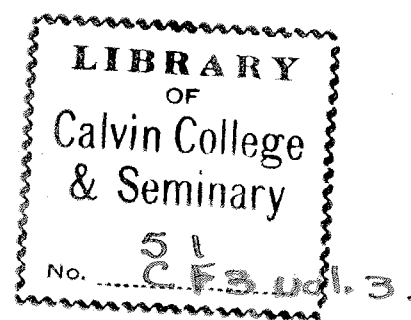


THE CALVIN FORUM



A MONTHLY

Vigilantism

An American Menace

The Galilean Conquers

Greek and Christian Ethics

Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethics

An Exposition

Cross-Centered Preaching

The Testimony of History

Falstaff in Geneva

Calvinism and Humor

News and Views

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The CALVIN FORUM

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VOLUME III

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH., AUGUST, 1937

NUMBER 1

EDITORIALS

The Menace of Vigilantism

UNLESS all indications deceive, the menace of vigilantism is at our doors. Last year's "Black Legion" in Michigan and "Black Legs" in Kentucky may only have been the forerunners of a new epidemic of this peculiarly American disease. Vigilantism comes in pious garb. It speaks honeyed words of "defending the Constitution," "100% Americanism," "fighting subversive influences," and the like, but let America beware! Communism is not successfully fought by the weapon of fascism or vigilantism, any more than scarlet fever is successfully fought by small pox. There may be ever so much in the alleged provocation of the weakening of the stand of the government for law and order, there can be no national salvation in plunging into the abyss of vigilantism. Vigilante organizations may be ever so well-intended and intentioned, they inevitably turn loose upon the country a secretly organized group that takes the law into its own hands, and if it does not begin with hooded night riding it almost inevitably winds up by so doing. Vigilantism, stripped of all its allegedly patriotic accoutrements is insurrection, rebellion, because it means the taking of the law into its own hands on the part of a certain organized group of citizens that no longer has faith in the efficiency of the government to maintain law and order. If America wants to introduce a dictatorship, there is no better way of doing it than by hugging vigilantism to its breast. The seriousness of this menace of vigilantism should not be under-estimated. Our country is peculiarly susceptible to precisely that sort of organized terror. Primitive demagoguery seems to find a congenial soil among certain groups of our land, especially when the proper flamboyant battle cries are employed. The K. K. K. with its glorification of the "white, Protestant, Nordic" stock in our national life, its secret pass words, its night riding and terroristic activities must be viewed as a serious symptom of a disease that may temporarily have been checked but of which the American body politic is far from cured. We must not forget that this peculiar brand of terrorism associates itself quite readily with the frontier spirit, and—repeated contradictions notwithstanding—the frontier spirit is still very much with us. Besides, our country with its utilitarian attitude toward law and order has never exhibited a great degree of respect for government and the

officers of the law as such. If government does not work one way, we are quite ready to try it another way. And last, but not least, lodgism, so deeply entrenched in American social life, will ever prove fruitful soil for the seed of vigilantism and terrorism. There was undoubtedly a deeper significance than he himself surmised in a sentence spoken by a member of Kentucky's "Black Legs" when he testified before the officers of the law about the doings of the terroristic organization against which he offered to turn State's evidence. Said he: "It was a sort of lodge affair."

C. B.

Two Birth Control Decisions

RECENTLY two decisions have been reached on the professional and legal attitude toward the dissemination of birth control information which may prove to have a far-reaching effect upon public opinion in the matter. The one is a court decision, the other a resolution of the American Medical Association. The former was the outcome of a case which was argued extensively for weeks before the Canadian court. It hinged on a charge against a social worker who had passed out contraceptive information to certain French-Canadian women in a town in the vicinity of the Canadian capitol. The case for the prosecution was handled by the Crown Attorney, the case for the defense by the Secretary of the Social Service Council of Canada. No less than 45 witnesses were examined. Finally the case was reduced to the question, not whether contraceptives are desirable or not, but whether the social worker in question in making contraceptive knowledge available as she did served the public good or not. The court ruled that the public good was served under the particular circumstances and dismissed the case against the social worker. At the recent annual meeting of the American Medical Association in Atlantic City this influential body voted to approve birth control as having a definite place in medical practice and to promote the teaching of proper methods in the medical schools. By this decision the American Medical Association has reversed its decision of last year, a decision to which allusion was made in the Birth Control Testimony adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church that same year. Apparently this decision is indication of the final defeat of the strong opposition

