Progressive Calvinism

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Contents

	Page
III. THE NEED OF INTELLECTUAL METHOD	
Genius Versus Method	130
Descartes's "Discourse On Method"	132
Mathematical Brilliance Versus Method	134
The Relationship Of Method To Achievement	135
Lester De Koster On The Relationship Of Sin To The Natural Order	137
Tornadoes, The Result Of Adam's Fall!	139
Supralapsarianism And Infralapsarianism	142
A Reader's Reaction	144
IV. MESSIANIC INTERVENTIONISM	
"We Have Never Lost A Fight With Joe Louis"	147
Two Different and Irreconcilable Religions	149
The Dispute Between A Mosaic Ethic And An Agape Ethic Is Not Basically One of Morality But Of Epistemology (Intellectual Limitations)	154
The Mosaic System (Including Individualism And Capitalism) Is Not An Anarchic System	156
Interventionism — Presented As A Messianic Hope For Society	160

Correction

On page 112 in the April, 1957 issue PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM ascribed to Nels Ferre the statement that the God of the Christian Scriptures could be described as a "great bully." I relied on my memory. A friend has informed me that that statement was made by someone else. I regret having ascribed it to Professor Ferre. *Peccavi.* fn

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III. THE NEED OF INTELLECTUAL METHOD

Genius Versus Method

An examination of Scripture with the thought in mind, how much emphasis does Scripture place on mental alertness, intellectual gifts, subtlety of thought and profundity of mind will yield a startling conclusion, namely, Scripture places practically no emphasis on such talents. There are a few exceptions, Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; Solomon; Christ when twelve years old on a visit to the temple with his parents. For the rest, promptness of mind and mental brilliance, although not disparaged in Scripture, are genuinely *neglected.*

If Scripture does not place a high value on intellectual genius or extraordinary ability, then there are two possibilities: (1) it does not place a high value on any human characteristic; or (2) it places a high value on human characteristics *other than intellectual talents.*

The first possibility must be rejected because Scripture places an exceedingly great value on some human characteristics. In other words, it places a high value on something other than great intellectual gifts.

On what?

On, in general, two things:

(1) The "fear of the Lord," which can be paraphrased by the word, humility (the "fear of the Lord" is, of course, far more than mere *humility*); and

(2) The Law of God, namely, the Ten Commandments.

Solomon is alleged to have been very wise. In what did his wisdom consist? Largely in a number of sayings (proverbs) which repeat and repeat the allegation that wisdom consists in the fear of Jehovah and the keeping of His Commandments. If Solomon was a genius, then his genius consisted primarily in knowing that for human beings *moral* qualities rather than *intellectual* qualities are important.

The noteworthy place where *intellectual* gifts are highly praised is in the book of Daniel. But the emphasis there on extraordinary intellectual talents is not a solo note; it is only one note of two; the other is the moral note to which we have referred, namely, the fear of Jehovah and obedience to His Commandments.

Modern industrial psychologists have rediscovered the ancient truth taught in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures. They give you an intelligence test and they give it some weight. Assume you pass it with a grade of 140 or more, evidencing unusual ability. Will they, therefore, recommend you? They will not. They will finally recommend or not recommend you depending on whether they consider you "well-adjusted." "Well-adjusted" means about the same thing that Scripture describes as sound principles for getting along in the world, to wit, humility and honesty and industriousness. These are *moral* qualities. If an industrial psychologist describes you to a potential employer in the modern lingo of psychology, he will simply be telling the employer what Scripture said years ago, namely, hire this man because he has *moral* qualities; or do not hire him although he is brilliant, because he lacks *moral* qualities. These phychologists will not use the term *moral* but the term *well adjusted.*

Scripture has another peculiar characteristic. It teaches *never* to give up a man, no matter how bad he is or how long he has been bad. You can be "saved" at the eleventh hour, fifty-ninth minute and fifty-ninth second. (Scripture does not recommend that you wait that long, and warns against overstaying your time.) Modern industrial psychology also sounds a hopeful and cheerful note about men; it believes that men can be improved; however, after you are 50 years old an industrial psychologist will not enthusiastically accept you as a patient, if at all; men are too set in their ways at that age; they will not learn anymore; they could, but they will not. Scripture in regard to the reformation of a man is more optimistic and persevering than modern psychology. Psychology does not talk hopefully about redeeming a man as a "brand plucked from the burning."

Interestingly, Scripture sounds a third note which has an attractive quality; if you have *one* talent and *if you use it,* you will obtain two talents; and after you have two talents and exercise

them, you will have more than two talents; your growth possibilities are unlimited.

According to Scripture, you do not need intellectual brilliance; but you certainly do need *sound policies,* that is, the Law of God; those sound policies are to be the "major premises" in all your reasoning.

Scripture, in a sense, therefore, has a *method of procedure* for life. It places confidence in that *method* — and not in the initial intellectual endowment of a man.

In addition to the *moral method* that Scripture recommends, there is also an intellectual method which is worthy of being considered.

