

# Progressive Calvinism

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## "He Has . . . Systematically Examined Every Important . . . Problem"

The publisher's dust jacket (paper cover) of a book of essays entitled *Planning For Freedom* by the famous economist, Ludwig von Mises, tells a few things about the approach to the study of economics made by this great social scientist. It says among other things about Mises (our italics):

. . . he has in a series of scholarly investigations *systematically analyzed every important economic problem*, critically exploded inveterate errors and substituted sound ideas for discarded fallacies.

We call attention to the clause "systematically analyzed every important economic problem." This expression describes a basically sound approach to every problem in life. Imagine Mises as a young social scientist setting out in life in the field of economics with the intention of "*systematically analyzing every important economic problem.*"

Calvinism, a phase of the Christian religion, needs today what Mises has been doing conspicuously in economics. *Every important problem in religion and ethics, specifically every important problem in Calvinism, needs to be systematically re-examined.*

A young Calvinist who, as the result of his religious education, has an affection for Calvinism can well take as his goal the thorough study and systematic re-examination of Calvinism, and its restatement in *modern* terms. What he needs for that purpose is some ability; a capacity for hard work in religion and in all of the sciences, especially the praxeological sciences (social sciences). What he needs above all is honesty and intellectual integrity. He must be more than a mere repeater of what Calvinists in a previous age have taught. There is not, in fact, anything that Calvin himself taught that should not be re-examined. (Whenever we have *carefully* examined Calvin's ideas, we have been impressed how many ideas he analyzed only cursorily and by no means thoroughly.)

PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM also has that general aim, namely, to *analyze systematically every important Calvinist problem.* What

we shall do will at best be only a small fragment of the work that should be done.

An objective, independent research approach is necessary. Whoever sets out with the *predetermined* purpose to prove a predecessor or contemporary Calvinist to be right or to be wrong, whether a Warfield, a Kuyper or a Hodge or Calvin himself, has by his very approach disqualified himself from *objective* work. The word *systematically* in the clause we are quoting excludes a prejudiced approach whether favorable or unfavorable.

The word *every* should not be ignored. It includes *ethical* problems covered by the Second Table of the Law, but also *theological* problems covered by the First Table of the Law. (We use *ethical* as pertaining to the relation of men to men; and *theological* as pertaining to the relation of men to God.) PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM has selected the more modest field, namely, ethics, for its primary field of "systematic analysis." Although that is a relatively modest field, it is still an enormous field. At this time we mention two of the subjects in the ethical field concerning which we have said little to date:

- (1) Problems related to the Seventh Commandment,  
*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

This *sex* field as we shall analyze it includes such problems as population growth and birth control, population migration, miscegenation, divorce and remarriage, polygyny. On such problems there are some strange answers which have become popular among Calvinists and there are also strange silences and evasions. Some of these answers appear to be in violation of Scripture, illogical, and in contradiction of the laws of psychological motivation. Some Calvinist denominations have evaded "meeting up" with these problems, except maybe to employ a nonscriptural solution borrowed from the "world."

- (2) Problems related to the Eighth Commandment,  
*Thou shalt not steal.*

This *property* field is related to both private and public conduct. There is, therefore, undoubtedly private *theft* and public *theft*. In a fairly long life this writer has not yet seen any Calvinist church take a stand against *public* theft. This theft amounts to

billions annually. If a poor man steals \$10, and is caught, he must confess before the church; but if the powerful *public* steals \$10 billion, the church is as silent as the Sphinx of Egypt.

In PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM we propose to tear the mask of ignorance, sanctimony and unscriptural principles from off these iniquities, knowing that exactly in those quarters where there is declamation about "brotherly love" and "ecumenism" and "Christian culture" and "equality" there will be severe hostility to the solutions we believe should be found, which solutions we shall show are scriptural.

The future of every church depends on it continuing to have members who *systematically analyze every important religious problem.*

\* \* \*

We recommend to every banker, lawyer, minister, doctor, physicist, chemist, biologist, psychologist, economist, farmer, etc. that each of them "*systematically examine every important problem*" in his respective field. It is a sound approach to great achievement. fn

## What Are The Problems Of Calvinism?

Einstein and Infeld in their book, *The Evolution of Physics*, (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1938) emphatically make a point, namely, that it is more difficult to *state* a problem than to *solve* a problem. What is never stated in a correct manner is not solvable.

Einstein and Infeld speak as mathematicians and physicists. Anyone with experience as a businessman will realize the soundness of the Einstein and Infeld view, because the same situation prevails in business. Lack of awareness of a problem is a far more common cause for failure to solve that problem than knowledge of it but inability to solve it.

Keeping the foregoing in mind we ask our readers this question: *what ARE the problems of present-day Calvinism?* We shall be glad to hear from readers what they consider are the five modern most-important problems of Calvinism.

We believe that it will be an interesting intellectual exercise for thinking Calvinists to state simply and clearly their *modern problems*.

Once we have correctly expressed the *problems*, we can then all set about *systematically* examining and endeavoring to solve them.

How do you state modern Calvinism's problems?      fn

## Faith Alone Versus Faith Propped By Something Else

### I

The *Christian* faith cannot be freed of doubt. There is *ever recurring* doubt, because the ultimate issues of life are "unknown" to the Christian whether wise or foolish or learned or unlearned.

### II

It is a mistake to believe that the holder of any other faith or *any other view of life* can be freed of *his* doubt. The Mohammedan, the Buddhist, the agnostic, the atheist, and the scientific technician all must, inevitably, be affected by *their* doubts. For them the ultimate issues of life are equally unknown. Whence, why and whither man? The answers to those questions are beyond all science.

A man who is doctrinaire and never afflicted by doubt regarding the character of man and his origin and destiny is essentially foolish. He does not know that he does not know. He overestimates the human mind. His epistemology is wrong. (Epistemology pertains to the limits of the human mind.) A man who thinks he *knows* by himself, through his own mental processes, the ultimates of life is arrogant and mistaken.

