

# Progressive Calvinism

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## The Centenary Of The Christian Reformed Church

The Christian Reformed church, an extraordinary denomination, of Dutch origin, Reformed in doctrine and Presbyterian in church government, with 211,454 souls, is celebrating its *centenary* in 1957.

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The experience of many has undoubtedly been such that they will praise this "institution" for great benefits received. There will be impressive ceremonies thanking God, imploring His blessing for the future, and recounting past achievements.

Although a centenary is a natural time for self-congratulations, we might wisely on the occasion of this centenary appraise ourselves critically. There are reasons for believing that the seeds for the dissolution of the distinctiveness of the denomination have already been planted in the denomination.

In this issue we shall consider two matters which may properly be considered unfortunate:

1. The growth of a doctrine which exposes the denomination to the charge of being sanctimonious; and
2. The intellectual bankruptcy of the denomination on the most dangerous practical problem of the age.

Our treatment will be popular in form in this "centennial issue." More detailed arguments will be presented as opportunity presents itself.

What is here written about a situation in one denomination is probably equally true in other denominations. We write about a symptomatic and not an isolated situation. fn

## I. SANCTIMONY

### The Ambulance In The Valley

The poem which follows is entitled "The Dangerous Cliff" but we remembered it as "The Ambulance In The Valley."

We have asked ourselves the question: What practical things in life are ambulance-in-the-valley types of operation? And then an interesting association of ideas developed in our mind: Is the Social Gospel an ambulance-in-the-valley type of religion? And then another thought: Is the Christian Reformed church drifting in the direction of being an ambulance-in-the-valley type of religion?

### The Dangerous Cliff

'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,  
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;  
But over its terrible edge there had slipped  
A duke, and full many a peasant.  
The people said something would have to be done,  
But their projects did not at all tally.  
Some said, "Put a fence round the edge of the cliff;"  
Some "An ambulance down in the valley."

The lament of the crowd was profound and loud,  
As their hearts overflowed with their pity;  
But the cry for the ambulance carried the day  
As it spread through the neighboring city.  
A collection was made, to accumulate aid,  
And the dwellers in highway and alley  
Gave dollars and cents — not to furnish a fence —  
But an ambulance down in the valley.

"For the cliff is all right if you're careful," they said;  
"And if folks ever slip and are dropping,  
It isn't the slipping that hurts them so much  
As the shock down below — when they're stopping."  
So for years (we have heard), as these mishaps occurred  
Quick forth would the rescuers sally,  
To pick up the victims who fell from the cliff,  
With the ambulance down in the valley.

Said one, in his plea, "It's a marvel to me  
That you'd give so much greater attention  
To repairing results than to curing the cause;  
You had much better aim at prevention.  
For the mischief, or course, should be stopped at its source,  
Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally.  
It is far better sense to rely on a fence  
Than an ambulance down in the valley."

"He is wrong in his head," the majority said;  
"He would end all our earnest endeavor.  
He's a man who would shirk this responsible work,  
But we will support it forever.

Aren't we picking up all, just as fast as they fall,  
And giving them care liberally?  
A superfluous fence is of no consequence,  
If the ambulance works in the valley."

—Reprinted from Vol. 16, No. 11, December 1956 *Koehring News*.  
Origin unknown to us. Regret not being able to name the author.

## The Householder Whose Glass Door Was Broken

The door of a nearby house has an all-glass door with an aluminum frame.

A young man, believing the door unlatched, struck his shoulder against the glass and shattered it.

Two weeks later, when the door was this time being operated without abuse, the new glass shattered suddenly. The owner wondered whether the new glass had been improperly installed; if so, the glazier could be held responsible.

The glazier, however, (as was natural) declared that the installation had been proper. He asked at once whether there was insurance that would cover the cost of the repairs. He was told, no. It was suggested by the young man who had broken the original glass that the owner should carry insurance to protect himself in the future.

The insurance approach would release the owner from the *initial* loss on the broken glass. The insurance company would thus become the initial victim (1) of carelessness or (2) of improper installation. An insurance company is, however, no everlasting fountain of money. It cannot stay in business if required to pay out more money than it has received from insurance holders and from stockholders. If "experience" with glass doors is bad, then the rates for such insurance will have to be raised. As an insurance holder, the owner would eventually be obligated to pay a higher insurance premium. What will he then be doing? Merely paying in annual sums (that is, premiums) enough money to take care of the frequent breakage of the glass in the door, and also leave the insurance company a profit. It might appear that the

insurance company as an ambulance-in-the-valley was a gift or a boon to insurance holders, but really it was something they had paid for in advance (or would have to pay for in the future).

What would be alternative solutions to the problem? There are several: (1) less carelessness; (2) proper installation; (3) avoidance of letting moisture condense on the door, run down between glass and frame, freeze, and so create stresses which would result in the glass shattering; (4) changing the structure of the door to avoid stresses on the glass; or (5) putting in an entirely different type of door. These solutions are all fence-around-the-cliff types of solutions.

The editors of *PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM* are fence-around-the-cliff men and not ambulance-in-the-valley men. They are not the type which would fail to put up a fence and have 10 ambulances in the valley; nor would they have a flimsy or semi-adequate fence and 5 ambulances in the valley; the situation, if left to them, would probably be a steel, closely-woven, seven-foot high, heavy duty fence — and proportionately fewer ambulances in the valley. fn

## **Religion's Ambulance-In-The-Valley**

There is a perfect example existing today of an ambulance-in-the-valley religion.

We refer to the religion of Bishop Anders Nygren of the State church (Lutheran) of Sweden. One of its theological schools is located at Lund. Nygren and Aulén are the two men who have made the Lund theological school of thought famous throughout the world. We would say that the most-popular modernist schools of religious thought in Protestantism are the Barth-Brunner school and the Lund school.

A nation, as Sweden, which has an established state church, will naturally have a state-controlled faculty in theology. A faculty in a state-controlled church will represent diverse views, some orthodox and some modernist.

Nygren's views, although colored by historical Lutheran ideas, are not traditional Lutheran ideas.