Have members of Calvinist churches developed or applied an intellectual method which will keep the denominations *progressive?*

fn

Descartes's "Discourse On Method"

René Descartes (*day kart*) (1596-1650), a Frenchman who moved to the Netherlands, published in 1637 at Leiden when he was 41 years old, a small book of about 75 pages which carried the title *Discourse On Method;* (a paperbound translation is published by The Open Court Publishing Company, La Salle, Illinois, U.S.A., price 60 cents). This is a most interesting book which may be read with pleasure by anyone. It contains no abstruse and fanciful ideas, which sometimes pass under the name of philosophy. It tells instead Descartes's *method* for investigating, thinking and working.

The name of Descartes is no small one in the history of philosophy and science. The great Greeks founded philosophy. The middle ages did little more than thresh over the old straw of the Greeks. Descartes ushers in the modern age; he turned to the study of *things* rather than to the study of what others had written. In the research and study of things directly, he needed a *method.* That method is described in his book (page 19).

Descartes's method consists of four short and simple rules:

> The *first* was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.
>
> The *second,* to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.
>
> The *third,* to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; assigning in thought a certain order even to those objects which in their own nature do not stand in a relation of antecedence and sequence.
>
> And the *last,* in every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that nothing was omitted.

Descartes himself did wonderfully well with these rules. Between the great Greeks and the modern world of a Kant or a Kierkegaard there is no greater name to be mentioned in philosophy than Descartes.

We recommend to readers that they read carefully Descartes's *Discourse On Method,* and apply for themselves his rules for intellectual method.

If to the rules of *moral method* prescribed by Scripture, the rules of *intellectual method* recommended by Descartes are added, it will be reasonable to hope that considerable progress can be made in harmonizing the problems of religion and ethics and freedom and science, including the science of economics.

It will not be necessary for readers to inform us that Descartes was a "rationalist" and by the use of that term expect to condemn his rules. If his rules are wrong, what makes them wrong? fn

Mathematical Brilliance Versus Method

A mathematical genius of a particular type could add the following figures almost at a glance, *five columns at a time.*

39,872
12,695
48,920
87,651
46,129

Can you add the five columns at one time, and promptly write in the correct answer below the line, 235,267?

Although readers may not be mathematical geniuses, we have confidence that they have a *method* of being able to add the foregoing column of figures. What is their *method?*

1. First they abandon the attempt to add five columns at one time. It is "impossible" for them and for us. They add the columns separately beginning with the right-hand column.

2. Secondly, they abandon the attempt to add all the figures in the right-hand column at a glance. Instead, they begin at the top of the column and add *only two figures at a time* — 2 plus 5 equals 7, and 7 plus 1 equals 8, and 8 plus 9 equals 17. They put down the 7 and carry the 1 to the next column.

That is the method of our readers who are not mathematical geniuses — and our method, too. Of what does the method consist? It is nothing more than Descartes's method specifically applied to adding figures; Descartes advised:

1. Break a big job up into as many parts as you can. (Readers did that when they first reduced the figures to columns, and then the columns to digits.)

2. Take the easiest part first. (Readers did that when they selected the right-hand column, the unit column.) That is the easiest way when numbers must be "carried forward."

3. Be thorough. If the addition of the units' column is wrong and the carrying number is incorrect, the total will be wrong. Accuracy and thoroughness are absolutely essential.

Descartes's *method* for good intellectual work is, it will be obvious to all readers, of very wide application. It works well, not only in mathematics, but all through life. fn

The Relationship Of Method To Achievement

Many years ago, when an employee in a business of elephantine size, we worked directly for an executive who had advanced through the accounting department to near the top of the company. At one time he had been a travelling shoe salesman. Then he became a ledger clerk, for which he had had no prior experience. From that he advanced steadily and eventually rapidly. He had been endowed with a powerful mind, and came as close as any business man we ever knew to having that "perfect soundness of judgment" which Macaulay ascribed to the great John Hampden. How did the mind of such a man work? What was its *method?*

This is what we discovered.

This man had forged for himself, by intense effort, out of accounting rules, a master tool for his brain. His chance employment as a ledger clerk had placed this tool within his reach. He mastered the techniques of accounting and used the principles and ideas underlying those techniques for the solution of every kind of a business problem. As he used the tool, it became a magnificently effective one.

Men of great abilities always forge a *mental method* of their own. In the solution of the explanation of the solar system existing mathematics were inadequate; that is why Isaac Newton developed the methods of the Differential Calculus. Similarly, Descartes, deciding not to thresh over futilely again as the medievalists had done the ancient words of the great Greeks but to discover *new* truth, had to develop a set of rules for himself. By the use of those rules he discovered Analytical Geometry.

What relationship was there between the *mental method* of this great business executive and the *mental method* of Descartes? One was a business man and the other a mathematician-scientist-philosopher. The *methods* were basically identical.

The outstanding characteristic of this business man was *thoroughness*. Compared with him we concluded that we and all the rest of mankind were shoddy workmen. The care which the man took to be right was exceptional. Was there a reward? Yes; that consisted in coming close to having "perfect soundness of judgment." This characteristic of thoroughness was nothing more than Descartes's Rule (1), that is,

> . . . never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.

We remember hearing from this business executive a constant refrain, "What are the *facts*." Before anything was accepted as a *fact*, it was put through a gruelling scrutiny and cross examination. No police third-degree was ever more exacting. We remember hearing him describe accounting once, as follows: "Accounting is only a great *common sense way* of *knowing* the *facts* about your business."