And so all wise men learn to doubt. Why, they say to themselves, be cocksure of what *cannot* be known?

The church father, Augustine, was acutely aware of the excellent initial dialectical function of *doubt*. (Note that we put in the adjective, *initial*.)

But then the thinkers progress further. First they passed from shallow sureness to doubt. Then from doubt they move to the next step, namely, *doubt about their doubt*. Indeed, all men who think finally come to that curious, inevitable result — doubt about their doubt.

However, the last and final step that many of the wisest of men make is this: they are unwilling to rest in doubt or in doubt about doubt as a *final* view of life. Such agnosticism has an unnering, deadening effect.

### III

Every addition to a man's knowledge is not a new brick on the top of his intellectual edifice. It becomes, in a sense, a substitute brick. But the substitute brick is by definition different in size and shape. All old bricks must then be readjusted. Every addition to knowledge is therefore "disturbing." To acquire knowledge and to think is synonymous with disturbance of mental quiet. And so people with undisturbed "faith" — Christian or otherwise — are people who have stopped growing intellectually.

### IV

The Christian religion claims for itself the position of the "assurance of faith." It declares that that is not subjective, but that it relies on something external, namely, the promises of God (or better said, the covenant of God.) Those promises are accepted as being recorded in Scripture.

The next question is: What is Scripture? The present Scriptures are obviously man-chosen. Being man-chosen, the question arises why the particular Scriptures were selected rather than others. Confidence in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures, therefore, becomes a crucial foundation for devout Christian faith.

Curiously — or rather naturally — the two Westminster Catechisms and the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterian churches begin with just that article of faith — the reliability and inspiration of the Scriptures. The Belgic Confession of the Reformed churches in Articles II through VII does the same.

### V

The Scriptures cover the "unknown" and the "known." The "known" as we use this term is that part which constitutes good

*ethics* between man and man, that is, the Second Table of the Law. By "good ethics" we mean the kind of ethics that "work," that men can live by and prosper *because they live by it*. If the Second Table of the Law could be found to be not right, then *our* personal confidence in the First Table of the Law would also be disturbed. It is, therefore, important if not requisite for *our* general religious faith that Moses be a *superlative lawgiver on ordinary everyday ethics*. We believe he is. That reassures us on all else in Scripture. That is why we wrote as we did about Moses in the March issue.

## VI

The position of some Christians on these matters differs from ours. They too get high voltage shocks of doubt as they add to their knowledge. And whither do they seem to turn? They do not recoil on elementary Scripture and on ideas logically related to Scripture; they fall back on "culture" and on secular knowledge which (appears to us) is not easily reconcilable to what Scripture teaches. In other words, the props they need and use for their hard-battered faith (a need which is inescapable because of the finiteness of man's mind) are not props with which we can have mental peace. The supreme soundness of the *ethics* of Scripture are our prime prop for belief in the *religion* of Scripture. In fact, figuratively speaking, the walls of our mental *religious* edifice are braced by the flying buttresses of scriptural *ethics*.

## VII

We address ourselves to *all* men. All men are forced back onto some assumption — some faith — about the nature and destiny of man. In the broadest sense, agnosticism is also an assumption, a faith. We seriously advance the proposition to "believers" and "unbelievers" alike that the supreme soundness of the *ethics* of the Scriptures is the best logical buttress that there is for the Christian *religion*. (We have not said that it is the foundation of faith; we have merely said that it is a prop, a flying buttress, bolstering the walls.)

The foregoing explains our great interest in the *ethics* of the Christian religion, that is, our great interest in the Second Table of the Law: thou shalt not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet.

All this will not be of interest to anyone who has a completely "frozen" intellectual structure, who is no longer afflicted by any doubts on the ultimate issues of life, simply because he is no longer acquiring new knowledge. fn

## The Decline Of The Ministry

Nine of us were sitting around the luncheon table at the club during the intermission in the meeting. The conversation had turned from business and had become personal. The chairman stated his viewpoint; his voice was mocking: "John," he said, "belongs to a little . . . church. But intelligent people don't believe Christian teaching anymore."

Most men do not express themselves so baldly as that. But in practice they seldom go to church, and when they do it is often merely a concession to the social demands of their wives, or an attendance which involves no assent on their part to what they hear preached from the pulpit.

Among protestants many members are really only nominal members. They have small knowledge of what the church teaches. They do not accept what the church teaches as a real guide for life. Three out of four members in attendance in some churches are women, many of them elderly.

Against real competition part of the church has become somewhat weak. That competition consists of theaters, golf, amusements of all kinds. Sunday church services are steadily losing out to golf courses, travel, picnics, entertainment.

The ministry is not presently in such great repute as it was formerly. A preacher is hardly respected by many professional and business men except as a well-meaning man; the *intellectual* respect is small. The doctrines a minister teaches or professes leave most men cold and arouse their skepticism or even amusement. Not one in a hundred businessmen has enough interest to discuss the *doctrines* of a church, and explore and analyze and accept and defend them.

The protestant churches have no real hold on their members. The ardent members join a sect or some new organization. The

others just drift into indifference. Churchmen are not fighting an uphill fight; they appear to be fighting a losing fight. Considering some of the ramparts they are manning, it can be confidently predicted that they will be ignominiously defeated.

A few isolated denominations still have a considerable hold on their members. But this hold is weakening; twenty-five years from now it may be largely gone. All that needs to happen is a continuation of the trend of the latest twenty-five years.

This decline of protestantism and of the repute of its ministry should not be blamed on the lay members or the nonmembers who have already drifted away. The responsibility lies wholly with the churches, their seminaries, and their ministers.

Unless the protestant churches become up-to-date and withdraw from their mental confusion and faithlessness, nothing will save them from further religious anemia. The count of the spiritual red corpuscles will some day be so low that the churches will be only a ruin. (We are not referring to buildings but to the religious ideas of people.)