Liberalism Too Optimistic

Although it was the great merit of the Age of Reason to revolt against the identification of life and love, the liberal church with its emphasis on reason has been too optimistic in its expectations. It proceeded on the assumption that the people had but to be taught to love in order to love. Economic and political techniques could be dispensed with. By this attitude liberalism revealed that it had more moral idealism than religious realism. To correct bodily ills more is necessary than good will. To rectify the ills of society more is needed than good intentions. Social mechanisms enforced with moral power cannot be dispensed with. For that reason Niebuhr advocates a radical political theory, realistic enough to "bring the most effective social check upon conflicting egoistic impulses in society" and idealistic enough not to regard "a given political and social order as divinely ordained." In regard to property he holds that we are in need of a change and that Marx has not been successfully challenged. If one should object that violence may be resorted to, Niebuhr answers that one cannot be true to an absolute ethic by disavowing violence. When truth is at stake one may have to do what the surgeon does when health is endangered: cut deeply. Prophets

may criticize statesmen for this, but statesmen know the world they are living in.

Against the pessimism of orthodox christianity, against the optimism of liberal christianity, of naturalism and radicalism, Niebuhr maintains the relevance of the impossible ethical ideal. Perfection may not be realizable in history but a dynamic love ethic which demands conformity to the will of God will prevent the sanctification of class interests. Prophetic religion cannot condone tyranny or any form of injustice and inequality. It demands a change when love requires it.

If you ask what the love ethic can do for the individual, Niebuhr answers that love, and love only, can make him good. What reason cannot do, love can. Love comes to the heart from God as the fruit of grace and faith.

The choicest fruit of christian ethics is the spirit of forgiveness. Only when one has learned to depend on "the realm of transcendence" is one able to forgive. Though forgiveness, which excels tolerance, remains an impossible ideal, it can mitigate the struggles of life. Theism, not humanism, safeguards the rights and happiness of man.

[This exposition of Reinhold Niebuhr's ethics will be followed by a criticism in the next issue.—Editor.]

THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

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WHEN a protestant approaches the study of the mediaeval and modern catholic churches he has to guard against the assumption that because he differs with these churches on many things therefore they are erroneous in all matters. Even Calvin declared that in some things the Romanists are our allies. Forsythe assures us that the mediaeval church was not only the church of the papacy, but also the church of the mass; and that just because enshrined amid serious errors of the mass there was a preaching of the centrality of the Cross that church was reformable. "But a church that renounced universally its atoning redemption would not be reformable. It would be extinct."

The Cross in the Catholic Churches

The Church of the Middle Ages had its Anselm whose *Cur Deus Homo?* was pronounced by Denney "the greatest and truest book on the Atonement that has ever been written." Bernard of Clairvaux, sometimes designated the oracle of Western Europe, writes: "three principal things I perceive in this work of our salvation: the pattern of humility in which God emptied Himself; the measure of love, which He stretched even unto death, and that the death of the cross; the mystery of redemption, in which He underwent the death which He bore. The two former of these without the last are like a picture on the void." In the later middle ages John Gerson of Paris declares "my hope is the cross of

Christ." The mediaeval church taught dying men that their hope was to place the death of Christ between themselves and their sins, between themselves and the wrath of God, between themselves and the punishment they deserved. And that the Roman Catholic Church, the Church which glories most in the middle ages, still has scholars who cling to the Cross is shown in these weighty words of Karl Adam: "Christianity is nothing else than the gospel of our redemption by the Cross of Christ, by the death of Jesus for our salvation, by Christ's expiatory blood." Similarly, Kattenbusch insists that the Eucharist is the act of foundation of Christ's Church, the meal at which the New Covenant was founded, and that this is so *sub specie mortis Christi*.