This executive also followed the second and third rules of Descartes. He did this in a very interesting way. If a man came in to see him and presented information, the visitor of course was pre-informed and often well informed. He would present information at a normal rate for himself, but at a fast rate for the executive who was initially (relatively) uninformed.

What always happened? The executive would get out a pad of paper. He would slow down the visitor's rate of presentation. Item by item, he would record what the man said. And he would ask many questions, some apparently foolish. This method had a purpose, we eventually discovered. That purpose was to break the presentation down into all its parts. It was a procedure like adding columns of big figures, by taking not even a column at a time, but a digit at a time. This method had an apparent defect, which troubled me (then a young man) much. That "defect" was that people would learn how ignorant and slow we were. This fear was evidence of a basic lack of humility. If we had been prepared to approach problems with general "humility," we would have been

unashamed to reveal to others our real ignorance. The willingness to reveal ignorance is genuine humility. That is one of the reasons why Scripture declares that "humility . . . is the beginning of wisdom."

From that point on, the executive began to act. Question upon question was put, in order to explore and test the picture as a whole and in detail. Gradually, the most important and earliest considerations were sifted out.

All this, obviously, was a specific application of Descartes's Rules (3) and (4), to divide a problem into as many small parts as possible, and then begin taking the easiest parts first and working them over with thoroughness.

By these methods this business man solved great problems with simplicity and assurance. Of this method could be said what Descartes says of geometers:

> . . . long chains of *simple* and *easy reasonings* . . .[lead] to the conclusions of their most difficult demonstrations . . .

By a sound method — the method of humility — difficult problems become easy. A sound method contributes to achievement. fn

Lester De Koster On The Relationship Of Sin To The Natural Order

Lester De Koster in his book, *All Ye That Labor,* has the following to say about *evil* (page 16):

> I propose no definition of the term "evil" other than it has in common parlance. We all take it to mean the malevolent, the unjust, the painful, the vicious, the cruel, the hateful which men do.

That is what De Koster means by evil.

On page 5 De Koster also wrote the following:

> Evil comes to expression in other forms than in human relations. Disease, physical and mental deformity, and

> natural calamity all witness to the Christian mind of the radical corruption with which man's sin has infected the natural order. . .

In the next paragraph De Koster writes that

> disease, deformity and disaster create problems for Christianity in its doctrine of divine love, divine omnipotence and providence. . .

Readers will note that two definitions of evil are here given. It is the second definition (from page 5) to which we wish to call attention. Here *evil* is taken to include "disease . . . deformity . . . and natural calamities . . ." These phenomena are considered to be a "witness to the Christian mind of the radical corruption with which *man's sin has infected the natural order.*" (Our italics.)

Let us consider this idea and put it in its simplest form, namely, *natural calamities are the result of man's sins.*

We can begin with an illustration. A tornado strikes a town. Property is destroyed. People are dead or injured. According to De Koster this tornado was an evil, and because natural calamities are the result of man's sin having infected the natural order, this tornado should be considered the result of sin, presumably a sin of someone in the town or everybody in the town, or Adam's sin; anyway somebody's sin.

We submit a simple rejoinder. We have been so much influenced by Descartes's rules quoted earlier in this issue that it is impossible for us to accept De Koster's primitive cosmology. (Cosmology is the science that "treats of the character of the universe as an orderly system.") Whoever applies Descartes's rules to the relationship of sin to natural calamities will, we are sure, abandon De Koster's proposition.

Before applying the logic of Descartes's rules, let us immediately dismiss the idea that somebody in that town hit by a tornado was a special sinner who needed to be taught a lesson. That idea was rejected by Christ when he talked about a "natural calamity" that occurred in his day, namely, a tower had tumbled over in Siloam and killed eighteen men. The naive interpretation of many contemporaries was that the eighteen men killed were special sinners.

> *Luke 13:4-5.* Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

At another time a young man blind from birth — another of those "natural calamities" — was brought to Christ for healing. On this occasion Christ also denied a specific causal relationship between *sin* and *natural calamity*.

> *John 9:1-3.* And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

But a reader will say, "Granted all that, the situation was *caused* by Adam's fall in paradise. If Adam had not fallen, there would have been no *natural calamities*."

This is the cosmology which underlies De Koster's views of the world. Let us consider the idea in the light of Descartes's simple, common sense rules. The matter is important because it affects a man's view of the science of economics. Economics deals, firstly, with the relationship of men to things (that is, the relationship of men to the world about them which suffers from "natural calamities") and, secondly, with the relationship of men to men. fn

Tornadoes, The Result Of Adam's Fall!

Adam's Fall is emphasized in Christian doctrine. That emphasis is based on a writing of a relatively late date. Scripture was written during the period between 1400 B.C. (Moses's time) and 100 A.D. (Paul's time) — a span of 1500 years, a very long time.

The Fall itself occurred long before Moses's time. A careful reader of Scripture would expect constant reference to the effects of Adam's Fall throughout the whole Old Testament and in the

Gospels of the New Testament. Strangely, however, the Fall as a vital doctrine for cosmology gets little attention except from the Apostle Paul. If Paul had not developed the doctrine of the Fall, it would probably be unimportant in Christian dogma today.