We submit for consideration as true the statements: (1) that most of what the churches have been accepting from the "world" has hurt the churches\*; (2) that the churches have largely become mere sounding boards or megaphones for ideas not derived from Scripture; (3) that the churches do not testify to any significant extent against the real evils in the world but against trifling or even spurious evils or evils perpetrated by the weak; the churches testify hardly at all against great and malignant and powerful evils; (4) that the churches do not understand the structure of modern society and that therefore their social ideas are erroneous; and (5) that the churches must have a new reformation, if they wish to become influential again.

The future of the churches is up to the churches. We are disposed to paraphrase Blaise Pascal; he wrote: "The church is in an excellent state if it is sustained by God alone"; we would say: The church is in an excellent state if it is based on Scripture (correctly interpreted) alone. But we also hold that the praxeological sciences (social sciences) can make a contribution to the correct interpretation of Scripture. fn

\*They seem to have a penchant for borrowing what is not the best.

## Doorbraak (The Break-Through)

One half of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM's subscribers are persons of Dutch descent. Only a few of them are recent immigrants, and so knowledge of the religious, social, economic and political situation in the Netherlands is vague or practically nonexistent among such Dutch Americans.

The influence of Dutch Calvinism on the Calvinism of Americans of Dutch descent is declining rapidly and in a few years will probably be practically nil. There are several reasons for this: (1) as long as these Dutch Calvinists in the United States used the Dutch language they were isolated from Americans but in communication with Netherlanders; but the language barrier has reversed itself; it now opens Americans of Dutch extraction to American influences and closes the channel of Dutch influences; (2) as native Americans these Calvinists of Dutch extraction are becoming aware that many ideas in the political, social and economic fields held by Netherlanders in Europe are incompatible with the American tradition. If Dutch ideas are to be retained, it means that the person will be out of tune with traditional Americanism and vice versa; (3) a generation ago immigrants came from a fairly *solidaire* and united Dutch environment; there were no grave differences within it; today the Calvinist environment from which American Calvinists of Dutch extraction originated is no longer united; there are basic (maybe irreconcilable) differences among them; the broken front of Calvinism in the Netherlands reduces the force of its impact here.

The influence of Dutch Calvinism on American Calvinism is past its peak.

Nevertheless, PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM wishes to continue to be in communication with our Dutch brethren. Such communication makes desirable the having of accurate knowledge of actual conditions in the Netherlands. How small that knowledge is has come home to us from our own recent endeavor to read Dutch magazines and newspapers. This is extraordinarily difficult even for someone who knows the Dutch well (by customary language standards). For example, initials in the Dutch dailies and magazines such as

CHU or ARP or PvdA, and these initials are constantly used, mean nothing to an American unless he knows what the Christelyke Historische Unie party stands for; or the Antirevolutionnaire Partij; or the Partij van de Arbeid (Labor Party); similarly, on nearly all subjects.

In current Dutch papers there is frequent reference to the Doorbraak — the break-through, as a break-through of a dike. We have realized from the contexts in which the term is used that it refers to something both political and confessional. We have asked Mr. M. A. van Wijngaarden, editorial secretary of *Tot Vrijheid Geroepen* (Called Unto Liberty), a new Dutch libertarian publication which we believe thinks "more American" than any Dutch paper we know, to write for us an article on the Doorbraak so that all Americans could understand it. Mr. van Wijngaarden does, we are confident, just that in the following excellent article. We believe all our readers will be interested in this because what is related may be fairly symptomatic of trends in other European countries. In private life Mr. van Wijngaarden does legal and commercial work for a construction firm in Amsterdam. He has been a law student at the Free University of Amsterdam, and a student in economics at the Advanced Institute (School) of Commerce of Rotterdam. Mr. van Wijngaarden's article follows:

The editors of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM have asked me to write an article about the Dutch political parties. They have requested me especially to explain what is meant by the *doorbraak*. *Doorbraak* is a Dutch word meaning break-through. It is a significant Dutch development. The subject is a very complicated one; to make it as clear as possible I have simplified it as much as I can.

### Dutch Political Parties Before The War

The number of the Dutch political parties is large, at least compared with the United States where there are only two of them. In the nineteenth century, we had in the Netherlands, also two parties: the Conservative and the Liberal. Presently there are seven political parties represented in the Dutch parliament. In many municipalities there are still more. What is the reason?

In the middle of the nineteenth century not everybody was qualified to vote, but only people who were financially comfortably situated. The poor men were excluded from the electorate. The majority of the Calvinists and Roman Catholics belonged to the class which was not qualified to vote. They (justly) believed that the government did not take proper account of their interests. The big question in those days was the fight for independent (Christian, private or parochial) schools. Both Calvinists and Roman Catholics wanted financial subsidies for their schools in order to equalize the burden of supporting government and private schools.

The so-called *school fight* (to obtain a fair proportion of tax money for nongovernment schools) was the reason for the origin of the denominational political parties in Holland. The Roman Catholics left the Liberal Party; most Calvinists left the Conservative Party. The Calvinists founded the Anti-Revolutionary Party. Mr. Groen van Prinsterer was the famous leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in its early days. There was much opposition to it. When Groen van Prinsterer was the only representative for his party in parliament, his adversaries ridiculed him by declaring him to be "a general without an army."

Nevertheless, the denominational parties grew steadily. In 1891 the Anti-Revolutionary Party had 21 seats in parliament, and the Roman Catholics 25, out of a total of 100 seats.

In 1894 a division developed in the Anti-Revolutionary Party. Under the guidance of the well-known Dr. Abraham Kuyper the Anti-Revolutionary Party was continued by one group. Another group followed Dr. de Savornin Lohman, and took the name Christian Historical Party. The reason for this division, according to the judgment of many contemporaries and historians, was more a question of personal controversy between the leaders than real fundamental differences. Notwithstanding various efforts to restore unity, these two separate Calvinist political parties continue to exist as well as a third (mentioned later).

At the turn of the century a new political party came to the front, namely, the Socialist Party.

In those days the voting in parliament was mainly "left against right." The Left was represented by Socialists and Liberals; the

Right by Roman Catholics, Anti-Revolutionaries and Christian Historicals. The Conservatives had in the meantime disappeared from the political arena. Some years later two additional parties were organized: the Communist Party and the Political (Christian) Reformed Party (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*).