If one turns rather to the Orthodox Church which is rising from the ashes of Russian persecution, Arseniev writes:

"His death is and remains fundamental and decisive: 'ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come.' 'This is My Body which is given for you,' 'this is My Blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many'—that is decisive for the Eastern Church. His death, His sacrifice on the cross, is contacted as a heart-shaking, ever-present, ever-living reality. The whole Christian philosophy of salvation is concentrated here as in a focus . . . We are *lifted up* into the presence of His eternal Sacrifice, Rev. v. 5, 6, 11-12. This glorified Lord, this Lord Jesus Christ who has fully measured the cost of suffering, in His human flesh and blood, in His human soul, down to

the very deepest depths, now offers it to the Father in the eternal Present."

As a matter of fact the worship of every liturgical branch of the Christian family clusters close about the Lamb for sinners slain. Whether one studies the Greek Eucharist, the Roman Mass, the Episcopal litany, or the Lutheran sacrament of the altar he hears the refrain:

Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.

Calvary's Cross in Protestantism

That this thought is not less precious to the heart of the Reformed may be conveniently seen in the words of John Knox in the Scots' Confession, in the works of Wm. S. Plumer, one of the most influential of the American Presbyterian theologians, in the recent writings of President J. O. Buswell, Jr.

In the very nature of the case the Cross must have and does have for the Protestant Reformation even more central place and import than in the Roman or Orthodox Catholic Churches. The implication of justification by faith alone is that the whole and sufficient work for our forgiveness and justification was completed on the Cross. Faith alone is sufficient only because Christ's atoning work for us is sufficient. In His active and passive work which culminated on Calvary's Cross, Christ became the end of the law for the justification of the believer. When He died crying "it is finished" the work of objective soteriology was accomplished. He was delivered for our offenses, and raised for our justification; so that everyone who trusts in the satisfaction and merit of that death is forgiven and accepted as righteous. Hence, Luther insisted that present Christian theology is a theology of the cross, rather than a theology of glory; and that there is enough of the revelation of God in the Cross of Christ to last a man all his days. "Therefore this text—He bore our sins—must be understood particularly thoroughly, as the foundation upon which stands the whole of the New Testament or the Gospel, as that which alone distinguishes us and our religion from all other religions. For Christians alone believe this text. Therefore, whosoever believes this article of faith is secure against all errors, and the Holy Ghost is necessarily for him."

In accord with these words of the father of the Reformation, Emil Brunner writes, "the whole struggle of the Reformation for the *sola fide*, the *solus deo gloria*, was simply the struggle for the right interpretation of the Cross. He who understands the Cross aright . . . understands the Bible, understands Jesus Christ." Everything in the Scriptures *spirat crucem*. "All Christ says and does should ultimately be understood *sub specie crucis* if it is to be understood at all—or it will not be understood . . . The Cross is the total expression of the life of Jesus." "Justification means this miracle: that Christ takes our place and we take His. Here the objective vicarious offering has become a process of exchange . . . Justification cannot be separated from the objective atonement, from the expiatory sacrifice of the Mediator."

Likewise a British scholar, who personally differs widely from the Reformation, rightly recognizes that Luther presented the death of Christ as the sole and adequate penalty for human sins and that "the Reformers agree in accepting the penal view of the Cross as being the sole and sufficient cause of reconciliation between God and man." Sin deserves punishment, but all punishment has been transferred to Christ. Hence man is entirely free from its penalty apart from priestly absolution or good works if he will only receive the atonement. Or, to return to Luther, Christ assumed our guilt in order to confer His blessing upon us.

