

Some Comments

J. P. A. Mekkes

APPRECIATING the courtesy so generously accorded by the editors of *Calvin Forum* to contributions "from overseas" in its columns, I would be glad to make a very modest use of their kindness by submitting a brief replication to Dr. Dirk Jellema.

But first of all I may be allowed to point out to the readers that the note to my article in the *Calvin Forum* of June-July, 1955, page 221, has been printed in the body of my text. This, of course, has happened entirely unknown to me. At the same time I would correct the irritating misprint "motils" on page 220 and replace it by "motives."

It is not possible for me to make a detailed and complete reply to Dr. Jellema, and I would rather leave it to the readers to draw their own conclusions. The misunderstanding between Dr. Jellema and myself is so deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition from which my esteemed opponent starts that for the time being I do not venture to hope for a clarification of this subject. The only thing I might do is to ask him and the readers to peruse my article again. There is, however, one point I wish to consider more particularly, because it is the key to the door that has remained shut between Dr. Jellema and myself. I am referring to his note marked with an *h*, and concerned with my paragraph to which his note bears reference.

The thoughtful reader will have noticed that in the note mentioned Dr. Jellema deals with the question about the angels, and also inquires if logical thought has nothing to do with our knowledge of God. In my paragraph bearing on that note, however, the statement is made that with regard to God, created logical thought is to be "counted to Him less than nothing" (a Biblical manner of speaking!); and that only in the faith in God's exclusive sovereign Revelation V.A.D. refuse to believe in a soul which is supposed to live in "a spiritual-rational sphere" knowable in an earthly manner. God's sovereign Revelation and created logical thought are here opposed to each other.

Which of these two should have the first and the last word? Is it thought? Theo-logy? Dr. Dirk Jellema is in mortal fear of distinguishing between (Reformed) theology and Biblical faith. But in what way am I, a seeking and erring human being, to acknowledge the truth of Revelation? Through

(The following brief articles by Dr. Mekkes and Dr. Dirk Jellema are a continuation of a discussion initiated in the June-July, 1955, number).

faith, no doubt. That in this process I think, stands to reason, for I think in everything. But the direction of my thought is determined by my faith. Can anybody ever prove that our understanding has the last word? If understanding or reason did have the last word, this assertion ought to be capable of demonstration. But such proof cannot be given, and all our "trust" in human understanding is a confidence, a faith, and nothing else. Therefore we will not trust in our understanding or our reason nor in any theology, but we only want to believe God's Word Revelation in Jesus Christ. Only through this faith does my understanding, also my theological reason, acquire the right direction. The fact that theology, philosophy, philology, ancient historical science, etc., have to render their aid for a proper understanding of the environment and the setting of the Biblical message, is a matter of course. But their services themselves are used and directed by a preceding faith, both in the case of scholars and scientists, and in that of simple Bible-readers.

At this point of the choice between logical thought with its sciences and the unique sovereignty of the Word of God is to be sought the heart of the matter at issue between us and Dr. Jellema.

Here, too, is the central issue in the struggle that the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea has to carry on. And for this reason the relation between us and the non-Christian ways of scientific study is entirely different from what Dr. Jellema tries to maintain.

These things go deep, and we shall do well *not* to try and dismiss each other's views lightly, as if we were only intent upon "being in the right."

Announcement

It is with real regret that the Board of the CALVIN FORUM announces to its readers that it plans to cease publishing within the next few months.

Our reasons for this rather unusual decision are several and weighty. Particularly, we have suffered the loss of two talented editors within a relatively short time—first, Dr. C. Bouma by reason of illness and second, Dr. C. De Boer by reason of death.

Also we are faced with a declining number of subscribers and as a result, with financial difficulties, for which we can find no immediate or permanent solution.

We have enjoyed the happy and stimulating fellowship of our readers and correspondents, and we thank all who have travelled the road of journalism with us these twenty years.