The existence of so many parties is favored by the system of *proportional representation* which is used in the Netherlands. All votes, from all over the country, are counted together. A system of *geographical representation* is, of course, a disadvantage for small parties, for if a party has many votes, but no majority in any geographical area, it would not get any representation in parliament.

An important consequence from the existence of many parties is that one party practically never gets an absolute majority in parliament. A parliamentary coalition becomes necessary in order to get a working majority.

### Consequences Of World War II

In World War II, the people of the Netherlands suffered under German occupation for five years. Anyone who has not lived in a German occupied country cannot realize how great the terror was in those years.

It is, therefore, easily to be understood that all Dutch people (except a small number of traitors) joined the resistance against Nazi Germany, and it was also natural that political differences did not at that time play a large part in the common struggle.

Already while the war still continued, various politicians made plans for post-war politics. They thought that the extraordinary unity of the Dutch people which was being demonstrated in the common resistance to Germany during the war could be continued after the war in new political alignments. This turned out to be a great illusion. Although a country may be united while under a general oppression, it does not necessarily follow that there will be equal agreement when it is free and when normal life again takes its course.

The leaders of the Socialist Party looked forward to there being one great "progressive" party in which there would be room

for everybody regardless of what his conception of life was. Nominally for this party the two foundations of Marxism, namely, class-war and historic materialism, were abolished.

*That phenomenon which consists in members of the Calvinist and Roman Catholic parties leaving their old parties and becoming members of a party which has neither Calvinism nor Roman Catholicism as its foundation is called "Doorbraak" (break-through).*

Numerically *Doorbraak* (break-through) has not been a success. Relatively few members have left their confessional parties in order to become members of the Labor Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, or abbreviated P.v.d.A.).

But the *indirect* consequence of the *Doorbraak* has been much more important; that indirect consequence consists of *the influence of the Doorbraak upon the aims and policies of the denominational parties.*

The Labor Party, because it had no absolute majority in parliament, could only obtain a majority by a coalition with one or more parties. The Roman Catholic Party had a key position, namely, it could make a coalition with either the Labor Party or the Calvinist Parties. Because the Roman Catholic Party feared the loss of members to the "radical" labor party, it chose a coalition with the Labor Party. Thereafter, *volens nolens* (willy nilly) it was obligated to support the socialistic policy; it was the "captive" of the Labor Party. This, of course, was of great benefit to the Labor Party.

The Calvinist parties could have done a good job if they had operated as genuine *opposition* parties. But they have not done so in respect to social and economic questions. As was the case with the Roman Catholic Party, the Calvinist parties feared that they would lose many members unless they were willing to stress the "social" aspect enough.

An important factor in this situation has been that the Christian Labor Organization (CLA) has a great influence in the Calvinist parties, especially the Anti-Revolutionary Party. Many members of the Labor association are also members of the Anti-Revolutionary Party. Now the CLA has also had a big competitor in

post-war Holland, namely, the Socialist Labor Organization. In order not to lose members to the Socialist Labor Organization the CLA has felt obliged to become more "radical," that is, it had to go in the Socialist direction.

And so, as the CLA has become more radical, the Anti-Revolutionary Party also practically automatically became more radical.

### **Appraisal Of The Situation**

American readers who are in sympathy with the Anti-Revolutionary Party may become pessimists about this party. In a sense that would be justified. But I wish to point out two facts.

First, the facts mentioned in the foregoing are mainly related to social and economic problems. In two other fields, namely, that of education (the Christian school) and the maintenance of the Sabbath, the Anti-Revolutionary Party holds fast to its old position.

Secondly, there is a steadily growing opposition against the socialistic trend which the Calvinist parties are pursuing. This opposition group is represented by the "libertarians." Their struggle, however, is very difficult. For example, Calvinist papers will not publish "Letters to the Editor" when they contain libertarian concepts. If you call yourself a libertarian, you are abused as being an egoistic man, etc. Furthermore, a libertarian does not make campaign promises to one group which he can only keep at the expense of some other groups; and so he is not "popular" with the mass of voters.

The foregoing article gives American readers only a brief summary of the situation in regard to Dutch political parties and the *Doorbraak*. Maybe I can tell you more about this subject some other time.

mavw

## **The State And The Second Table Of The Law**

The church standards of the Christian Reformed church (that is, its constitutional documents — The Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dordt) as originally drafted specified that the state or government was obliged to enforce *both*

the First and Second Tables of the Law of Moses (the whole Decalogue or Ten Commandments).

That would put the state in the position of enforcing "religion," namely, the First Table of the Law. If the state is to enforce the *whole* Decalogue, there can be no separation of church and state.

The Christian Reformed church has amended the article in The Belgic Confession, which covers the question of the relation of church and state, in such a manner that the state has no proper activity in the field of *religion*, and vice versa.

That brings a man to the next question: should the state enforce the *Second* Table of the Law? The Second Table of the Law governs *ethics* and not *religion*. It is our position that this *is* the proper field of the state.

Nevertheless, that puts us on the horns of a dilemma—what to do when the laws of the state conflict with rather than enforce the ethical rules of the Second Table of the Law? At the moment we have specifically in mind the laws in the sex field — laws on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Our answers to these questions are the following:

1. The state definitely should cover by its laws the field of ethics.
2. Those laws of the state pertaining to ethics may not conflict with the Decalogue.
3. If they do conflict, then as individuals or as a religious denomination, the obligation is to disobey the state and obey Scripture. This follows from the principle that it is "more necessary to obey God than to obey man."

If there is in a Calvinist church a slavish demand to obey the state regardless what the state is and legislates and does, then the church members may feel absolved from obeying Scripture. We in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM unequivocally believe in obeying Scrip-

ture rather than men (the state), whenever the regulations of the two conflict.