Since the Reformation

From the Reformation onward the Cross has been the heart of evangelical preaching, and it is a misnomer to call any other preaching evangelical. The Protestant faith began in Scotland with Patrick Hamilton's declaration, "Christ is the Saviour of the world. Christ is our Saviour. Christ died for us. Christ bare our sins upon his back. Christ bought us with His blood. Christ washed us with His blood . . . Christ was the price that was given for us and for our sins." Knox adds that "He was wounded and plagued for our transgressions; He being the clean and innocent Lamb of God, was damned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we might be absolved before the tribunal of God." The saintly McCheyne insisted "Live within sight of Calvary and you will live within sight of glory." Indeed, whenever it has been apparent that

"There's nae gospel noo, lassie,
There's nae covenant blood,
There's nae altar noo, lassie,
There's nae Lamb o' God.

"There's nae Chalmers noo, lassie,
There's nae guid M'Cheyne,
And the dear, dear Cross is gane.

"Fold dinna want the Cross, Lassie,
They've cutten doon the tree,
And naeboddy believes in't,
But fules like you and me"—

when this seems to be the situation in a Presbyterian household of faith, history shows that some who are willing to be fools for Christ's sake will "come out" and established a "re-formed" fellowship for the preaching of "the foolishness" of the Cross.

The Moravian revival with its magnificent missionary emphasis began with the contemplation of the thorn-crowned Head, and never forsook the wounds of Christ. John Wesley's dying cry was "There is no way into the holiest, but by the blood of Jesus." Toplady and the Wesleyans differ in some doctrines; but he and Charles Wesley vie with one another in seeing which can make the Cross more central in their great hymns, *Rock of Ages* and *Jesus, Lover of my Soul*.

If you will allow a word from my own communion, Dabney, Thornwell, Plumer, Palmer, Strickler, Baker have plowed the cross deep into our hearts and lives. The position of the last named is well seen in his letters to his son, a young minister:

"My son, whilst others make a parade of learning, and boast of their knowledge of German literature, be it your praise that in scriptural language, and

with simplicity and power, you preach Christ and Him crucified, as the world's last and only hope."

"Remember, my son, this saying of your father, that the sermon that does not distinctly present Christ in the beauty and glory of his mediatorial character, is no better than a cloud without water, a casket without a jewel, a shadow without the substance or the body without the soul. You ask why my preaching is so much blessed. If it will throw any light upon the subject, I will tell you that my plan is incessantly to preach Christ and Him crucified."

That this is still the preaching of many of our pulpits may be seen, for example, in the case of Brother Bryan of Birmingham in the home church, and of Evangelist George Hudson in China.

Twentieth Century Witnesses

Nor should it be forgotten that the twentieth century hath had and doth have able and scholarly defenders of the central import of the Cross of our blessed Lord, James Denney, P. T. Forsythe, Alexander Whyte, Daniel Lamont, Abraham Kuyper, A. T. Robertson, B. B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, W. Elert, Barth, Thurneysen, Brunner, Heim, Adam, and not least the able work of Professor Louis Berkhof. Introducing a series of sermons on the cross by Professor Heim, Pastor J. Schmidt rightly insists that "the strength of Christianity is in the Cross." Heim declares that he can be helped only by the imputed righteousness of Christ (*aliena justitia Christi*) of which Luther speaks, and further magnifies the Cross by endorsing these words of Pandita Ramabai: "I looked upon the holy Son of God, who was lifted up on the Cross, and who there suffered death in my stead, that I might be freed from the bondage of sin and the fear of death, and might receive life. O what love to me, the lost sinner, this inexpressible love of the Father, who gave His only begotten Son, to die for me! I did not deserve such love, but just for that reason He showed it to me."