Enoch E. Mattson in his "Lundensian Theology And Motif Research" in the paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society (December 1955) at Grand Rapids, Michigan, wrote as follows (see "Papers . . . read at the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, John F. Walvoord, Editor, 3909 Swiss Avenue, Dallas 4, Texas) :

Although the Lundensian school of theology does not loom as large on the contemporary theological scene as some of the other dominant emphases, it must nevertheless be recognized as a vigorous movement. It has furnished leadership and considerable impetus to the modern ecumenical church movement, with some of its doctrinal emphases — the doctrine of the church, and the doctrine of *agape* — definitely slanted in the direction of ecumenicity. Two of the monographs produced by Lundensian theologians — *Christus Victor* by Gustaf Aulén, and *Agape and Eros* [ag'a pē and er 'os] by Anders Nygren — appear to be gaining recognition as classics and making considerable impact on the theological thought of our day.

We consider the basic ideas of Nygren in his book, *Agape and Eros* (translated by Philip S. Watson, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1953) to be the acme of sanctimoniousness.

The words *agape* and *eros* both mean "love." If the words had been translated in the customary manner, the English title of the book would read *Love and Love*. Obviously, Nygren is writing about two kinds of love.

It is not possible to make clear the difference between *agape* and *eros* by means of a short title. Nygren takes more than 200 pages to describe the meaning of *agape* and *eros*. If a short descriptive title were attempted, the title might be "Unmotivated Love and Motivated Love."

(1) A "motivated" love is a love influenced more or less by self-interest; such love is *eros*. For example, a young man loves a girl and wishes to marry her. He wishes to make her happy, but he also wishes — and here the *eros* motive enters in — that she will make him happy himself, or at least it makes him happy to think that he is making her happy. His love is motivated by self-inter-

est to a degree. *Eros* may be a very high and lofty type of love, but it has in it an alloy, says Nygren — the alloy of self-interest or self-benefit.

*Eros* (which derives from the name of the Greek god of love) sometimes has an unfavorable meaning. *Eros* includes sexual love. Because "love" related to sex is subject to insincerity and betrayal, *eros* often has an evil meaning. The common English word, *erotic*, derived from *eros*, is defined as "of or pertaining to passionate love." The term *erotic* sometimes refers to excessive sexual desires, and may mean the same as oversexed.

But Nygren uses the term *eros* only in a good sense, that is, he applies it to proper love of any kind which has some motive in it more or less of self-interest. *Eros* is *motivated*.

(2) *Agape*, according to Nygren, is a nobler love; it is *unmotivated*. *A* loves *B* although *B* is unworthy of love and although *A* will get no benefit for himself from it in any degree. *Agape* is not a love which "discriminates" by loving *C*, who is wise, good, handsome and gentle, more than *D*, who is foolish, wicked, ugly and violent. Such a difference in love toward *C* and *D* would discriminate according to merit and in that sense be motivated by the differences in the objects loved.

This *agape*, according to Nygren, is a godlike love. The *real* Christian religion, he says, describes God's love toward sinners as being a love which is above self-interest and which is not reduced because of any unworthiness in the person loved. The essence of the Christian religion, in Nygren's opinion, is the *agape* of God toward men — a love unmotivated by any selfishness and unalterable by any unattractiveness in the object of that love. When God loves men not for himself and despite the unworthiness of men, then that love is *agape*.

(The love of God in predestination is *agape*. However, if God predestined persons to salvation *for his own honor and glory or for any satisfaction for himself* then that "love" cannot be *agape* any more, in the Nygrenian sense of unmotivated love.)

When religion uses two words, *agape* and *eros*, for love, then the difference in meaning can, in the opinion of some scholars, be

settled by studies of the origins of these words, but etymological studies are, in our opinion, practically valueless. Context and deliberate definition should determine meaning. Scripture defines *love* repeatedly and exactly, and not at all as Nygren endeavors to define love, and as he endeavors to discriminate between *agape* and *eros*.

The use of *agape* by the Apostle Paul, when he became lyrical and poetic about love in I Corinthians 13, has caused English translators considerable trouble. The King James translators in the seventeenth century were reluctant to translate *agape* as *love*; instead they translated it *charity*. This is an astonishingly different idea in English than *love*. This dilemma of the translators is a perfect illustration of the problem of the meaning of words in Scripture, and should make everyone wary of belaboring words and lucubrating over etymological origins of words.

Nygren has developed the idea of *motifs*. Mattson writes about that as follows (our italics):

The method [of the Lund school] has been that of motif-research — a method which it is claimed is strictly scientific.\* The task and method of theology, it is urged, is not apologetic, nor speculative, nor one of appraisal — that is, of attempting to assess or evaluate. It is rather conceived as descriptive, and can therefore claim to be scientific and objective. The attempt is made to press beyond the terminology or the form of expression of a writer *to the real meaning or motif that was in his mind* as he wrote.

When Nygren then asks the question, what is the fundamental *motif* of Christianity, he answers it by saying *agape*, not *eros*, not *nomos*.

(3) *Nomos* is the third essential term in Nygren's thinking. *Nomos* refers to *law*. *Nomos*, according to Nygren, is the motif of the Old Testament. *Nomos* is basically a different motif than either *eros* or *agape*.

In Nygren's thinking, anything that does not have the motif

\*This claim can easily be rebutted.—Editor of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM.



of *agape*, unmotivated love, is not the genuine article in religion. *Eros* will not do. And *nomos* is even worse. The ensigns and banners of Christianity must move forward with only one slogan and one device — *agape*, unmotivated God-like love. He believes that this *agape* is the key, the sesame, to every problem in life.

Anyone who concerns himself about the law, *nomos*, is a person who emphasizes the "fence on the cliff." The Law is designed to keep people from falling; likewise, the fence on the cliff. When Nygren disparages the law he is disparaging the "fence on the cliff."

But Nygren's ambulance in the valley is terrific — *agape*, unmotivated love. Here is the divine and the perfect, the God-like and the genuinely Christian. As the victims come plunging over the cliff Christianity is to rush up with the ambulance; ask no questions; manifest love — *agape*. That, says Nygren, is the quintessence of the Christian religion, love (*agape*) and not law (*nomos*). We consider this to be a dangerous half-truth, and unalloyed sanctimoniousness.

The Second Table of the Law, which specifies the relation of men to men, says, Thou shalt love thy neighbor *as thyself*. The words *as thyself* are obviously words referring to motivation.