The difficulties regarding divorce and remarriage, in a church as the Christian Reformed, stem almost entirely from the contra-Biblical action of the state. Remove that institutionalized factor, and the problem is manageable by the church. Fail to neutralize that institutionalized factor and the problem is unmanageable by the church. To follow the state in these matters (unless the state itself follows Scripture) is to establish a conflict. As the state takes the lead, the church can only follow the state or sputter back fecklessly. Neither action solves the problem.

A church which survives a long time must have adopted many sound policies. The Roman Catholic church which has survived for 1900 years has established its own legislation on divorce and remarriage. By doing that it avoided the problem of the legislation of the church on marriage being a mere rag on the tail of the kite of the state.

The fact seems to be that many churchmen *wish* to follow the legislation of the state. They appear not to wish to resist the legislation of the state. Consequently, they praise obedience to the state. They thus make a virtue of disobeying the mandates of Scripture whenever the rules of the state conflict on sex matters with the rules of Scripture.

*Success* has become the criterion of many Calvinist churchmen. They measure *success* in terms of additions to the membership rolls. They are annoyed at the idea of *quality* in the membership. To fail to follow after the (secular) State in regard to divorce and remarriage will reduce, they apparently think, the membership, or *success* of the denomination. However, the Roman Catholic church has done very well despite its strict rules. *Success* in the form of large membership does not, therefore, depend on passively following the state decrees on divorce and remarriage.

In the article that follows we are contrasting the problem of a church in Africa with the problem of a church in the United States.

## Polygyny\* In Nigeria

There is in the Christian Reformed church an unwearied agitation to change the rules of remarriage following un-Biblical divorce. The chief advocate of this is a veteran and powerful churchman. More recently much of the agitation has been carried on by men who at one time were associated with Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. These men and others are active in publishing *The Reformat Journal*, a monthly circulating in the Christian Reformed church. One of the five members of the editorial board is Dr. Harry R. Boer, at one time professor of missions at Calvin Seminary and, prior to that, for a time a missionary in Nigeria, Africa. Considering that Boer has been a missionary "on location" the rules on marriage and church membership accepted in the area of Christian Reformed mission endeavor in Negro Africa are of interest.

### Native Churches In Nigeria

There is an indigenous (native) church in Nigeria, West Africa, in the area where the Christian Reformed church conducts a mission. This church is known as *Ekklesiya A Sudan*, which we suppose means Church of Sudan. That native church is not a part of the Christian Reformed church nor is it a "sister church." However, Christian Reformed missionaries work in this area; the denomination spends money there.

Any foreign native (indigenous) church will almost certainly show radical differences from an American church and that is to be expected in Nigeria in the *Ekklesiya A Sudan*. One of the problems in Nigeria is polygyny, comparable in character to the divorce and remarriage problem in the United States.

Why does polygyny exist in Nigeria?

### Reason For Polygyny In Africa

We have made inquiry *why* polygyny exists in Africa. We believe that there is a very strong reason for it. We are opposed to polygyny in the United States but in Africa this polygyny situ-

\*Sometimes called *polygamy*.

ation is very understandable to an American male, if he is acquainted with the facts.

Unless colored babies in Nigeria are breast fed, the death rate is terrific. Further, not only do babies need to be breast fed; the longer they are breast fed, the better. Of course, breast feeding cannot last long if a new baby is on the way. *Therefore*, concern about the death rate of babies, because they cannot be breast fed during new pregnancies, has resulted in the custom that a man does not associate with his wife except at intervals of more than two years. (Babies are said to be "spaced" about three years apart.)

But that is a long time for the male who has a wife to whom he pays no marital attention. And so the African Negro reasons: I want more than one wife. I will enjoy one at a time while the others are pregnant or nursing small babies. (Further, his wealth and prestige are also measured in the number of wives he has.)

As long, therefore, as infant nutrition other than mother's milk is inadequate in Nigeria, polygyny is likely to continue unless the African black man is satisfied with only one wife and satisfied to approach her only once every two or three years.

### Westermarck On Polygyny

There is an article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on polygyny by the late famous anthropologist, Professor Edward Alexander Westermarck, a Finn, who became professor of sociology at the University of London. What Westermarck writes on the cause of polygyny in equatorial Africa is (one might say) verbatim what a present-day missionary to interior Nigeria would report. Westermarck ascribes polygyny to the dissatisfaction of the males with having only one wife if, in order to reduce infant mortality, he can associate with his wife only every two or three years. Westermarck writes:

One cause of polygyny is an excess of marriageable women; we may safely say that whenever there is a marked and more or less permanent majority of women in a savage tribe polygyny is allowed. But while the existence of available women makes polygyny possible, the

direct cause of it is generally the man's desire to have more than one wife. There are various reasons for this desire. Among many of the simpler peoples the husband has to abstain from his wife not only for a certain time every month, but during her pregnancy, or at least during the latter stage of it, and after childbirth until the child is weaned, which often means an abstinence of a couple of years or more.

### Moses On Polygyny

Westermarck wrote:

Among the Hebrews a man could in any circumstance have a plurality of wives, and there was no difference in the legal status of different wives, nor was there any limit to the number of wives a man might take.

To our knowledge Moses nowhere prohibited polygyny; *he regulated it*. He wrote some very plain language about taking on more than one wife. In Exodus 21:10 Moses wrote:

If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.

According to this no Jew could diminish his first wife's food allowance nor clothes. Apparently, no second wife could be the cause for reducing the standard of living of the first wife. To what a man had accustomed his first wife, to that she could demand an unreduced quantity and quality. The second wife then would have to be supported out of a man's abundance, his superfluity.

But the interesting phrase is the phrase "duty of marriage." What does it mean? This "duty of marriage" obviously means that the first wife is to receive as much marital attention as she received formerly. The first wife might not be neglected *as wife*. Moses says that the attention — the duty of marriage — shall not be *diminished*.

In Africa they seem to do it differently. Whereas Moses obligated a man to give undiminished attention to his first wife, the

Nigerian polygamists rotate them for the reason that has been explained.