Read Thurneysen's *Significance of the Reformation*, Brunner's *Mediator*, and Barth's *Credo* and you see that the theology of crisis is becoming more and more the theology of the Cross. Even certain Auburn Affirmationists (such as Henry Sloan Coffin and George A. Buttrick), realize that the Cross ought to be central since "it has provoked and kept alive theology" and "has been the fountainhead of heroic devotion." After these men have affirmed that the biblical doctrine of the atonement, the only thing which can keep the Cross as the pivot of Christian thought, is unnecessary they vaguely and vainly seek to make the Cross the crux of life.

In view of the central place of the Cross in the New Testament, in view of the way in which the Cross has kept its place or returned to its saving center in the life of the Christian Church it were, indeed, an audacious man who would set himself against the concensus of the apostles, the fathers, the martyrs, the Reformers, the true evangelicals—the Church of the Ages—and maintain that this verdict of the primitive community and Christian centuries is wrong. The speaker is entirely convinced that the faith of the ages is right in the fundamental place which it gives to the Cross.

Cross-Centered Preaching

And we can keep the Cross in its rightful place only by preaching and teaching a doctrine of the crucifixion which is adequate to place the cross in the forefront, among the first principles, of our Christian education and great enough to keep it in the center of our thought. Puny concepts of the Redeemer and His work will not do. Only a great gospel can and will keep the Cross at the center.

As one reviews the history of Christian thinking he finds that men have dwelt on three great magnitudes of the Cross: who the Crucified was; what He did; and how He did it. The fathers were amazed at the wonder of the Person of the Redeemer. They could never get beyond the astounding fact that God Himself undertook this awful task for us. Though it shook the Mediterranean world to its foundations that ancient church insisted that the Saviour was not in the first place a creature, but the eternal Creator. In His eternal Person, Jesus, our Lord, was of the Divine nature, of one substance or essence with the Father. His is that Being which is uncreated, self-existent, absolute. Thus when Christ in His human nature died for men infinite merit—the merit of the Creator—was measured with infinite debt—the infinite demerit of sin. This great truth has never been lost, but is one of the presuppositions of Anselm, of the Reformers and of the great hymns of the Cross. It appears in the lines,

"When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."

and

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When God, the mighty Maker died
For man, the creature's sin."

The Greek Church ever lifted her eyes to the heights to contemplate the glory of the Saviour. And the beholding of His glory who was crucified for us is a proper task that has engaged great Christians from John to B. B. Warfield.

The Cross and God's Justice

However, the Church especially from Anselm through the Reformation added to this heart-moving truth the further study of what Jesus did on the Cross. The necessity of the expiatory Cross is seen in the very character of God as holy and just, and in the awful nature of sin as the transgression of the law. The essential nature or character of God requires that He punish sin. True justice is only satisfied when justice is done. Only the Cross of Christ, our penal substitute, shows God to be just when He justifies the sinner who believeth in Jesus. The Cross is not a compromise, but a substitution; not a cancellation, but a satisfaction; not a wiping off, but a wiping out in blood and agony and death.

Paul presents Christ as our legal substitute who satisfied the precepts of the law by His obedience and endured its penalty in His death (Rom. v. 12-21; Col. ii. 14); who gave Himself a substitutionary ransom (I Tim. ii. 6), being made sin (II Cor. v. 21),

and a curse (Gal. iii. 13) for His people that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him and receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Through the death of Christ God reconciled us unto Himself, that is, God changed the status or relationship of enmity that existed between the holy God and sinners to one of peace by imputing our trespasses unto Him (Rom. v. 6-11; II Cor. v. 18-21). Thus Christ's death as our penal substitute vindicates God's justice in forgiving sinners and sets Christ forth as the mercy-seat where alone can sin be forgiven (Rom. iii. 21-6). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul has expounded in its fuller implications the doctrine of Jesus, of John the Baptist, of Isaiah, and of the Old Testament sacrificial system. This great Bible doctrine is that guilt has been expiated in an act of worship. As the High Priest Jesus offered Himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice by bearing the penalty we deserve.