Granted that this doctrine of the Fall is applicable to the nature of man, that is, that Adam corrupted his whole human nature and the whole nature of his posterity by his disobedience; does it, therefore, follow that nonhuman "natural calamities" result from Adam's fall?

To this, we believe, the answer must be an emphatic, No. This statement is made despite the statement in Scripture which appears in Genesis 3:17b-19:

> . . . cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

That text cannot, with good sense, be interpreted to mean that the whole earth was a paradise up to that time and that it suddenly became the opposite of a paradise.

Before Adam fell and after Adam fell there must have been "natural laws" established by God. To believe that those "natural laws" were changed because Adam fell is to read something into Scripture which is not there.

Let us take some examples of difficulties which would follow from such a doctrine. It is necessary to keep in mind what is being contrasted, namely, that before the Fall the natural world outside of man was "good" but that after the Fall the natural world outside of man became bad. Sin is alleged to have changed the character of the natural world and to be the cause of "natural calamities."

Gold and silver are valuable products. Some men and women will practically sell their souls to get them. If God made the earth "good" then valuable natural products would undoubtedly have been so placed as to be readily available, and if sin (Adam's Fall)

caused a corruption or a lesser availability of gold and silver, then what must have happened? At the particular minute that Adam fell there must have been a mysterious movement of gold and silver throughout the world. Instead of continuing to be easily available in a genuinely "good" creation, they suddenly became almost unavailable by a seismic transportation to distant places — the mountains of Colorado, the Klondike of Alaska and the Witwatersrand in South Africa. What a mysterious effect of Adam's Fall — that seismic movement of gold and silver to out-of-the-way places as just mentioned, as if Aladdin had rubbed his lamp and all the gold and silver and diamonds moved far away on the magic carpet to places from which it is difficult and costly to extract them.

Or consider the matter of climate. God had made the world "good" which would hardly include a bad climate. And so the climate must be supposed to have become bad because of Adam's Fall. Heat can be painful. The text just quoted refers to the "sweat of thy face." Shall we indeed infer that the weather changed because of man's sin?

What weather changed? California weather? North Pole weather? Winter weather? Summer weather? Wet weather? Dry weather? Or was the weather originally uniform — that is, were there no air currents, or high or low pressure areas. (If you do not have high and low pressure areas you will not have any rain.) And were there only gentle breezes in the world before Adam fell? But do we have tornadoes now only after Adam fell?

We submit for consideration that natural laws were unchanged — completely unchanged — *before* and *after* the fall.

The "natural calamities" of De Koster are not *because* of Adam's sin. And let us add at once: the sunshine and rain on "the good and the evil" is not because of or despite Adam's Fall either. There is no causal relation in either case.

The prevailing doctrines of "natural calamities" and the "common grace" of God in natural events are primitive ideas which should be abandoned. If the whole relationship of men to natural events is seen in a false light, all derivative sciences will have a defective foundation.

Scripture, be it noted, does in specific cases (in contrast to the Tower of Siloam and the man-born-blind cases) ascribe natural calamities to specific sins. When Scripture interprets them that way in those specific cases, we see no reason for not accepting those interpretations. We can understand, too, that special modern calamities are ascribed, in the subjective opinion of people of faith, to specific present-day sins. They may be right or they may be wrong.

But when someone declares that the regular heat and drouth of the Sahara is because of Adam's Fall, we demur. Or when someone declares that the prevalence of tornadoes in Oklahoma and Kansas (a territory particularly afflicted by tornadoes) is because of Adam's Fall, we again demur. Or if someone declares that the act of a wolf eating a jackrabbit is a cruelty which entered the world because Adam fell, then we again demur.

Men wish to study the relationship of men to trouble. There is much trouble in the world. That trouble consists partly in men's sins. That trouble consists partly in natural circumstances. But that part of the difficulty which consists of "natural calamities" is, in our opinion, not "infected by man's sin."

We believe a more careful cosmology should be accepted, a cosmology which would not conspicuously violate Descartes's simple and understandable rules. The statement: "natural calamity witness[es] to the Christian mind of the radical corruption with which man's sin has infected the natural order" is not acceptable according to Descartes's rules. fn

Supralapsarianism And Infralapsarianism

These two uncommon words, *supralapsarianism* and *infralapsarianism,* pertain to the relationship of Adam's Fall to predestination by God. The *lapsarian* part of the term refers to the Fall, the word *lapse* being a variant of *fall. Supra* means before, and *infra* means after. Supralapsarianism means a doctrine of "*before* the Fall"; infralapsarianism means a doctrine of "*after* the Fall."

Supralapsarianism is usually described as meaning that God first decided that man would fall and that then He decided He

would create man. Infralapsarianism is usally described as meaning that God first decided to make man and that He then decided man would fall. Defined thus, the dispute centering around the two terms has always appeared somewhat pointless to us.

The Three Standards of the Christian Reformed church (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort) all have infralapsarian assumptions. Infralapsarianism is, therefore, the official doctrine of the denomination. Nevertheless, supralapsarianism is permitted to members as a *personal* belief, but there is a synodical decision that it may not be taught from the pulpits of the denomination.

We have long been disposed to extend respective supralapsarian and infralapsarian positions to the relationship of men to natural events. This may be invalid.