The Apostle Paul, who did not make an enthusiastic appraisal of marriage, being apparently a happy bachelor, makes an unfavorable comment on failure to perform the "duty of marriage." In I Corinthians 7:1-5 he wrote:

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But, because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife her [sexual] due: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not the power over his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other [maritally], except it be by [mutual] consent for a season that ye may give yourselves unto prayer, and [then] may be together again, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency.

The plain meaning of this statement is that a husband has a marital claim on his wife; and vice versa, a woman has a marital claim on her husband. If they do not have mutual marital access they "defraud" each other. The nonaccess can only be "by [mutual] consent" and "for a season" — apparently meaning a short time.

Fortunately, a typical man's cycle appears more rapid than a typical woman's cycle and he will usually be the aggressor (as the woman demands). It must be quite another matter to satisfy more than one wife. (In oriental (but not African) polygynous societies such women are guarded in harems by eunuchs. A normal male could not be trusted with the task; no woman could maintain discipline. This explains the great utility of eunuchs in ancient polygynous societies.)

Where polygyny does not prevail but where monogyny is the rule, greater freedom of social and business association of the sexes is possible and practiced. The men and women balance off; the women are not "defrauded." Such a society is more normal and more stable.

## The Nigerian Church On Polygyny

Undoubtedly, polygyny constitutes a very serious problem for the Nigerian church. The solution of the problem in this church is that a man who is a polygamist *may not be admitted as member*. They are happy to permit him to attend but he is denied membership and the sacraments.

Under the Nigerian circumstances we see no reason why polygamists should not be admitted into the church. Abraham and Jacob, Gideon, Elkanah, David, Solomon and many other Old Testament saints were polygamists. We doubt whether they would have considered themselves to be properly treated unless they could keep all of their wives and the children of those wives and bring them along into the church.

We assume polygyny will continue unabated in Nigeria as long as several conditions prevail:

1. That there are more mature females than mature males;
2. That the nutritional situation for babies continues to be bad, and consequently, as Westermarck writes, a man "has to abstain from his wife . . . during her pregnancy, or at least during the latter stage of it, and after childbirth until the child is weaned, which often means an abstinence of a couple of years or more."
3. That the Nigerians reject sanitation and modern dietary practices which are accepted in Western civilization, and which would make unnecessary the periodic marital abstinence presently practiced in Nigeria, which marital abstinence has the meritorious purpose of keeping down the infant mortality rate.

What really astonishes us is the narrow definition apparently given by mission leaders (as Boer) to the mission program. He rejects, we understand, the "comprehensive approach" which means that the mission effort covers all of life — religious, social, economic, political, etc.\* The gospel *only* is to be preached. That is all that missions apparently should do. The contrary view (to which

\*Statement based on information in a book review. We have not read Boer's doctoral thesis.

we subscribe) is that there is a whole complex of benefits which Christianity carries with it. Those benefits should be part of the parcel. This is related to our principle that there are many temporal blessings which accrue from the gospel — if the gospel is not shorn of all its natural by-products. We subscribe to the “comprehensive approach.”

What astonishes us more than anything is the apparent gross neglect of any program to improve infant nutrition in Africa. Why does not the Christian Reformed church send baby food to Africa? In all the years of the Nigerian mission we have not once heard of a program to save Nigerian babies. *Only the gospel*, it seems, is to be preached, something pertaining to the next life. But in this life, be not concerned that the span be short because of malnutrition!

The Negroes in Nigeria have found a solution — two or three years of marital abstinence. But then the males say: we want more than one wife to enjoy serially as others in turn are pregnant and breast-feeding young babies.

What does the church say? That the gospel *alone* is adequate in Nigeria, and that there is no need of a “comprehensive approach”?

Of course, eugenists will have their misgivings. A higher birth rate in Africa unaccompanied by a higher death rate will certainly populate the world with the presently less-civilized people, *unless the Nigerians turn to birth control*. What does the church say about that?

These economic and public health problems are problems that churches do not face with candor and courage. These issues we plan to discuss in future issues of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM. But in the meanwhile, we have grave doubts about the humanity and the clarity with which mission leaders are handling foreign mission problems. The questionable solutions abroad do not augur well for adequate solutions suggested by them for domestic problems.

**In America Divorce and Remarriage  
Are Preferred To Polygyny**

Farmers formerly had many children; that was because the children were an asset; they could do farm work *early*. City people

have regularly had less children (and certainly not as Adam Smith surmised because urban and prosperous women were less fertile!); in cities children are financial liabilities; they cost a lot; and so universally city birth rates have been lower.

Ordinary observation in this case is adequate to know the *causes* of different practices regarding birth rate. In the United States the social conditions which are different from those in Nigeria explain *our* different marital problems. Our problems are not polygamy but easy divorce and remarriage. Sober appraisal of the situation results in the conclusion that men in America are more astute than in Nigeria. American men prefer to have wives *serially*, by means of divorce and remarriage, rather than simultaneously in polygyny. Let us consider how calculating American men have been in avoiding polygyny.

No man in a quiet state of mind will want more than one wife at a time except he have some well-paid eunuch to take charge of his harem. A *wife* must be maintained under a man's own roof; this is in contrast with a *mistress*, who is secretly supported elsewhere. Two or more women in a house are very bad for peace. The women are given to quarrelling and conniving to obtain favors for *their* children versus the children of the other women.

It has always appeared reasonable to us that women are willing to resort to polygyny and that men stop it as soon as they can. We would put the problem in this manner: when it was a question for a woman of being a second or later wife *or* not ever having a husband, most women apparently say, I would rather be a second, third, etc. wife *than no wife at all*. Women also do not approve of prostitution; knowing that single women without hope of marriage may drift into prostitution, women favor the surplus women being taken care of by becoming the second, third, etc. wives of polygamists. But when the sexes (in maturity) become approximately equal in number polygyny is generally a doomed institution. The men are wise if they see to that.

If a man wants more than one woman, it is far better for him to have women *serially* rather than simultaneously. Divorce *and* remarriage is then the ideal system for a man. Two or more wives at one time? Look at the cost! Consider the intrigue and controversies!

