

# The Presbyterian GUARDIAN

J. GRESHAM MACHEN • EDITOR 1936-1937

## Whole Counsel of God

Charles H. Ellis

## Calvinism and Art

## Glory of the Christian Church

R. B. Kuiper

## Unbelief in the Presby- terian Church U. S. A.

John Murray

## Orthodox Presbyterian Church News

## Guardian News Commentary



*The believer, according to Paul, is  
in himself guilty in the sight of God.  
But he is given a sentence of acquittal,  
he is "justified," because Christ has  
borne on the cross the curse of the Law  
which rightly rested upon those whom  
Christ died to save.*

—J. Gresham Machen



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Reformed symphony from any other on first hearing. The purely musical mediums build up their conceptual content largely by association. If you heard a piece of music in the chorale style, coming to a half close and a full close on alternate phases, you would have no reason to make any religious associations except that you are accustomed to hearing that kind of music in church. Conversely, if you hear a Billy Sunday adaptation of a popular tune, it fails to qualify as sacred music because of its shady past. We are not concluding here that certain forms are not more appropriate than others. It may be maintained that the rhythmic patterns of jazz are not appropriate to worship because its kinesthetic contagion is not congenial to the repose of worship and reverie. In contrast Mr. Grove's medium offers him the possibility of being much more specific but it is also in this area that he failed us.

In the first place, Mr. Grove's mother is of the Mona Lisa type. As such she recalls Italian pre-reformation art, and puts us in mind of Roman Catholic domination. The cowl worn by the mother further puts the painting in the medieval period and covers the woman's hair, her crowning glory, though here Mr. Grove's purpose may have been to lead the interest away from the mother, as the comments stated. The total effect, however, is to lend a Madonna and child impression which again puts the painting in the Roman Catholic tradition.

Secondly, though we wish to deny the Roman Catholics any monopoly of the cross as a symbol, nevertheless, we cannot deny that in the history of art they have held that monopoly. By so much, therefore, it adds to the general impression already gained by the Madonna motif on the mother. Using a medium that is rich in representational possibilities it should not be necessary for us to be told that this is to be a Reformed painting in spite of the Roman Catholic impression which it gives.

Let me suggest the following changes in order to give the mother and child subject a more Reformed appearance. Instead of a cross in the hand of the child, place a Bible on the table in front of the mother. Since the child does not understand the symbolism of the cross, it may be argued that he will also have no understanding of the meaning of the Scriptures. But if

the child retains the same pose which suggests the future, and the mother has her attention divided between the child and the Word, her arm around the child and her eyes on the Bible, giving this representation of divided interest, there will immediately follow the idea of Christian nurture which is so fundamental in realizing the implications of the covenant in Reformed theology.

Further, though we do not deny the artist the right to idealize his subject, the very exquisite hands of the mother do not suggest that kind of self-sacrifice which is necessary generally in the fulfillment of the vows which Reformed parents make at the time they present a child for baptism. Let me also suggest that the mother be taken out of the pre-reformation period. Perhaps removing the cowl would effect that change. A less Latin model might also have the same result. Since the Reformation was effective mostly in Northern Europe a non-Latin mother would assist in putting the painting in its proper place both as far as the history of art is concerned, and as it might reflect the history of Christian thought.

In conclusion let me reaffirm my introductory remark. These comments do not come as carping fault finding, but only register the reactions which come to me in viewing Mr. Grove's painting. I am fully cognizant of the fact that it is much easier to speak in generalities about Calvinism and art as Kuyper does in his "Stone Lectures" than to express it through an actual medium as Mr. Grove's worthy work attempts to do. Whatever may be said concerning the Reformed motif, there certainly is no denying that Mr. Grove is an artist of the first order. As such the first expressions of a Reformed art can do no better than to come through his hands.

NICK R. VAN TIL  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

#### Violently React . . .

DEAR MR. EDITOR:

In your brief article on page 273 of the December issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN you have extended a highly commendable invitation to readers to contribute to what you call "a sort of symposium on the subject of Calvinism and Art." The subject is provocative of thought and fruitful discussion may result. May I be permitted to offer a few reflections re-

lating to the picture reproduced on the same page.

It is gratifying to know that the artist did not intend the picture to be one of Christ and Mary. That somewhat relieved the shock received when the picture first caught my eye. I am one of those who violently react against pictures which purport to represent the Saviour. One reason, among others, for this reaction may be mentioned.

It is supremely imperative that every conception we frame respecting our Lord should be true and every emotion we entertain pure and holy. If we hold that pictures of Christ are legitimate then it is because we consider that to some extent they minister to the framing of a proper conception of Him and to the cultivation of devotion to Him, in a word, that intelligent devotion is in some way promoted thereby.

We must also avow that our knowledge of Christ and of the devotion owing to Him is derived from the Scripture. Now it so happens that the Scripture does not provide us with data respecting the physical appearance of our Lord. No one today knows what His appearance or likeness was. Any picture, therefore, is the work of the artist's imagination and there is no norm or test by which we may determine its correspondence with the reality. This is an exceedingly serious matter. We all know how our conception of a person may be influenced by that person's physical appearance. The same holds true with reference to pictures purporting to represent the Saviour. Particularly is this true in the case of children and also of adults with certain types of mentality. In certain instances we may be sure that the conception entertained is very deeply affected by the picture or pictures. The conclusion is surely apparent. By pictures of Christ we are laying ourselves open to the influence exerted by something that has no warrant in the only source we possess from which our conceptions of Christ are to be derived and the only norm by which they are to be determined and corrected. It is surely criminal to subject ourselves or others to such an influence. Deflection from truth in our conception of mere men is bad enough. But deflection from truth in the conception we entertain regarding our Lord is the sin that lies close to idolatry.