It is Nygren's corruption of the meaning of *agape* which constitutes his mistake. It is that corruption of the meaning of *agape* which is widely accepted.

We have developed an intense aversion to a sanctimonious definition of *agape*. We dislike an impossible, pharisaical religion — one which by very definition itself must be that. fn

## Classic Irrationality

Nygren writes (page 91, his italics):

Now at last we are in a position to define the Christian meaning of the commandment of love. *The Agape that is required here has its prototype in the Agape manifested by God, and therefore it must be spontaneous and unmotivated, uncalculating, unlimited and unconditional.*

Spontaneous? Unmotivated? Uncalculating? Unlimited? Unconditional?

We would combine all these grandiose descriptions of *Agape* into one word, *irrational*. The sentence would then read:

The *Agape* that is required here has its prototype in the *Agape* manifested by God, and therefore it must be *irrational*.

because anything which is a combination of the spontaneous, the unmotivated, the uncalculating, the unlimited and the unconditional is perfect irrationality — by definition.

Nygren may declare that God's love is *unmotivated* (as he laboriously defines it). We do not consider God's love to be unmotivated in any sense that can be understood by men.

Practically every page of the 202 pages which Nygren uses for his explanation of *agape*, *eros* and *nomos* contains a fallacy or absurdity. There is nothing in the world and in life that can correspond in reality to Nygren's doctrine of *agape*.

When Nygren begins on page 95 with the subject *love for one's neighbor*, he endeavors to make four points.

(1) Neighborly love has a religious basis, that is, its context is the "fellowship with God." The laws are so closely related that they almost appear to be *one* law.

(2) Nevertheless, the requirement to love God and the requirement to love the neighbor are *two* separate commandments.

(3) But there is no *third* commandment on love, as those infer who declare men should love themselves because the commandment reads, Thou shalt love thy neighbor *as thyself*. Nygren denies that you should love yourself.

(4) And you should love your enemies.

This "religion" then gets down to this. You should be spontaneous, unmotivated, uncalculating, unlimited and unconditional in your love (*agape*) toward God, your neighbors generally and your enemies also, but none of these things toward yourself! We lack space in this issue to analyze the foregoing ideas.

The idea involved in the foregoing is present in the thinking of men as Rev. Peter Van Tuinen when he condemns "selfishness." (See his article in *God-Centered Living or Calvinism in Action* quoted on page 68 in *PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM*, March 1957.) One of the stupendous fallacies and hypocrisies of modern "Christian" religion is the assumption or allegation that selfishness — any concern for the self — is evil. The idea is that men must live for God, for their neighbors and their enemies — but *never* for themselves. That would be sin!

This doctrine of love by Nygren is the same doctrine of love that Karl Marx taught — from each according to his ability to each according to his need.

Nygren's doctrine of love can be used as a pious "rationalization" of communism's demands. fn

## Refined Seduction Versus Vulgar Seduction

Men have developed innumerable ways of perpetrating that evil which may be described as the seduction of women. Arbitrarily, we shall classify these methods into two types, the vulgar and the refined.

The vulgar consists of exploiting a woman's response to off-color jokes, etc. We forbear cataloguing a long list.

The refined consists in being more indirect and pretending to be thoughtful and kind. Some years ago a married man committed suicide. A mistress whom he had acquired was heartbroken. The newspapers reported her anquished lament: "He was so wonderful; so kind; he persuaded me to read good books; he taught me all kinds of things I did not know; he made me so much better than I was. Oh, Oh!" This seduction involved a *refined* technique; an evil was perpetrated under the shelter of apparent good.

The "Christian" religion is being seduced by Nygren's definition of love, not by a vulgar method but by a refined method. Nygren defines *agape* so high and elevated that no Christian theologian dares to question it. Christianity is supposed to be the acme of what is wonderful. Therefore, the Christian religion feels obligated to define *agape* idealistically high, and no one dares to

question the correctness of that, no more than the suicide's mistress questioned the good intent of the educational acts which in his lifetime he had done for her — in order to seduce her and keep her happy as his mistress. Nygren's definition of *agape* seduces theologians as the suicide's educational efforts seduced his mistress.

There is considerable criticism of Nygren as a modernist in religion which he indisputably is, but there is practically no question anywhere about his doctrine of *agape*. It is too lofty properly to be suspected!

When theologians reject the idea that sanctimoniousness about *agape* must be evidence in itself of good intent, and examine whether Nygren has defined *agape* Biblically, this refined technique of seduction will fail. fn

## The Significance Of The "Attributes" Of God

If a man begins as a humanist and trusts his reason only, he will end up with the proposition of the ancient Greek Sophists: "man is the measure of all things," that is, everything will have to be judged by human reason and there is nothing beyond it. With Socrates he may then come to the proposition that "if man is the measure of all things," then he certainly ought to say to himself "know thyself."

The Christian religion has a base outside human reason, to wit, revelation. Eventually, then "man is not the measure of all things," but that measure is God speaking through Scripture.

The word, God, is merely a three-letter word of no precise meaning until the "attributes" of God are specified. In orthodox Calvinism, therefore, everything finally depends on the alleged attributes of God, based on an interpretation, correct or incorrect, of Scripture. These attributes have traditionally included love, justice, righteousness, hatred of evil, omniscience, etc. In old and orthodox Calvinism there is a substantial emphasis on God's hatred of evil and his righteousness and justice.

In Nygren's religion of *Agape*, God's attributes are reduced to one — love, incorrectly defined. This attribute overwhelms everything.

If any professor at Calvin Theological Seminary defines God or the idea of *agape a la* the Nygren definition of love, he deviates from the historical Calvinist position. fn

## Peering Over The Cliff

In former days when the road was less-improved, an automobile trip over the mountains in Colorado from Montrose to Silverton and Durango was a hair-raising experience. The abyss at the edge of every curve could paralyze a person with fear.

Let us crawl on all fours to the edge of the cliff and peer down into the shadows of the valley and see whether there are any Christian Reformed ambulances below. If we shade our eyes with our hands, we shall be able to see how favorable the ambulance situation is.

There are, it becomes obvious, several lines of ambulances like several lines of cabs at cabstands in large railway stations or airports.