The result is that we consider the supralapsarian view to be more "logical." That view, it seems to us, permits a man to view the "natural order," which has "natural calamities" in it, as having originally been created that way, that is, natural calamities were in creation from the very beginning. An infralapsarian view, it seems to us, has as a natural corollary the idea that when Adam fell, the natural world was therefore changed for the worse. According to that view, God had to change His building plans — His natural laws — to inject certain "natural calamities" after Adam fell.

We are consequently disposed to favor a supralapsarian view, because of this collateral consideration. As a result, the effect of Adam's Fall does not affect our view of sun, moon, stars, gravity, electricity, weather, and other natural (nonhuman) events.

Various distinguished men as Gerhardus Vos, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Hoeksema were (are) avowed supralapsarians. We have wondered to what extent they were supralapsarians because (so it seems to us) that view permits a much simpler cosmology. We would assume that De Koster's view of "natural calamities" places him in the infralapsarian group. But, as we said, we admit we are "extending" the supralapsarian and infralapsarian ideas (beyond the Decrees of God relative to the Fall) to the character of the original creation. fn

A Reader's Reaction

We print herewith for our readers' benefit, an extract of a letter we have received, criticizing our preliminary remarks in the April issue of Lester De Koster's book *All Ye That Labor.* It comes to us from a minister of a church of Calvinist persuasion — not Christian Reformed.

> . . . I should like to take this opportunity to comment about your discussion of Lester De Koster's book: "All Ye That Labor." You have a good deal to say about the basic conflict between Christianity and Communism. Indeed, there is such a conflict, but it is found, *basically,* in ideology. Reduced to its simplest terms, the conflict between the Christian Church and Marxism rages around the question: Can man live by bread alone? Christianity would give the answer our Lord cited, when tempted. Marxism states flatly that the physical, the sensory, the earthly, is all that matters. Marxism scoffs at religion as an opiate, and attempts to usurp the position of faith by replacing it with a thorough-going materialistic dogma. It provides for the physical, and crushes the spirit.
>
> In this regard, arguments about "surplus value" do not have the predominant place. We are talking about basic philosophies of life, not about economic theories, about which Christians and others may have honest differences of opinion. The answer to Communism is to be found in Christianity's gospel, in her provision of a message for soul and body. When we help man to see his first, and basic need, when we have witnessed to him of the Kingdom of heaven, and its application to all of life, then we shall be attacking Communism at its root. Man stands or falls by his faith or lack of it. When he lives by faith, he will seek to put first the matters of the kingdom of God. This means that he will live in the manner of a steward. Such manner of life includes his talents, his prosperity, his time, in short all that he is and has.
>
> When you say that De Koster *et al,* have aided the spread of communism, you are being unfair, and intellec-

> tually less than honest. So long as they, and their fellow Christians everywhere, proclaim and live the truth of the gospel, they will have an adequate and victorious answer to communism. It is a good deal more than Marx's idea of surplus value that needs discrediting. In the final analysis, it is not capitalism that holds the answer to communism, but rather, it is the Christian faith. Christian ethics also come into play at this point.
>
> In your mention of others evading the crucial issue, it would appear that your magazine has lost sight of it altogether.

We appreciate this correspondent writing to us, but it is impossible for us to agree with him, disposed as we may be to be conciliatory toward all men.

His criticism of our review makes this major point: that Marxism's error is not basically economic, but rather ideological. Therefore we should have begun our attack on Marxism's position on the Gospel and faith, not on Marxism's economic theory.

In fact, the writer says, Christians can have "honest differences of opinion" about economic theories. Apparently, then, one Christian can hold to Marx's *economic* theory and another Christian can hold to a conflicting *economic* theory. If this is so, then economics is unhinged from ethics; then the Gospel, talked about as the real buffer to Marxism, must not attempt to warn against sin as set out in the Ten Commandments, because the central theme of Marx's attack is not originally an attack on the Gospel, but rather an attack — an economic attack — on the eighth and tenth commandments — Thou shalt not steal, and Thou shalt not covet.

This is Marx's argument: The workers (the property-less) are exploited (robbed) by the owners (the propertied) to the extent of the unearned income which the owner collects in the form of rent, interest and profit, collectively known to economists by the general term, *interest.* This unearned income, this "surplus value" which is allegedly produced by the worker but which goes to the *owner,* should go to the worker. The way to accomplish this is to remove the right to private property.

Marx fully recognized that the church and Christianity were (in his time) among the staunchest supporters of the right to private property. The church not only sanctioned private property and its alleged consequence, exploitation; the church, with its patter about faith and another life, tried to soothe and drug the workers into passivity instead of arousing him to rebellion and revolution.

Marx's attack on Christianity's gospel does not start out with the proposition that the gospel is bad in itself, but bad rather because that gospel and its message are used to cover up the exploitation of the property-less by the propertied. If the church had not endorsed private property, Marx probably would have completely ignored the church's gospel.

In other words, the *basic* conflict *is* an economic one. PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM believes that the writer of the foregoing letter (and De Koster) miss the point. They miss it because they apparently have no answer to Marx's *economic* attack on private property. Until they answer this charge of Marx, they cannot argue basically against Marx's attack on the gospel.

Our correspondent emphasizes that the property holder is a "*steward.*" He writes: "This means that he will live in the manner of a steward."