The Board of the
CALVIN FORUM

Response to Prof. Mekkes

Dirk Jellema

IT might be in order, first of all, to recall the main point of my articles, since this has been largely ignored by Prof. Mekkes in his discussions. The articles tried to show (and I believe *did* show) that VAD are deeply indebted to the philosophy of Phenomenology for the structure of their philosophy; that is, deeply indebted to non-Christian philosophy; and that the "Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea" is thus a synthesis-philosophy, a Christian Phenomenology.

The articles *did not* take up the question of whether VAD's Christian Phenomenology expresses the Calvinistic outlook more successfully than Woltjer's Christian Platonism, Jonathan Edwards' Augustinianism, or whatever. That is another question, which might be fruitfully argued, and on which there might well be honest difference of opinion.

The articles *did* attack the strident propaganda which has been made by VAD's more extreme disciples, propaganda which has seduced many of our people. It is being proclaimed (for example, by Spier) that VAD have the first Christian philosophy, that they have a philosophy "uncontaminated" by any thoughts taken over from non-Christian thinkers, that they have *the* one and only Calvinistic philosophy. This sort of thing is irresponsible, and I believe the articles showed that it is.

So much for that: now, the points that Prof. Mekkes raises in his letter.

The "question of the angels" he mentions refers to VAD's view of the soul and of the angels, which has aroused opposition among Reformed theologians in the Netherlands because it is (admittedly) contrary to the view given in our Reformed creeds. VAD, and Prof. Mekkes, hold that VAD have adopted a different view because Scripture shows that the Reformed creeds are in error on this point. I would say, rather, that VAD have adopted a different view of the soul and of the angels simply because the view expressed in our Reformed creeds cannot be fitted into a philosophy of Phenomenology, whether it is Hartmann's or VAD's.

Somewhat related to this question is VAD's idea that theology should have a minor place in Calvinistic thought. As VAD's disciple J. Spier puts it (*An Introduction to Christian Philosophy*, p. 97), theology should get its philosophical ideas from

Christian philosophy (i.e. VAD's philosophy), but Christian philosophy need not go to theology for its religious ideas; it can depend directly on the Bible. This seems to me to imply that if the creeds conflict with Christian philosophy (i.e. VAD's philosophy), so much the worse for the creeds. Perhaps some of the theologians among *Forum* readers could comment on this more effectively than I. It does strike me, though, as a somewhat dangerous approach.

The second half of Dr. Mekkes' letter leaves me puzzled, and disappointed. I have read it three times, and unless I misunderstand him completely, he is trying something like the argument Piet used against Klaas in their argument about herring. Prof. Mekkes states the obvious at great length, and passes to a strange conclusion without any intervening steps.

"Don't you believe in predestination?" asked Piet angrily. "Indeed I do," said Klaas, "for I am a Calvinist too; but what has that got to do with whether salt herring or sour herring are better?" "Look here," said Piet, "don't you believe that predestination is one of the basic points of our Calvinism?" "Yes," replied Klaas, "I am a Calvinist too." "Why," went on Piet in eloquent tones, "predestination rests squarely upon the sacred Word of God, as many texts show!" "Yes," said Klaas plaintively, but I *still* think salt herring is better than sour herring." "My friend," thundered Piet, "now I see the point of difference between us. *You don't believe in predestination!*"

Dr. Mekkes spends some time in showing that he believes that faith preceeds reason, that religion preceeds philosophy, that metaphysical presuppositions preceed metaphysics. Yes, I say plaintively, I agree, since I too am a Calvinist; but what has that to do with whether VAD, who believe that faith preceeds reason, have a better philosophy than, say, Woltjer, who also believes faith preceeds reason? "Aha!" says Mekkes. "Now I see the difference between us: you don't believe that faith preceeds reason!"

Can we not rather admit that VAD are Calvinists, and that Woltjer and Kuyper and Jonathan Edwards and John Calvin are *also* Calvinists, and that other Calvinist philosophers besides VAD start from the idea that philosophy is based on religion, that faith preceeds reason?