There is a *theological* line of ambulances. One of the several drivers in this line-up of ambulances is Henry Stob, professor of ethics and apologetics at Calvin Theological Seminary. His definition of *agape* has an affinity to the Nygrenian definition, as is quite evident from his views on the racial question. Besides Henry Stob there are others, George Stob, Harry Boer, James Daane — the editors generally of *The Reformed Journal*.

There is also a social science line of ambulances. They also have the label *agape* on them, with "nondiscrimination" printed below it in small type. To "discriminate" obviously involves motivation. To be "nondiscriminatory" is to avoid motivation. Anyone who discriminates cannot rise beyond *eros*, but *eros* is alleged not to be the real spirit of Christianity. It is defective. We need *agape*. We can identify some of the "nondiscrimination" ambulance drivers — Prof. Donald Bouma, Rev. Peter Van Tuijnen, Dr. Gerrit Heyns, Rev. Clarence Boomsma.

So many ambulances might cause traffic congestion. Is there no traffic cop? There is. He is a veteran. Many of the individual

ambulance drivers are his protégés. However, these ambulance drivers have become well trained. They are now operating largely on their own experience, without extensive guidance from the veteran traffic officer. fn

## Stromata

*Stromata* is a Greek word. We have known the meaning but we have forgotten it; it does not matter. *Stromata* is the name of a new publication put out by the students of Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The first issue appeared on March 15, 1956. A second issue appeared on October 3, 1956; it begins with "A Word Of Greeting" from John H. Kromminga, president of the Seminary. He wrote: "We commend *Stromata* and its writers to the charitable judgment of the public. . . . If as writers and readers we can exercise due Christian patience and charity, both writers and readers may grow in grace and in knowledge. We respect this plea for "patience and charity." When we quote from *Stromata* in what follows, we are not thinking so much of what the students have learned as from whom they may have learned it.

The December 1956 issue of *Stromata* contains an article entitled "Anders Nygren." We quote from this article a paragraph which excellently states the Nygren doctrine on *agape*.

. . . Nygren formulates the fundamental motif of Christianity as *Agape*, and contrasts it with its pagan rival, *Eros*. He further describes the vicissitudes of the *Agape*-motif throughout the Christian History, until and including Luther. *Agape* is unmotivated, uncalculated, disinterested Love. Properly it can be ascribed to God alone. *Agape* is God's way to man, Christianity's only solution to religious fellowship: God coming down, seeking and finding sinners. *Eros* is *Agape*'s enemy. *Eros* is a yearning desire, an appetite aroused by the value of its object. *Agape* is value-blind and value-creating. Fellowship in the sense of the *Eros*-motif means to satisfy the spiritual hunger by the possession and enjoyment of Divine perfections. *Eros*, as self-love rightly understood, makes a person strive

to ascend to God, his *summum bonum*. Eros is egocentric; Agape is theocentric. Agape-love to God cannot exist by definition. Therefore Paul calls it "faith." And when a man by faith has been made receptive for fellowship with God, God's Agape comes and dwells in him and streams through this Christian out to the neighbor — not caring whether this neighbor is a relative or an enemy (or both). A Christian is one whose heart has been possessed by God's Agape; a Christian simply loves. Freely ye have received, freely give. Self-love cannot exist.

Later in the same article the following appears:

Nygren's commentary on Romans can be read because it is not one of the analytical kind but is one of the kind which takes after Luther and Calvin [our italics]. We recommend his book, *The Gospel of God* (104 pages), a pastoral letter by Bishop Nygren to the ministers of his Diocese.

The student who writes the foregoing later adds (our italics): "It [*Agape and Eros*] is a fascinating book and *its fundamental thesis is true.*" The article ends with "Nygren is an *evangelical Christian who bows low before Scripture* — but not before every verse in it."

That the atmosphere at Calvin Theological Seminary is not entirely unsympathetic to the sanctimonious and un-Biblical doctrine of Nygren is obvious.

Of course, *agape* is a term to conjure with. Historical Calvinism has always been more realistic than to write a panegyric about love *and love alone*, as Nygren does. fn

## Nygren And Nels Ferre

In a book review of *Agape And Eros* by Dr. J. R. Richardson in *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, October 26, 1955, the following comment appears:

Outstanding as this volume is it must be read with caution. Unless it is, it can lead to positions which are

not theologically correct. For example Nels Ferre in his book "The Christian Fellowship" implies that his position on universalism has been derived from the study of this work of Nygren's. Ferre, Reinhold Niebuhr and a number of other present day theologians push "Agape" to such an extreme that the Biblical doctrine of hell is undermined.

This judgment of Nygren's book is more tolerant than ours. We do not consider the book to be "outstanding." We consider the basic idea of the book to be sanctimonious twaddle about love, wholly unworkable, a fit subject for rejection by people of common sense. The *agape* doctrine is as unbalanced as any that modern liberalism has produced.

Nels Ferre, a Swedish immigrant to the United States to whom reference is made in the foregoing quotation, has at some time or other written or said (if we remember correctly) that the God of the Christian Scriptures was a "great bully."

In the September 7, 1955 issue of *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* the following article by Dr. L. Nelson Bell appears:

**Dr. Nels Ferre And  
Lake Junaluska**

The *Christian Century* and the *Presbyterian Outlook* are both concerned because the executive committee and the board of trustees of the Lake Junaluska (Methodist) Assembly cancelled the scheduled Bible talks by Dr. Ferre for August.

Our only information as to why and how this was done has come from the daily newspapers.

However, according to Dr. Ferre's own books he:

- (a) Does not believe that Jesus was sinless;
- (b) Denies the Virgin Birth;
- (c) Admits the possibility that Christ may have been the bastard son of a German soldier quartered near Nazareth;
- (d) Flatly affirms, "Jesus never was or became God";
- (e) Questions the reality of the resurrection: "But we know neither that this event actu-



ally happened nor exactly what took place"; (f) Speaks of the Bible: "The use of the Bible as the final authority for Christian truth is idolatry"; (g) Although teaching in a Methodist seminary he is actually a Universalist and speaks of "the Hindu branch of the Church of the living God." fn

## Synopsis

There is a sanctimonious modern religion which may be described as *agape* religion. It is a religion hostile to a fence-on-the-cliff religion, a religion which has law (*nomos*) as part of its "motif." It disparages rationality in relationships between men; it considers any "love" which is motivated, even though understandably motivated, nevertheless to be non-Christian, only *eros*, a motivated love. This *agape* religion sounds so good and lofty that theologians are afraid to attack it boldly; they are seduced by its pretended loftiness. If "God is love" *only*, and if love is defined as Nygren defines *agape*, God's attributes are practically all reduced to one attribute, irrational love.