We ask: If he is a steward only, and not really an owner, to whom is he responsible? To God? Does God "spell out" such stewardship? To his neighbors? If to his neighbors, then *how many* of his neighbors? The majority?

We ask again: Does a property-holder's "*stewardship*" eliminate all of the unearned income which Marx declared the property-holder wrongfully exacted as an owner? Or if not all, how much?

We ask our correspondent: *what is indeed your answer to Marx's economic argument?* Until you answer that, you will never know how crucial the economic argument is for destroying Marx's whole dialectic. Why emphasize the *general* dialectics of Marx, because you are apparently unable to rebutt conclusively the *specific economic* dialectics of Marx?

Holding the views we do, we feel constrained not to dispute the matter further until we hear clearly and specifically what our correspondent's argument is, against Marx's *economic* argument. Once we hear that, we can proceed with profit. If we do not hear it, we shall not presently devote more space to this question. ek

IV. MESSIANIC INTERVENTIONISM

"We Have Never Lost A Fight With Joe Louis"

We can truthfully say that we have never lost a fight with Joe Louis, even though in his prime he was the champion heavyweight boxer of the world.

It can also be truthfully said that Calvinism has never lost a fight with communism, even though communism is making many gains, as it has made in Hungary recently.

The reason why we have never lost a fight with Joe Louis is because we have never fought with him. The reason why Calvinism has never lost a fight with communism is because it has not involved itself in a mortal fight with communism.

What is the main thrust of communism? Dialectical materialism? Atheism? Not at all.

Marx's dialectical materialism and his atheism stem from his basic psychology, his gluttonous covetousness. The only way to clear himself of the charge of evil was to change the rules on what is good and what is evil. Marx reversed on *material* matters the principles of Scripture; what Scripture declares is good, Marx declares is bad; what Scripture declares is bad, Marx declares is good.

Marx's whole case rests upon his idea about *surplus value*. It is very simple, namely:

1. An employee produces.

2. He does not get in return a reward equal to all that he produces; he gets only part.

3. The employer gets a share of what the employee produces. For example, if a man works 8 hours, he gets a reward equal to what he produced in (say) 7 hours; the employer claims what the employee produces in the 8th hour.

4. An employee then is robbed by whatever amount the employer gets. The employer *exploits* the employee in the amount that the employer gets anything.

5. Therefore, all return on capital, all rent, interest and profits of owners and employers — all of it, every penny, is exploitation of the employee or laborer. Marx considers that this (alleged) *exploitation* is the root iniquity of society, the origin of all temporal evil.

One would have expected that Christianity, and particularly Calvinism (which prides itself on being intellectual), would have refuted Marx's argument *by reasoning.*

More than 50 years have elapsed since the writer was born. In all those years he has never once heard a *rational* argument *by Calvinists* against the soundness, the logic, of Marx's *surplus value.*

To the contrary, the unstated assumption today in practically all remarks made by Calvinists is that there is (more or less) a wicked *surplus value* obtained by the employer and capitalist, or if he does not actually obtain it, there is a terrible risk that he will. *Therefore,* the government must "intervene" and regulate the relations between employer and employee, because otherwise the employer will, more or less, surely exploit the employee. This is the *interventionism* which is almost universal in the Christian churches.

Therefore, too, coercive unions must be organized, some Calvinists reason, in order to lessen or eliminate the natural exploitation of the employee by the employer. The idea is that the *freedom* of the employer and of the employee in an unregulated market (unregulated by legislators or bureaucrats) will inevitably end in exploitation of the employee by the employer. On the basis of that "logic" we hear demands by the Christian Labor Association (dominated by Calvinists) for "*union shops*" — that is, you cannot retain your job unless you join a union and pay dues, so that *coercion* can be applied to the employer.

Marx's economic ideas have, in fact, deeply penetrated in nearly all the "Calvinist" thinking with which we are especially acquainted.

Progress can be made by returning to the elementary issues; we have stated them before (see PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM: September 1955, pages 241-243, and July 1956, pages 219-222); we repeat them.

1. Is capital entitled to any return?
2. Should it be a *just* return?
3. How determine what is a *just* return?
4. Does the return on capital exist because capital is productive? If so, is capital entitled to the *whole* return on its productivity?
5. Is capital entitled to part of what labor produces or is the laborer entitled to *all* what he produces? fn

Two Different And Irreconcilable Religions

Religions can differ in their theoretical and their practical aspects. We are considering religions here only in their most practical aspect, namely, their *ethics* or what they teach regarding morality.

Ethics, in this context, refers to the relation of persons to persons, their obligations to each other in the various circumstances of life. Widely different ethics claim for themselves the character of being Christian. It is not probable that this can be correct.

There are two irreconcilable systems of ethics tolerated in the Christian Reformed church. One of these systems we shall describe as the *agape* system; the other as the Mosaic plus Sermon-on-the-Mount system, or *Mosaic* for short.

Agape is one of the two principal Greek words for *love*. The *Mosaic* system could be described as the system of *law*. However, in Scripture love is not defined in terms of sentiment but in terms of The Law, and so the Mosaic system is also a system of love, but a different love than what now popularly goes by that name, *agape*.