But to get back to the picture concerned. It does not purport to be a picture of Christ and Mary. On that assumption, however, does not the picture defeat the purpose it is alleged to serve? If the child does not represent Christ, why should the child have the centrality and why should the child be "the source of the light which streams from the picture?" Why play down the mother? Is a child more important than a mother? To play up a child in contradistinction from a mother is not *itself* Christian or Calvinistic. Surely two motifs were at work in the artist's mind and they are scarcely compatible with one another.

Again, the cross in the hand of the child "is intended," you say, "to illustrate the fact that even from His birth Christ had the cross in view." The child, then, after all, does represent Christ. For how can a child holding a cross in his hand represent the fact that Christ from His birth had the cross in view unless the child in question is intended to represent Christ in the days of his infancy? Besides, there appears to be dangerous confusion at this point. Our Lord was divine and in His divine knowledge He always knew that He was to suffer upon the accursed tree. But surely the picture is intended to represent Christ in His human nature, and what is represented is 'what came within the compass of His human knowledge. Now, what evidence do we possess that there came within the compass of our Lord's human consciousness from His birth, or even from the age represented by the picture, the knowledge of what is represented by the cross? To say the least, this is dubious theology. I fear that this is an example of what we are liable to slip into when we resort to improper media for conveying the truth concerning Him who is the mystery of godliness.

Others features merit comment; but I have already trespassed my limits. I have no doubt, Mr. Editor, that the artist's intents were noble. But I am also convinced that he has not been successful. Insofar as the picture of the child represents Christ, it is open not only to the principal objection stated at the outset, but also to a serious theological objection. Insofar as it does not represent Christ but only a child and his mother, then as a medium of conveying truth respecting Christ and His work it is something of a monstrosity.

With thanks for your indulgence, Mr. Editor, and with high esteem for Mr. Grove as a Christian gentleman and as an artist, but with little respect for the picture concerned.

JOHN MURRAY  
Philadelphia, Pa.

#### Excerpts from other letters:

"... Art is so subjective that it could not possibly be called 'Calvinistic art,' or any other kind of art... even a picture representing the sovereignty of God very vividly to a Calvinist might confirm the skeptic in his unbelief... Art is the first step beyond the written word. . . ."

BRYCE T. SENTER  
Denver, Colorado

"... The thousands upon thousands who saw Jesus of Nazareth in infancy and adult manhood, heard His words and viewed His works, could never discern the Lamb of God except through the eye of faith implanted by the Holy Spirit... It has pleased the Holy Spirit to employ but one implement, the ministry of the Word, to work in man knowledge leading to salvation... Be on guard that the preacher is not relegated to the background."

J. A. MERIZON  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

"... It seems to me that Mr. Grove has taken a Madonna painting and has changed it around a little bit; he has placed the emphasis differently. But by rearranging and changing several objects we do not get a Calvinistic composition... Why on earth do we have to put up with the Roman Catholic pattern of mother and child, instead of taking our pattern from the Scriptures? Joseph, the son of David, who took his wife unto him at the command of the angel, there-with making his adopted son the legal heir to the throne of David is consistently missing in Roman Catholic paintings for obvious reasons: they put the emphasis upon the blessed one among women and her child... Joseph is in my opinion just as important a link in the divine revelation in the fulness of time as Mary is... Joseph and Mary ought to be in the picture with the Child in order to tie it in with the whole of God's revelation; only that will give, in my estimation, perspective to our artistic, Calvinistic evaluations of the Christ Child... Let us not try to reform the disorder of Rome, without attacking their dis-

ordered background, for the two are inseparably tied together..."

BERT MULDER  
Philadelphia, Pa.

"... It seems to me that God's requirement, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy,' would demand that the Christian, if so qualified by the Holy Spirit, give expression to the sanctification which is of God, yes, in Calvinistic art. In that respect too the Calvinist is to think the thoughts after God, be it in actual production or in the appreciation of art. I believe Mr. Rene Grove has succeeded admirably in his painting *Mother and Child* to use art forms and media under the governing influence of the Calvinist world view. . . . In that Child I see portrayed the story of the Gospel. It is my cross-bearing Saviour, my glorious Lord..."

JOHN EHLERS  
Willard, Ohio

### Grace Church Missions Minded

THE Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles has recently been placing increased emphasis on the missionary work of the denomination. Says the pastor, the Rev. Robert H. Graham, "We feel it is sinful for our church to neglect its servants abroad. The entire offering of the Sunday school on the last Sunday of each month goes to Orthodox Presbyterian missions. A missionary dinner is held on the first Friday of each month. This is a pot luck dinner, so that no one is put to great expense for it. An offering is taken at each of these dinners, and this is given to Orthodox Presbyterian missions. Besides the duplex envelope on Sunday there is an offering plate on the table at the front door marked 'for missions.' The mission offering of this Home Missions church exceeded \$180 in the month of November, and all of it was sent to the Orthodox Presbyterian missions."

On Sunday, December 12, five persons were received into communicant membership in the church. During the pastor's absence December 19, the Rev. Louis Knowles conducted the services.

During 1948 the congregation was able to pay off over \$2,000 of its indebtedness on the church, as well as to make many noticeable improvements both to the exterior and interior of the building.