There are obvious driftings toward and acceptances of the *agape* doctrine by members of the Christian Reformed church. An extensive list of names could be mentioned; foremost are the names of the editors of *The Reformed Journal*. Probably considerable sympathy has been engendered at Calvin Theological Seminary for the *agape* religion. One student, at least, thinks well of it.

The *agape* religion tends toward perfect ecumenism and universalism. God is *agape*! Punishment is irreconcilable with *agape*. fn

## II. DIALECTICAL BANKRUPTCY

### Lester De Koster's "All Ye That Labor"

Lester De Koster is Director of the Library of Calvin College and Seminary. He has also taught (probably still teaches) courses in public speaking for theology students. He has written a book, *All Ye That Labor* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956). The book has the sub-title, "An Essay On Christianity, Communism And The Problem Of Evil."

De Koster is against communism. But the principle reason, in our opinion, why communism has made such enormous progress is exactly because of ideas such as are in this book, *All Ye That Labor*. Expressed another way: De Koster's ideas are one of the "causes" for the spread of communism, for its vitality, for its appeal to the masses.

We consider this to be not only a slightly startling indictment, but also an indictment that needs something to substantiate it. We address ourselves to that requirement in the remainder of this issue and the next.

There was a time when we occupied practically the same position that De Koster occupies now. But we have abandoned it. It is, we have been convinced, an erroneous and inadequate and illogical view of the issues between Christianity and Communism.

It is not that what De Koster says in criticism of communism is in specific statements erroneous. As far as he goes, what he says appears to be generally right and always brilliantly done. His deficiency is in what he does not say against communism, but which he should say and which touches the heart of the issue. It is the omission which is fatal. There is evidence that De Koster does not know the basic answer to the really crucial question between Christianity and Communism.

We are not in this instance taking issue with an intellectual commoner. De Koster's native mental furniture is some of the best available in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Among the younger intellectuals he has as brilliant and constructive a career before him as any — *provided* he is able to take a different road from the one he is now on. It is because of the excellence of De Koster's talents and the artistic skill which he evidences by this book that we review it vigorously.

The critique which follows may not be welcomed by some. In this connection we think hopefully of an anecdote, about a controversy between Themistocles, the Athenian, and Eurybiades, the Spartan. Themistocles, threatened with a blow, pleaded with his adversary as follows, "STRIKE, BUT HEAR ME." To all who are alarmed about our foregoing formulation of a grave problem, we say with Themistocles, "*Strike, but hear us.*"

It has taken De Koster 123 pages to tell his story. It would take us as many to take complete issue with him, and we shall need the space of many more pages to develop the real counter argument against Marxian communism. We shall merely be repeating what others have said earlier *and better* than we shall say it! We shall add only one thing new — if it is new — namely, the harmony of the *logical* rebuttal of communism with the *scriptural* position on the issue which is involved.

This, we believe, is the situation:

1. Originally, Christianity *basically* rejected Marxian communism from a general feeling (not a conclusive argument) that it was wholly incompatible with Christian ethics.

2. Presently, "Christianity" has come to view Marxian communism more tolerantly and either (a) admits its most basic premise, or (b) evades arguing about it, because it does not know how to answer the basic communist argument.

De Koster's book falls into category (2b). The situation requires a *logical* answer which will meet head on and devastate the basic Marxian argument for communism. fn

## The "Issue" Between Communism And Christianity

The most fundamental idea of Karl Marx, the founder of modern socialism-communism, is that God was a scoundrel and Moses a fraud when they legislated in favor of private property and its concomitant, *unearned* income, by means of the Eighth Commandment, Thou shalt not steal. To legislate against stealing implies the genuine right to private property; and private property is valued primarily because it yields an *unearned* income.

Any private property, according to Marx, *any* ownership, say, of land, is unmitigated evil. In fact, according to Marx, private ownership is *the* evil of the world, *the* basic evil of society. Oh yes, Marx would not argue about your holding tightly in your hand, as a baby holds a piece of candy, some inconsequential bauble that nobody else wanted. But if anybody else coveted it, you no longer had a genuine, imprescriptible\* right of possession.

\*Imprescriptible — incapable of being either lost or acquired by prescription; inalienable.

When Marx talked about private property, he especially had in mind factories, shops, railroads, and *productive* equipment (and not *consumption* goods), but an exact dividing line between the two is not traceable. In practice there is, in communism, no impermissible *right* to *any* private property, productive or consumptive.

What, stripped down to bare essentials, is Marx's argument?

1. All *value* is produced by labor. There is no other *value*.
2. The employee should get the *full value* of *all* that his labor has produced.
3. If an employer gets any part of what is produced by the employee, then the employer is an exploiter, a damnable scoundrel. That an employer or an owner gets anything is immoral.
4. God through Moses is alleged to have legislated laws which give the owner or employer part of what the laborer or employee produces. God, when He legislated thus, was grossly immoral and *completely* wrong.
5. Genuine right and the proper moral law are just the reverse; real private ownership of property may not be permitted; *unearned* income from ownership by a land owner, property owner, or employer is conscienceless wickedness. Let the Law of God in regard to the Eighth Commandment be damned!

It was not until the nineteenth century A.D. that a man (Karl Marx) lived who so basically attacked the morality of God, as taught in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures, that there is nothing left of the Eighth Commandment. Either Scripture is all wrong, or Marx is all wrong. Of all things, Marx was no petty quibbler. He was one of the greatest revolutionaries toward God who has ever lived.

Marx did not teach that an owner is entitled to *some* income. He insisted that the owner was not entitled to *any* income. Every *unearned* income is, says Marx, evil. Any answer to Marx must meet up with this issue as Marx relentlessly formulated it.

Does De Koster meet that issue head on? Not at all. He *does* not put in a word of *real* defense for the legislation by God in the

### Eighth Commandment in the Decalogue.

Marx, it should be carefully noted, comes up with an argument from "logic" or "reason" to support his proposition, that (1) ownership and (2) income from ownership are evil.