The law in America permitting easy divorce and remarriage is far more suitable for the American male than polygyny. When then many people are in favor of relaxing the rules on remarriage (which relaxation will remove the principal brake that has existed on divorce) they are excellently adjusting to the "needs" of the American male (and female).

It may be doubted, however, whether the churches will think strictly in Biblical, as distinguished from secular, terms. The western secular world in which we live has abolished polygamy; it is considered somewhat "disgraceful"; the American churches will probably under no circumstances make concessions about letting polygamists become members. On the other hand, the western secular world does tolerate un-Biblical divorce and remarriage; the church will, therefore, be under powerful pressure by adjustable churchmen as well as others to tolerate un-Biblical divorce and remarriage. The pattern of the world in which it lives, largely determines the morals of the church. The church is not the "salt" of the world; the world is the "salt" of the church.

We are not convinced that a genuinely Biblical approach has been made to the polygyny problem in Nigeria. We consider the existing solution in Nigeria to be a defective solution; the thing to do is to alter the circumstances that superinduce polygyny. But that requires a "comprehensive approach" against which Boer has argued in his doctoral thesis.

It may be argued that polygyny is *sin*. Polygyny, however, was freely permitted in Hebrew society. Polygyny is determined by circumstance, and in certain societies may be considered to be a permissible institution. It may be argued that the *sin* of polygyny was committed while a man was in "heathen ignorance" and therefore the *sin* must be tolerated by the church. But it is not the ignorance that is pertinent; it is the infant death rate that is pertinent. Take away the *reason* for polygyny and the institution will die a natural death. Why talk about the sin of polygyny or excuse it as ignorance when there is no real attempt made to reduce *infant mortality*?

Similarly, the solution to the American divorce and remarriage problem lies in changing the condition which aggravates the problem. The condition which aggravates the problem is the action of

the state in permitting easy divorce and remarriage. Refuse to abide by that circumstance and the problem of divorce and remarriage can be solved by the churches in America, as the polygyny problem in Nigeria can be solved by removing its cause.      fn

## The Interesting Quotation By Rev. Leonard Verduin

Occasionally one reads something which is said more forcefully by someone else than one has ever been able to say it himself. This holds true for us in regard to something written by the Reverend Leonard Verduin in the February, 1956, issue of *The Reformed Journal*, page 15. Verduin has an article entitled, "On the IUS Reformandi." Readers will remember that we believe the broadest (but by no means the most simple or graphic) way to interpret the Sixth Commandment (Thou shalt not kill) is to say: *Thou shalt not coerce*. Note with what force Verduin makes that point in the following quotation:

One still finds traces of this objectionable notion that Bucer, and with him the other Reformers, defended so vigorously; it has not yet dawned on some, whose eyes were otherwise inclined to be quite open, that coercion is in itself a violation of the law of Christ — as the Bohemian Brethren put it — and that voluntarism is of the very nature of the Gospel. Some of the deliverances of the great Abraham Kuyper are quite inadequate, according to American taste. He said repeatedly that "if coercion by the secular powers worked then we would not for one moment hesitate to employ it" (*Baatte staatsdwang, we zouden geen oogenblik voor staatsbemoeiing . . . terugdeinzen*). All Dr. Kuyper's eloquent assertion that history had shown coercion to be ineffective fails to satisfy; for at any time a man can stand up and declare that with modern techniques of social controls it *will* work, and then we would have all the terror of the Inquisition back upon us. Kuyper seems to have been sufficiently medieval still

so as not to realize, as did Augusta\* and his people, that coercion is contrary to the law of Christ.

We concur fully with Verduin: Abraham Kuyper was completely off base when he wrote: "If coercion by the secular powers worked then he would not for one moment hesitate to employ it."  
fn

## The Heidelberg Catechism's Explanation Of: Thou Shalt Not Kill

The Heidelberg Catechism (drawn up in 1563 in Heidelberg on the Rhine in the Palatinate, Germany by two Germans, Ursinus and Olevianus) is one of the accepted "standards" (constitutional documents) of the Christian Reformed church. In this famous Catechism the authors explain the commandment, Thou shalt not kill, as follows (Lord's Day XL):

*Question:* What does God require in the Sixth Commandment?

*Answer:* That I neither in thought, nor in word or gesture, much less in deed, dishonor, hate, wound or kill my neighbor, whether by myself or by another, but lay aside all desire of revenge; moreover, that I harm not myself nor willfully expose myself to any danger. Therefore, also the magistrate is armed with the sword to prevent murder.

*Question:* But this answer seems to speak only of murder?

*Answer:* In forbidding murder, God teaches us that He abhors the root of murder, as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge; and that He accounts all these as murder.

\*John Augusta was one of the four men who composed the Council of the Bohemian Brethren, sixteenth century protestants in Bohemia who built largely on the ideas of John Huss and the Waldensians. We agree with Verduin that the Bohemian Brethren held sound ideas on the relation between church and state. See the very interesting letter by Augusta quoted at length in the *Reformed Journal* by Verduin.

*Question:* But is it enough that we do not kill our neighbor in any such way?

*Answer:* No; for when God forbids envy, hatred, and anger, He commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves: to show patience, peace, meekness, and all kindness towards him, prevent his hurt as much as in us lies, and do good even to our enemies.

The foregoing is a noble explanation of the commandment, Thou shalt not kill. But it is worthy of note that the Catechism makes no mention that *coercion* is generally forbidden. Let us analyze the answers somewhat in detail.

First, there are the *extremes*, namely, simply the *mental attitudes* of envy, hatred, anger and desire of revenge. These are not categories of action but of motivation.

Second, there are the actions of wounding and actually killing. They are certainly the *extremes of action*.

Then, there is the term, *dishonor*, which refers to slander and the manifestation of contempt. These are mostly *words*.