And just this thought of Jesus as our Highpriest which looms so large in Hebrews points to the third great magnitude in the Cross, that is the spirit, or motives which prompted our Saviour to make His great sacrifice. We are saved by the will of a priest, the most noble and sublime spirit which actuates the heart. Recognizing this modern emphasis the First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta portrays Jesus rising from prayer in Gethsemane in the window which presents the suffering Saviour. There in His spirit was the atonement begun, the task accepted, the Saviour's will bowed to the Father's will. In Gethsemane He willed to go "over the top" that the Father might be glorified and man saved. In this spirit of the priest we see the two great principles of all virtue, love for God and love for men.

Dr. Thornwell's New York Sermon

But that we may not assume that the loftiest contemplation of the way in which Jesus died, in the least militates against the full appreciation of the work which He did on Calvary and the infinite worth of the Mediator I want to call to your attention the combination which our James Henley Thornwell made of these three great doctrines which correctly apprehended set forth the magnitude and pre-eminent centrality of Calvary. Realize who suffered there, what His suffering accomplished, how, or in what a spirit of love and worship, he suffered and you can again never place the Cross on the periphery, you must keep it at the center. It is, perhaps, appropriate in any case that I refer you to this classic statement in the sermon which Thornwell preached to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. in the First Presbyterian Church of New York. Using John x. 17-18 as his text, Dr. Thornwell spoke of *the sacrifice of Christ as the type and model of mission effort*. The doctrinal part of this great message clusters about the thought of Christ's work as a priestly act, an office of devotion. "Jesus appears as a worshipper of God, burning with zeal for the Divine glory and compassion for the souls of men." But the very contemplation of this spirit of worship

guilts the terrors of Calvary and makes us absolutely certain that there was no undue severity, no suspicion of injustice in that act of worship whereby Christ offered Himself to cover our sins. "The strongest argument to me for the necessity of the atonement is that Jesus died in the spirit of devotion. When I consider His soul as a pious offering, and then reflect that He celebrates the grace and condescension of God in accepting the gift; when I consider the extent and severity of His sufferings, and then remember that all were endured to express to the universe His sense of the Divine holiness, I ask no more; I am satisfied that it must be—that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission. So intense was His conviction that His death was indispensable to the righteous pardon of the guilty that He seems to have coveted the Cross, and to have been straitened for His baptism of blood. He could not brook the thought that man should be saved at the peril of the Divine glory . . . Our finite minds are incapable of conceiving the extent to which the principle of holiness, the principle of supreme regard for the character of God, energized within Him when He made His soul an offering for sin; and when I figure to myself the scene, and undertake to penetrate into the workings and emotions of the Saviour's heart, I am irresistibly impressed with the conviction that nothing short of the Divine nature could have been the dwelling place of such zeal. I see not so much an admiration of the holiness of God as the energies of that holiness itself. I see the Father reflected in the Son. The piety of the Priest flows from a fountain of inexhaustible fullness." "Here His Deity appears in full-orbed radiance as Deity in action. Nowhere else can the Son be seen in all the intensity of His glory."

The Coronation of the Lamb

Lo, Heaven's doors lift up, revealing in the midst of the Throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders of the Church, the coronation of the Lamb. The sceptre that ruleth in the armies of heaven and among the children of men is the throne of God and of the Lamb. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords wears a garment dipped in blood. Sin is such an awful deflection from the path of rectitude, such a heinous transgression of the law of God, that nothing less than a Cross that springs from the source and center of the cosmic energies of the universe was sufficient to rescue sinners from its eternal destruction.

The sooner our land of boasted freedom replaces the Cross in the center, the sooner will the heart of America begin to attune itself to the will of God, and the sooner will revival supplant depression in the churches, righteousness overtake crises and collapses in morals. We cannot expect Heaven's blessing when we forget the Cross, remove it from the focus of faith, or deny his holy efficacy, its revealed meaning. God has placed the Lamb in the center of His throne and given to the Cross a significance that keeps it central. Dare sinners do less?