In simplified form here are the two irreconcilable systems:

LOVE, in terms of the Law of Moses plus Sermon on the Mount	LOVE, as Agape, a certain kind of Neighborly "Love"
1. (a) You may be "selfish"; that is, you may very properly pursue your self-regarding interests; BUT (b) In the process of pursuing your self-regarding interests you may not injure your neighbor by violence, adultery, theft, falsehood or covetousness. (c) You must be *forbearing* and *forgiving* when a neighbor wrongs you. (d) You must provide help which is needed, that is, charity.	1. You may not be "selfish"; You may not pursue your self-regarding interests freely; you must "serve" your neighbor; you are a "steward" of everything you possess *for his benefit.* As Lester De Koster quotes John Calvin: "There cannot be imagined a more certain rule or a more powerful exhortation to the observance of it, than when we are taught that all the blessings we enjoy are divine deposits, committed to our trust on this condition, *that they should be dispensed for the benefit of our neighbors.*" Also, "... *whatever God has conferred on us,* which enables us to assist our neighbor, *we are stewards of it,* and must one day render an account of our stewardship." (See Lester De Koster's *All Ye That Labor,* page 61. The exact source of the quotation is not given. The italics are ours.)
2. You must inform your neighbor of the gospel.	2. You must inform your neighbor of the gospel.

In PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM this *agape* religion is rejected. We are not endeavoring to make this *agape* religion look bad. Readers

will note that we have quoted John Calvin in the *agape* column. This quotation could lend credence to the idea that John Calvin taught an *agape* religion, as we refer to *agape* in this contrast.

But the fact is that John Calvin did NOT in general teach an *agape* religion. Every man makes statements which seem to support a position which he does not basically hold. John Calvin did not hold to an *agape* system; his followers in historic Calvinism never operated on the basic *agape* principle that you are a sinner when you are "selfish." The quotation, therefore, gives a wrong impression of Calvin's *general* ideas.

The case in regard to Calvin is understandable. If Karl Marx had been a contemporary or a predecessor of Calvin, Calvin would not, in our opinion, have been inexact in any statement he made contrasting (1) the pursuit of legitimate self-interest, versus (2) the exercise of stewardship and devoting your whole life to the service of the neighbor at the expense of yourself, as Marx demanded (and as Calvin seems to support in the foregoing quotation).

Nearly all quotations applied centuries later of men who lived in a distant past are subject to gross misquotation, merely because men in former ages did not have their problems cast in the same mold as our problems are cast today. What they said long ago must be restricted to the frame of the problem as it was posed in their day.

While it is misleading to consider Calvin to have been a man holding to *agape* ethics, it is equally misleading to follow De Koster in regard to Adam Smith. Smith is historically the greatest name in economics. Smith is considered to be the economic "founder" of modern capitalism. In that sense, he may be considered the opposite — the primary antagonist — of Karl Marx, the founder of modern socialism. But the fact is that Marx generally accepted the economics of Adam Smith. The reason for this is that there are a mass of statements in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* which support Marx's theories and statements. There are, however, as many, indeed many more statements by Smith against the basic premises of Karl Marx. Was Smith then insincere, or unstable, or confused?

No, he was an *early* economist who had not thought through a mass of problems now solved long after his day. Consequently,

some of his statements are inconsistent and contradictory, and *can* be quoted by both capitalists and communists. Capitalism — with its *unearned income* (or as Marx put it, *surplus value;* or as Scripture puts it, *interest*) needs a better defense today than Adam Smith ever gave it. De Koster, therefore, presents a wholly false contrast when he contrasts Smith and Marx; it is as proper as comparing a Newton with a Ptolemy. Marx came a hundred years after Smith. There are some economists, who were contemporary to Marx or came after him, who constitute the real defense against Marx, instead of a predecessor as Smith.

It may be confidently relied upon that, if Smith had been a contemporary of Marx and had had an opportunity to rebutt Marx's argument, he would have done so. In basic ideas he disagreed with Marx. De Koster recognizes both the agreement and the disagreement of Marx with Smith, but he lets that disagreement stand, as if no one had developed further those ideas of Smith which (as developed) completely rebutt Marx. It is as if De Koster insists on relying on quotations from Ptolemy to rebutt Newton, completely neglecting an Einstein who came after both. De Koster has apparently been influenced by the Adlerian "Great Books" idea so that he has relied (in his economics) on the "ancients" rather than modern writers; it is like relying on Hippocrates for your medical ideas rather than the Mayo Clinic.

But returning to the two systems of ethics both of which claim to be Hebrew-Christian — the *Mosaic plus Sermon-on-the-Mount* system versus the *Agape* system, are these different religions? They are. The Mosaic plus Sermon-on-the-Mount ethics represent historic Christianity (and definitely historic Calvinism). The *Agape* ethics constitute a defense for the claims of communism and the claims of interventionism. Communism and Interventionism would never accept the requirements in the left-hand column in the foregoing, but they will greedily accept the right-hand column.