De Koster dodges that logical argument. He does not endeavor to refute it. In effect, therefore, he concedes that Marx is basically right when he declares that God and Moses are immoral. If De Koster fails to attempt to answer Marx, God is left exposed to the basic indictment that He is an immoral legislator.

When De Koster fails to attempt to defend basically the in-prescriptible right of private property and turns instead to interventionism, he does not occupy an isolated position on this issue in the Christian Reformed church. Professor W. Harry Jellema, head of the philosophy department of Calvin College is also an Interventionist, in an economic sense. Readers may remember the public discussion several years ago between

1. Rev. Norman Thomas, advocating Socialism;
2. Rev. Stanley High, advocating Capitalism; and
3. Prof. W. Harry Jellema, advocating neither Socialism nor Capitalism, but Interventionism.

This Interventionism of Jellema, and of many latter day members of the Christian Reformed church, is equivalent to a refusal to meet head on the basic argument of Marx for socialism-communism. In the public discussion just referred to, the man representing Capitalism, Stanley High, at least was willing to argue the real issue, namely, ownership and income from ownership are not intrinsically evil but good. Marx, contrarily, declared that ownership and income from ownership are intrinsically evil, and that is the position which Norman Thomas, many times socialist candidate for the presidency of the United States, took in the public discussion between him and High and Jellema. Jellema's position was: a "plague on both your houses"; Socialism and Capitalism, *neither*, will do; *God really did not authorize ownership; He only authorized stewardship*; if ownership is more than stewardship then ownership is immoral. This is equivalent to saying that God and

Moses were wrong if their "Law" sanctioned an imprescriptible ownership and unearned income from ownership.

There is, of course, a feeble and obvious evasion available to Jellema and De Koster, to wit, that ownership is all right, but only so far as is right. What possibly can that mean? Something is right as much as it is right! Did God and Moses legislate a ridiculous proposition, something so tautological as that is? But the Jellemas and the De Kosters have a solution: wise lawmakers — the Roosevelts, the Harry Hopkinses, the Felix Frankfurters, the Harry Trumans and the Dwight Eisenhowers — are endowed and authorized by God to determine *how much* private property is to be allowed, by means of unearned income, to receive. Some preachers believe that they are authorized and able to "moralize" *how much* unearned income is proper. A man may not be supposed to be entitled to get his full and free income in a *free market* economy; no, he may have as much unearned income as these wise rulers and moralists legislate is "moral" and "loving toward the neighbor" and not "exploiting" and not "profiteering" and a "fair day's wage for a fair day's work," a "just wage," or what is not "usury."

The Jellemas and the De Kosters reject the proposition of Marx; they say that it is not right. But they also reject the position of God; he must have made a mistake because he failed to legislate limiting "profiteering" on ownership of land, etc. They make a choice for someone better than Marx or God, namely, a bureaucrat, a Roosevelt or an Eisenhower or a congressman conducting himself so that he will be re-elected.

A real difficulty is that the Jellemas and the De Kosters do not approach the issue with an adequate knowledge of economics. They are both philosophers without knowledge of economic laws. In an age when the basic stresses and strains in society are on the issue of the *ownership of property and unearned income from the ownership of property* they pursue philosophy without real knowledge of the basic social science involved, namely, economics.

Any philosophy, pretending in this day and age to have something to contribute to the solution of the present-day social problem *but lacking thorough knowledge of economics*, is a ridiculous philosophy — impractical, ignorant and erroneous. Philosophy *without economics* can wander harmlessly and innocuously along the

boundless paths of impractical speculation, but when it undertakes to teach morality, or suitable conduct, it should at least acquaint itself with its subject.

It is the ignorance of economics which is the reason for the intellectual paralysis in the social science field in the Christian Reformed church. It is that ignorance which causes the Jellemas and De Kusters and everyone following them to be unable to solve the paradox that *the laborer is entitled to his WHOLE produce*, but that nevertheless there *must be and will be* until the Day of Judgment a return on capital. This is to a Jellema or a De Koster a perfect paradox which they have apparently never attempted to solve. But it is no paradox at all if you *have informed yourself of what economics teaches*. On this issue sound economics and Scripture agree *perfectly*. Marx's logic, Jellemanian philosophy and government interventionism will *never* frustrate the economic law involved.

Readers should examine the September 1955 issue of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, pages 241-243, and the July 1956 issue, pages 219-222, in order to learn of an inquiry by PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM — already a year and one-half old — which has not been answered. There is no philosopher or social scientist in the Christian Reformed church who has deigned to give an answer. If they are *unable or unwilling* to give an answer, the Christian Reformed church is bankrupt *intellectually* and *morally* in regard to fighting communism and socialism until it finds the answer.

It is because the De Kusters and the Jellemas and all the other "philosophers" completely evade Marx's fundamental position that they are by that failure a cause of the progress of communism.

Let us consider the device of evasion, and its place in dialectics among men, and then how De Koster engages in such evasion of the real issue. fn

## The Crafty Treasurer On The Witness Stand

We worked in our youth for a man who knew the inside story of the attempted organization of a genuine trust or monopoly.\* We relate some aspects of the story in order to make a point. We have no intention that the case be identifiable.

\*PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM is unalterably opposed to monopoly.

The master mind behind the plan to establish a monopoly was a baby-faced treasurer of one of the companies involved. His face masked one of the craftiest minds of his time.

Few things can be kept secret. The government got wind of what was going on, evidence was made available by insiders, and a suit was filed by the government.

In the tight spots, circumstances eventually (not necessarily at the beginning) force the best men forward. The defendants in the suit — the would-be monopolists — naturally felt constrained to rely for their defense on the treasurer who had master-minded the scheme.

The treasurer was on the witness stand for hours and hours under gruelling examination by government attorneys. Although they had considerable documentary evidence, they could not "crack" the case.

The marvel was that they could not trap the treasurer into any lie which would give the necessary clue and betray the whole scheme.

The principal trial attorney for the government followed a settled plan: (1) question; (2) answer by the witness; (3) examination of all the documents already in government hands to discover something inconsistent, revealing and damaging. His procedure was systematic, invariable and thorough.

