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The truth is that the nurture of the children is rooted deeply in the commands of the Word of God. According to Reformed doctrine, baptized children are members of the Church. They are children of the covenant. Surely then they should be treated as such.

—J. Gresham Machen



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We Are Not Ashamed of Calvinism!

An Open Letter to the Editor of
Time and Life Magazines

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THE following letter to *TIME* magazine was first published in *CHRISTIAN OPINION*, Vol. IV, No. 3. Although the articles in *TIME* and *LIFE*, to which Dr. Van Til refers, appeared some time back, the general subject matter is of current and continuing interest. In an earlier issue of the *GUARDIAN* we referred to the article by Professor Bouma and the replies by Professors Pauck and Haroutunian. The fact that magazines such as *TIME* and *LIFE* give space frequently to the consideration of religious subjects indicates that there is a real interest among the reading public in the religious aspects of modern living. We are glad to have this evaluation of the usual popular attitude toward and treatment of such matters, from the pen of the well-known Westminster professor. We publish it by permission of *CHRISTIAN OPINION*.

DEAR *Time*:
In your issue of February 24, 1947 you published an article under your usual rubric called "Religion" on the subject Calvinist Comeback?

The writer of your article describes what he apparently thinks of as the essence of Calvinism in the following sentence: "Calvinism insisted on 1) the total depravity of man, 2) a God who, for His own good reasons, irrevocably divided all mankind into the Elect and the Damned, 3) strict 'blue laws'." We who believe in Calvinism wouldn't put it that way.

The System of Truth

Our contention is that any individual doctrine must be understood in relation to the system of which it is a part. Take, for instance, the so-called "five points of Calvinism," (a) total depravity, (b) unconditional election, (c) limited atonement, (d) irresistible grace, and (e) perseverance of the saints. Rightly or wrongly Calvinists hold that these five points are nothing

but facets of the system called Protestantism. They feel that those who are most deeply devoted to the genius of Protestantism, with its doctrine of Scripture as authoritative for all the dimensions of life, ought to hold to these five points of doctrine. The Bible speaks of God first of all. It speaks of Him as the creator and director of the world. What is this but to say that by His plan God "controls whatsoever comes to pass?" What is this but to say that man is ultimately responsible to God and that God by His self-contained wisdom controls the final destinies of men. Calvinism is simply Protestantism come to its own.

The Essence of Christianity

Furthermore Protestants believe that their system constitutes the essence of Christianity. The genius of Protestantism is not best expressed by saying that it brought to light the doctrines of the infallible Scripture, justification by faith and the universal priesthood of believers. Here too the individual doctrines depend for their meaning upon the relation they sustain to the system of which they are a part. And the Roman Catholic "system" is a hybrid system, a system part pagan and part Christian. The genius of Christianity cannot make itself felt without material reduction through any of the doctrines of Roman Catholicism.

Those who believe in Calvinism, then, believe that their system is, as the late B. B. Warfield put it, Christianity come to its own. They believe that they can make out their case for this contention first as over against those who are Protestants but not Calvinists and second as over against those who are Christians but not Protestants. Calvinists simply think of themselves as those who hold to the system of Christian theism and do so seriously at every point.

Calvinist Evangelism

Feeling as they do, Calvinists naturally do not hesitate to call upon men everywhere to accept their faith. And this call finds a particular urgency in what amounts to a confession of bankruptcy on the part of those who profess anything but Calvinism. The address of Professor Clarence Bouma of Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, published in *The Journal of Religion* for January, 1947, constitutes just such a call. The replies to Dr. Bouma by Professors Joseph Haroutunian and Wilhelm Pauck, that appeared together with the article by Dr. Bouma, seek to escape the challenge of Calvinism. But these replies do not really deal with the main point at issue as between Calvinism and its critics.

The God of Calvinism

It is the claim of Calvinism that its God alone is the source of all light and truth. Science needs its "uniformity of nature;" there would be no such uniformity unless God really controls whatsoever comes to pass. Philosophy needs its ultimate principle of coherence; there would be no coherence in any sense for man except for his presupposition of the self-contained God. In every field of human interest and endeavor man is confronted with impenetrable darkness unless he first presupposes the God of Calvinism. Calvinists think they can establish such contentions as these. Accordingly they think they have a duty not merely with respect to theology but also with respect to every other domain of human enterprises. Calvinists would ask men to accept their "world and life view" lest rationality itself should lose its footing in the quicksands of the irrational.

The article in *Life* of March 10, 1947, may help to illustrate the point. In it Paul Hutchinson, then the Managing Editor of *The Christian Cen-*

tury, makes a report on "the status of religion abroad." Hutchinson speaks first of religion in its relation to its institutional expression. He speaks of "new stirrings of interest in religion." Churchmen, he says, feel impelled to pass the "judgment of Religion" on questions of sociology and politics. At the same time there is less and less interest in the institutions of religion such as the church and the synagogue.

