached; and in such a way that contact with actual life and experience is maintained throughout. The book is a recent selection of the Texas Religious Book of the Month Club. Dr. Erdmans of Princeton writes a brief foreword.

**THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS.** *Sermons by Archibald Alexander Little. Grand Rapids, 1935, Zondervan. \$1.25.*

**T**WENTY-FIVE brief devotional essays, every one of them biblical in spirit and doctrinally sound. The teaching is very elementary and there is nothing outstanding in these messages, but every one of them is good spiritual food. When occasion presents itself the author, who is pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Meridian, Mississippi, champions some of the distinctively Calvinistic positions.

**PAN-PRESBYTERIAN PRINCIPLES.** *By John Watkins Moseley, Jr. Grand Rapids, 1935, Eerdmans. \$1.00.*

**A** CLEAR, simply-phrased account of some of the outstanding elements of the Reformed Faith. This little book is not a doctrinal treatise in any sense of the word. It is rather a series of brief essays exhibiting the truth and value of some of the distinctive elements in the doctrine and polity of the Presbyterian Church. Some of the subjects touched upon are: Common Grace, Predestination, Baptism, Perfection.

**THE PHILOSOPHIES OF FATHER COUGHLIN.** *Four Sermons by W. B. Riley, D.D. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1935. pp. 58.*

**A** HODGE-PODGE of pious platitudes, Scripture quotations, some sane observations, and half-baked economic statements. Here we surely have Dr. Riley at his poorest. In his Foreword the author states that this series of sermons is a plain departure from the custom of the First Baptist pulpit, Minneapolis, Minn. We hope the departure will not be repeated. We prefer to hear Dr. Riley preach Christ and Him crucified.

C. B.