Late one hot afternoon a dangerous question was put to the treasurer. He answered. But he felt forced to answer in a manner which was not true; in short, he lied. The other defendants sitting in the court room were stunned by the difficult question and the answer extracted. They expected that it would be only a matter of minutes before the attorney would complete his checking of the records in his hand and discover the falsehood. And this particular falsehood was a "key." Once realized to be a falsehood, all the rest of the proposed monopoly could be unravelled from that beginning. Everybody waited tensely.

Suddenly the judge, commenting on the insufferable heat, adjourned the session until the next morning. The examining at-



torney did not then and there check his documents. He "adjourned" his efforts.

When the court opened the next day the treasurer requested an opportunity to elaborate on his answer of the previous afternoon. The request was granted. The treasurer then made a long and careful and interesting explanation. He talked for an hour and one-half. When he was finished, everyone was satisfied. The prosecuting attorney did not even think of checking the *original* answer with the record!

What had been done?

The treasurer had begun with matters related to the question. But he had "wandered" on and on. Each step in the "wandering" took him farther away from the question at issue. He operated as a bird, pretending to be maimed, which flutters away, but every flutter leads the pursuer farther from the nest of the bird.

The trial proceeded. However, the government was not able to substantiate its case against the defendants and obtain a conviction.

When we read De Koster's book we thought of the treasurer on the witness stand, and the bird fluttering farther from its nest.

But there is a difference. What was done deliberately by the treasurer, and is practiced instinctively by a mother bird, is done unconsciously by De Koster.

The effect of course is the same. This analogy between De Koster, the treasurer, and the bird will become clear later.

We ourselves saw the treasurer only once. He had retired. He was at the office one day. He was quiet, placid and colorless, except that he looked like a patient and kindly man over whom the cares of life had rolled mercilessly and had softened and subdued, and as if he were a devout and submissive Christian. My employer laughed at my comment. He assured me that behind the face there was an astonishingly fast, calculating and cold intellect. Even the face had been moulded by the brain, in order not to betray anything or alert anyone dealing with the brain behind it.      fn

## De Koster's Comprehensive Summary Of Marxism

Chapter 2 in De Koster's book has the title "Marx and Marxism." This chapter presents De Koster's objective summary of the basic ideas of Marx. This summary is excellent. De Koster has studied Marx well and not unsympathetically.

De Koster by explanation and the use of illustration makes clear Marx's theory of:

1. *Labor value.* The *value* of every thing depends on the "socially necessary labor" in that thing, whatever it may be.
2. *Surplus value.* The employee is in a bad bargaining position and the employer in a good bargaining position and so the reward to labor gets forced down to a mere subsistence level for the employee. He gets only enough to live and breed his children for a similar lot as his own. The rest goes to the employer as *surplus value* (unearned income). The employer exploits the employee by the amount of the *surplus value* he is able to retain for himself.
3. *Congeaed labor.* All capital is earlier labor congealed now in the form of capital, and extorted previously from the employee by the retention of *surplus value* by the employer.
4. *The proletariat.* This means everybody who owns no capital and works for somebody else for his living, and who is consequently exploited to a mere subsistence level.
5. *The bourgeoisie.* This means all those who own capital, have *unearned* income, and who collect that income at the expense of the employee or laborer by means of alleged exploitation.
6. *The state.* This means the whole apparatus to coerce people, especially the laws of the state protecting the right to the ownership and free use of property. The state exists only for the purpose of protecting the bourgeoisie in their exploitation of the proletariat. It presently has no other purpose or utility.
7. *Class struggle.* This is the natural conflict that arises between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, a conflict not to be resolved except by the liquidation (destruction) of the bourgeoisie.

8. *Economic determinism.* This means that matters of property and property ownership determine (dominate, control) all human interrelations. In whatever manner the question of ownership is settled, so the basic characteristics of society will be settled. Presently all thinking, teaching and alleged morality is in the direction of defending and protecting property ownership. Every judgment is warped and made subjective by that viewpoint. That capitalistic viewpoint gives a false perspective of events and of history. Under a capitalistic system no sound perspective of events is even possible.

9. *Dialectical materialism.* *Dialectical* comes from the Greek work, *to argue*. Marx says that the basic *argument* between men is about material things. (First, society was communistic and nomadic. Then it became feudal; the few lived in luxury on the drudgery of others. The third period is the age of the guilds, and of expanded trade. The fourth period is capitalism, as we know it, with the worker no longer owning the tools with which he works.) The *dialectic*, the argument, the dispute arises in this manner: (1) the employer exploits the employee; (2) they then become class enemies (the action of the employer created the classes); (3) the conflict between the classes is the cause of the changes in events which we know as history. All history is viewed by Marx in this light, namely, the struggle and changes constituting history occur because of the operation of dialectical materialism.

10. *Alienation.* When a workman labors to produce, he puts his "life" into his product. But under mass production and by the capitalistic exploitation by the employer, the product of a man (vital fragments of his "life") are taken from him. This explains *and justifies* the attitude of the proletariat to bring about a revolution to overturn the existing economic order even by violence. Any revolutionary program is not covetousness, but righteous indignation and indemnification against the perpetration of the evil of collecting surplus value (unearned income). Strikes and violence are perfectly justified; they are a protest against alienation.

11. *The withering away of the state.* The state exists today only to protect exploitation of employees by employers by means of the exercise of government-protected property right. When property will no longer belong to individuals, there will no

longer be need for a government. The government (state) will, in the colorful language of the communists, "wither away."

12. *Communist morality and justice.* No bourgeois (or Biblical) standards of morality or justice are valid. Anything which promotes the overthrow of the "evil" of private ownership and its concomitant, surplus value, is moral and just. *Any* means to that end is commendable — violence, falsehood, or what have you.

According to Marx the program should be simple, namely, destroy the private ownership of property with its alleged result, *surplus value* (unearned income), and all the evils and privations of the world will end. Utopia, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, will have arrived.

Let us review the ideas which are clearly summarized by De Koster in *All Ye That Labor*, but are (only) skeletonized in the foregoing.

On what does the whole structure rest? At what point will the whole structure, or the need of the whole structure collapse? Is it:

1. Labor value?
2. Surplus value?
3. Congealed value?
4. Proletariat?
5. Bourgeoisie?
6. State?
7. Class struggle?
8. Economic determinism?
9. Dialectical materialism?
10. Alienation?
11. The withering of the state? or
12. Communist morality and justice?