We have then the categories prohibited by the commandment against killing strung out in this fashion:

<u>THOUGHT</u>	<u>WORDS</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>GESTURES</u>
envy	dishonor	?	wound
hatred		?	kill
anger			
revenge			

(1) Thought (motivations), (2) words and (3) violent gestures of wounding and killing. But what about the large open space under the general category of *Action*, between *Words* and *Gestures*? The authors of the Catechism put nothing in between! It is that omission which has had a restrictive influence on the interpretation of the Sixth Commandment in Calvinist churches using the Heidelberg Catechism. The general effect of this has been a singular blind spot regarding the Sixth Commandment.

What should be inserted in the blank space? Our opinion is that it should be the term *Coercion*. Certainly, there must be something to fill the area between *words* and the *violent action of wounding and killing*. There is no word which covers this area, neglected in the Catechism, so broadly or so well as the word *coercion*. It is only when coercion is included in the definition that the Decalogue protects freedom of person, speech, religion, etc.

We get then this interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism: the Sixth Commandment forbids (1) motivations hostile to neighbors, (2) words that dishonor, (3) coercion that restrains legitimate liberty, and (4) violence that injures physically and even kills.

If Abraham Kuyper had filled in the missing segment in the explanation of the Sixth Commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism in the manner outlined, he would not have written: "if coercion by the secular powers worked [would be effective] then we would not for one moment hesitate to employ it."

One more thing should be noted. The Heidelberg Catechism does cover an important idea very well. In this case Kuyper's deviation from the Catechism is conspicuous. The Catechism says (note our italics):

That I, neither in thought, nor in word or gesture, much less in deed, dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my neighbor, whether by myself *or by another*, . . .

Kuyper as quoted indicates he would be glad to use, if he thought they would be effective, "the secular powers" in order to apply "coercion." But the Catechism specifically forbids that program by the use of the phrase "or by another." Neither Kuyper *nor any agency he could employ* (secular powers) has any authority to apply coercion.

Indeed, the real blind spot of many Calvinists is not that they fail to sense that they may not *personally* coerce someone else; the real blind spot is that they think they may coerce somebody through a *collective agency* such as the state, the government.

The subtle way in which this evil slips in is probably psychologically the most interesting of all aspects of the Sixth Commandment.

What happens is this:

1. The Sixth Commandment is a commandment which pertains only to the *actor* and never to the person acted upon.

2. All interpretations of the Sixth Commandment must apply, therefore, to the action of the actor and not to the effect on the neighbor.

3. The allegation of the actor that his coercion or violence is *good for the neighbor* should never be heeded; what is good for the neighbor is always a question of judgment on which the actor's judgment should not supersede the neighbor's judgment; if that should be permitted then all violence and coercion would be justified by the mere allegation of the aggressor; that is exactly what happens in communist countries; the actor (aggressor, the government) engages in a multitude of coercions for the *welfare* of the people!

4. Because it is not determinable whether the recipient is injured or benefited — and certainly the judgment of the actor on this question is unreliable, men being what they are — therefore, *all coercion either to injure or to benefit the neighbor is forbidden*. The greatest crimes in the world have been perpetrated under the excuse that the coercion involved was for the welfare of the victims or someone else!

5. But Scripture left no loophole for such iniquity to be perpetrated under the mask of a benefit to the recipient. Scripture simply forbids *all* coercion. It restricts the actor in *his* actions; *he* may not coerce; an alleged beneficent purpose is irrelevant. Scripture does not acknowledge such a purpose.

6. There are, as has been reiterated in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, certain specific coercions which may be applied — namely, the coercions against doing wrong, wrong being defined as in the Second Table of the Decalogue.

The all-pervasive requirement for any action in order for it to be nonsinful is that it must manifest *meekness* — be noncoercive.

## The Testimony Of A Labor Leader In Canada Against Coercion

The Christian Labour Association of Canada puts out a magazine known as *The Guide*. The editor is Mr. F. P. Fuykschot. The February, 1956, issue contains the following information which is interesting (our italics for attention-getting purposes):

### A Scientific Enquiry Into Union Rights

The "Canadian Reformed Magazine" announced that the Canadian Reformed Churches have appointed Mr. Westera L.L.D. to make a study of the Labour Laws.

Especially the following subjects will be considered:

- a. The history and legal status of the labour unions;
- b. Whether the closed shop clause is legal;
- c. Whether the check-off clause is legal.

Mr. Westera has been asked to submit a report of his findings to the churches after he has finished his studies.

...

... The union security clauses [that is, clauses requiring compulsory membership] in the Anglo-Saxon and in the Scandinavian countries have an old history. In the address of Prof. Dr. W. Hug to the Convention of the International Federation of Workmen's Evangelical Associations held in Copenhagen in 1950 this eminent authority in the field of labour laws made a short survey of the freedom of association and the right to unite.

In view of the union security systems (closed shop, union shop clauses) he concluded that these clauses "leave the door wide open to trade union monopoly and, therefore, are the beginning of the end of the workers' freedom of association."

\* \* \*

Organized labour which is not based upon Christian principles consider these union security clauses as a pro-

tection of their union and have their eyes closed for the consequence of these clauses, namely that the freedom to join a union of his own choosing without restraint on the part of unions or not to join is completely killed by laws that allow such clauses in labour contracts.

In Canada such is the case.

While the labour acts proclaim the freedom of the worker (and the employer) to join a union or not to join it, and protect him (as far as possible) against coercion on the part of the employer, *there is no protection at all against violation of this freedom by labour unions in their contracts. Art. 33 of the Labour Relation Act of Ontario and corresponding sections in labour laws of other provinces, clearly state that such violation of the freedom of association is allowed.*

It will be a hard job to have these laws amended. *Actually the only way for freedom-loving people, though they are union-minded is to fight the practices of coercion, used in any way by unions which seek a monopoly.* Such a fight is now engaged by our local in the Vancouver area. . . .

We assume Fuykschot wrote the foregoing. We are pleased to read that he clearly sees that coercion in the form of union monopoly (closed shops and union shops) are an evil. Fuykschot calls on "freedom-loving people" to "fight the practices of coercion." We congratulate Fuykschot on his views which are both economically sound and scriptural. More power to him. fn

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