Hutchinson does, to be sure, speak of an intellectual renaissance but he mentions as its leaders such as are the enemies of Calvinism as a Christian life and world view. If there is anything that "Calvinist Karl Barth" finds distasteful and untrue it is Calvinism. And as for Reinhold Niebuhr and Jacques Maritain, the other two leaders of the "intellectual renaissance" referred to, these two worship anything but the God who by His counsel controls "whatsoever comes to pass." The intellectual renaissance spoken of seems to thrive in a reality that is said to have no ultimate system at all.

"Man's developing spiritual concern," as Hutchinson sees it developing, appears to be a feeling after some sort of a something somewhere beyond the regular patterns of nature discovered by science. The god of this religion is for all practical purposes as indescribable as was the idea of the "boundless" to Anaximander.

No Hope In an Unknown God

Yet it is the belief in this unknown and unknowable god that is said everywhere to support respect for the moral law. "But religion becomes of new moment in an age threatened with social disintegration when it declares that unshakeable moral standards exist, that human destinies hang on man's attitude towards these standards and that it is the business of man and all his institutions to try to bring all the activities of life into conformity with these principles." The great hope for the future of the world lies largely with the worship of this unknown and unknowable "god," so they tell us. In the words of W. H. Auden, as *the subatomic gulfs confront our lives with the cold stare of their eternal silence*, we look in vain to politics, to science or to technics for any help. Our only hope is in religion.

But will this religion help? Is it anything more than a Platonic myth, a second best, to which man turns in

desperation when his "rational" interpretations of the universe have failed? How can one expect any assistance, either, for his intellectual problems, from a God who by definition sustains no rational relation to the universe or to man? Why point to the world of "spiritual values," if that world but reduplicates the problems of the present one? If Socrates should read the article in *Life* he would say to its author, "But, as I was saying, revered friend, the abundance of your wisdom makes you indolent." To be sure, all the gods believe in the moral law. "For surely neither God nor man will ever venture to say that the doer of evil is not to be punished. . . . But they join issue about particulars." The mere formal agreement about the validity of the moral law is in itself meaningless. There is no reason why anyone should obey the moral law unless what Calvinism says about this moral law is true. Calvinism holds that in everything that man confronts he is face to face with the requirement of glorifying his Creator, and his Judge. But if man cannot know that God is either his Creator or his Judge, he has the fullest intellectual and moral right to do as he pleases. To see the forces of religion of the sort we have heard about pitted against "communism" as an enemy is a pitiable spectacle no less from the logical than from the moral and religious point of view.

Yet the kind of god and the kind of religion that is composed of the vaguest of mixtures of the various deities of all the positive religions is logically the only alternative to Calvinism. Without the presupposition of the God of Calvinism man is confronted with and himself floats upon the ultimately irrational.

We Believe Calvinism

As I said at the outset then, Mr. Luce, the individual doctrines of Calvinism are intelligible only as parts of the system of the life and world view of which they constitute a part. We hold to this system not because we live in the "Bible Belt" or because we have never heard of Biblical Criticism and *The Critique of Pure Reason*. To be sure, we accepted our system of truth on the authority of parents and teachers who believed in the Bible as infallibly true. But we believe our system, if possible, more ardently than ever now that we know

that those who reject it can find no alternative but pure irrationalism: We believe our system more ardently than ever too, when we see both the Roman Catholic and the Arminian apologists slip down the smooth decline into the cauldron of irrationalism as they seek to draw out those that are already swirling about in its midst. We admire the person of John Calvin. But we are not mere hero worshippers of the "ascetic heretic-burning" Reformer. We think Calvin taught what Scripture teaches. We have learned to believe what Scripture teaches not because we were wiser than other men but by the "testimony of the Holy Spirit." But now that we have believed, our eyes have been opened to the fact that our system is true or there is no truth. Why then should it be thought so strange to speak of a "Calvinistic Comeback?" Perhaps it is strange in view of the temper of the age. But are intelligent men to decide ultimate issues by a motion and a vote? Is it too much to expect that Wilhelm Pauck, Haroutunian, Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr and Jacques Maritain may become really self-critical and face the problems of reality, knowledge and ethics once again and afresh?

More Machen Books Available

WE HAVE been informed by the Eerdmans Company that two more of the books of the late Dr. J. Gresham Machen have been reprinted and are now available. These are the volumes of his radio sermons, *The Christian View of Man*, and *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*. Each volume is priced at \$2.50. Orders for these and other books may be sent to The Presbyterian Guardian, 1505 Race St., Phila. 2, Penna.

Son to Meiners

THE Rev. and Mrs. Raymond Meiners of Schenectady are rejoicing in the birth of a son, Daniel Raymond, born August 9th. The Meiners have two other boys, John Mark aged six and one half, and Calvin aged three.