Evaluation of the items in this list will show that everything depends on the correctness of the idea of *surplus value*, namely, that which is allegedly robbed by the property owner and employer from the employee. That is the crucial question. If the idea of *surplus value* is erroneous, everything is fictional before and after that point.

What does De Koster do?

fn

## De Koster's Evasion Of The Real Issue

De Koster is a philosopher of no mean potential. Naturally, therefore, he turns with special interest to the *philosophical* problems involved in the foregoing list. He is interested in "history" and the validity of *dialectical materialism*, which is only a derivative problem stemming from *surplus value* and exploitation. He completely neglects the basic problem of *surplus value*, which is the real issue.

What we summarize on pages 122 to 124 in the foregoing requires 20 pages in De Koster's book, pages 25 to 44 inclusive. The next sixty-one pages, from 45 to 105 inclusive are devoted by De Koster to *philosophical* problems created by Marxism! Although the *economic* problem was the prime issue, De Koster flits off to the *philosophical* problems.

That is why when reading this book we were reminded of the baby-faced treasurer, who *deliberately* wandered away from the crucial matter in the trial. That is why when reading this book we were reminded of a mother bird, pretending she cannot fly and may be caught, but which systematically flutters farther and farther from her nest. De Koster, we assume, *unconsciously* flutters away from the real problem posed by Marx. A psychiatrist would say his psychology is that of a not-well-adjusted child who only wishes to play "jump the rope" because that is what she does especially well; but what she does not do well she does not wish even to attempt. There is no question that De Koster's treatment of the *philosophy* of Marxism is interesting. But in doing well what he could do well, and ignoring that on which he had no knowledge, he *completely bypasses the basic and critical point*.

When people set out to resist communism, but in the process evade the real issue and talk lengthily about a side issue, then they have aided communism by their failure to resist the main argument. Communism has not spread because of the craft or power of communism so much as it has spread by the inability of men as De Koster, champions presumably of Christianity, to refute the *basic economic argument* of Marx.

There is, however, no reason to single out De Koster as being unable to refute Marx's main point. Jellema, head of the philosophy department at Calvin, is also unable. He and all the other un-Biblical interventionists in the Christian Reformed church are

interventionists exactly because *they cannot refute Marx*. In that dialectical struggle Marx worsts them. He carries away the laurels of victory. They play only at "jumping the rope" on the philosophical side issues; for the rest they do not play.

Does De Koster then *completely* ignore the real issue of Marxism and communism? No. He devotes a few paragraphs of his 123-page book to the real issue.

He introduces them by disparaging the "rivers of ink" and the "immense glaciers of learning" which have been applied to Marx's basic *economic* theory (not Marx's *philosophy*). He writes:

1) Life does not fit neat theoretical categories. Any generalization like "labor value," or "surplus value" sums up certain aspects of experience, and omits others. Illustrations can always be brought against whatever general position one takes regarding social phenomena. This is the basis for much altercation between various economic theories. One must rest, therefore, on what seems to him the best interpretation, without expecting to be invulnerable to attack. [Page 106.]

Again, the theory of "surplus value" (that profit comes only from exploitation) has given rise to intricate economic dispute. Marx obviously under-rated the value of initiative, the worth of capital, the nature of risk, and the value of distribution services. But, apart from the economic aspects of the immensely complicated problem of the distribution of the fruits of industry, the appeal which the theory of "surplus value" has made lies in the common recognition that the rewards of labor must be *fairly* distributed amongst those who produce them, whether they be owners, managers or machine operators. This is the truth of the theory of "surplus value" and again on another level than Marx employed. [Page 108.]

There is, obviously, no real analysis of the basic question of *surplus value*. The arguments about *surplus value* are in De Koster's judgment "embalmed" on groaning library shelves. Compare this dismissal of the basic issue with the almost convincing way that he explains *surplus value* as exploitation of the employee by an employer (*a la* Marx) on his (De Koster's) pages 30-40. De Koster tells the case for communism, as did Marx, lucidly and convin-

cingly. Then De Koster leaves the reader in the lurch. He does not attempt a rebuttal to Marx's best argument.

*Everything*, literally everything in regard to communist theory depends on the validity of the idea of *surplus value*, and its antecedent idea of labor value. Any argument against communism, if it is to be belief-worthy, must thoroughly discredit Marx's idea of *surplus value*.

This brilliant book by De Koster is therefore disappointing.

Of De Koster's book, *All Ye That Labor*, can be said what was written by the ownerless finger on the wall of Belshazzar's palace on the night that ruin was to overtake him, *Mene, Mene, tekel upharsin*, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (Daniel 5:25 and 27).

Until the Christian Reformed church finds an answer to the *surplus value* argument of communism it will not be effective in resisting communism. Why should it be? If Marx's basic idea is irrefutable, it must be convincing. If convincing, it will determine the course of events. Communism will spread and triumph. There will then be no Christian Reformed church any more, because the communists do not like Christianity, even a confused brand as that taught by De Koster. If the De Koster and the Jellemas have no real argument against Marx, every student trained at Calvin College may be expected to be ineffective in fighting communism. This is, of course, so obvious, *a posteriori*, that everyone can observe it.

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Pericles, in a speech to the Athenians before the beginning of the disastrous Peloponnesian War, according to the historian, Thucydides, said: "I am more afraid of our own mistakes than of the enemies designs." In a paraphrase we would say: "In regard to the communist menace, we are more afraid of the inadequate counter-arguments of the Jellemas and De Koster *et al* than of the original argument of Marx."

When theologians and Christian educators undertake to inform themselves about and use the devastating counter arguments available against the ludicrous and fallacious ideas of Marx on "socially necessary labor value" and on "surplus value" — counter arguments unknown to De Koster, Jellema and others and not even attempted by De Koster in *All Ye That Labor* — all the philosophical superstructure of Marxism will come tumbling down. In what De Koster presents in his book he does no more than knock off a few top stories of the Empire State Building. He does not attempt to touch the basic structure.

This evasion of theologians and Christian educators from coming to grips with the real issue is understandable. Marx's argument (with terrific voltage, *because it appeals to covetousness*) is a damnably clever and plausible one. That is why the sin of covetousness is hardly preached against anymore in the Christian Reformed church or in any church.

fn

(to be continued)

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