The question is: does the Christian religion ask merely that a man (1) not injure his neighbor; (2) be forbearing and forgiving; (3) show charity; (4) inform his neighbor of the gospel? Or does it ask that a man (1) forget himself and consider only his neighbor; (2) obliterate natural (not harmful) selfishness; (3)

act not according to his own knowledge of what he needs for himself, but as if he were a "steward" for all the rest of mankind as if he knew their needs, and as if he were as provident for all men as God is declared to be? To these questions there is, we are sure, only one correct answer. The first set of questions must be answered *yes,* and the second set must be answered *no.* When such answers are given, the answers are *scriptural* and, if we may use a much abused word, they are also *scientific.*

Insofar as any church or school teaches that scriptural selfishness (see the left-hand column) is inadequate, and that Christian ethics are adequately taught *only* when the full doctrine presented in the right-hand column is declared to be the minimum, then such a church or school teaches, we believe, a wholly unscriptural and sanctimonious doctrine, a doctrine which supports socialism, and its big brother, communism, and its little brother, interventionism.

To state the issue so plainly as in the foregoing will expose us to charges of selfishness, wickedness, hardness of heart, of not understanding the most elementary teaching of the Christian religion. We shall have to suffer the consequences of that misinterpretation, but there is no prospect that we shall be changing our ideas. We once held the extreme and sanctimonious ideas (in the right-hand column) ourselves. We have rejected them not only as untenable and unscriptural but as dangerous and eventually suicidal for Christianity. That explains why we attack the "extension" of Christian ethics — the extension from common sense to sanctimony — so boldly and mercilessly, and that in turn explains why the anger and hatred directed against us does not deter us or persuade us to become silent.

Adam Smith was not a religious man. He was adamantly hostile to Calvinism; (shall we say, he despised it?). But he said a society organized as he thought it should be organized would be guided as by an "invisible hand." He meant that such a society would be a good society in which to live; it would get along well. Someday we shall analyze that idea behind the "invisible hand." And at that time we shall show that by the pursuit of *legitimate* self-regarding interests a society naturally becomes a beneficent society.

Finally, should we "serve" our neighbors? Further, does the system of Moses and the Sermon-on-the-Mount (and the identical system favored in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM) result in neglect of the neighbor or hurt him? To these questions we answer that the Mosaic system is the ONLY genuine system of serving the neighbor, without hurting him by sanctimonious and hypocritical unselfishness.

But these ideas are all paradoxical to anyone who thinks in terms of an *agape* system, a system which is built on an exaggerated "neighborly love" foundation. fn

The Dispute Between A Mosaic Ethic And An Agape Ethic Is Not Basically One Of Morality But Of Epistemology (Intellectual Limitations)

The issue between Mosaic ethics and *agape* ethics is not an issue which is basically founded on something moral (that is, whether pursuit of the self-regarding interests is permissible) but on something really intellectual. This intellectual issue goes deeper than the moral issue.

Consequently, the issue between capitalism and socialism, the former being based on the Mosaic structure of society and the latter on the *agape* structure of society, is also not solely a moral issue but especially an intellectual (or epistemological) issue.

The Mosaic system has the premise that each man may be motivated *by his own needs.* It assumes he knows his own needs. There may be dispute about whether men in general know their own needs as they should know them. Nevertheless, there will be general agreement that men know at least what they think they need. But there is a corollary to this. The corollary is that a man does not know the needs of many other people and certainly not the needs of all people. A man or woman may know the needs of their immediate family. But beyond that their knowledge becomes thinner and thinner until it becomes perfect ignorance regarding the mass of their fellow men.

The Mosaic system, based on legitimate selfishness or better said, the self-regarding interests, is therefore intellectually modest

and humble. It limits its actions to sure knowledge, namely, self-knowledge. Though that knowledge is defective against absolute standards, it is still better knowledge than that man has of the needs of a Hindu, a Hottentot, a Chinaman, an Argentinian. The Mosaic system for organizing society is, therefore, a modest, nonarrogant, individualistic system. It has no hidden premise that man has a mind as God's — all-knowing.

The *agape* system, based on alleged selflessness and perfect service of the neighbor, cannot be intellectually modest and humble. It does not attempt to limit its actions to sure knowledge of *individual* needs or preferences. It does not rely on self-knowledge, but on arrogant knowledge of what others want (as if that were known) or what others should want. The *agape* system cannot be judged on the basis of a man "serving" 20 neighbors rather than himself, or of conducting himself as a "steward" for 20 neighbors rather than serving his own needs; no, if the principle is sound that the motivation for conduct must be the "neighbor's needs" then it must mean ALL neighbors — every American, every Norwegian, every Hottentot, every Australian — everybody. Only then is the "stewardship" right and only then is the "service" perfect. But this is, obviously, a boundless arrogance. The hidden premise is that every man can be omniscient.

The Greeks had a word for immeasurable, inexcusable, insulting arrogance. That word is *hubris*. The intellectual assumption underlying *agape* ethics is a hubris. Every man, it is unconsciously assumed, has become God in knowledge.

Agape religion and ethics will therefore eventually collapse because it is intellectually impossible.

Mosaic ethics, and the individualism based on it, and the capitalism in turn based on that individualism is, therefore, the only system of ethics based on reality — on a correct, modest estimate of mortal man.

Agape ethics, and the collectivism based on it, and the interventionism-socialism-communism in turn based on that collectivism is, therefore, a system of ethics based on a hallucination — on an incorrect arrogant estimate of mortal men.

The outcome is inevitable — an *agape* system must become tyrannical. The state and its bureaucrats, not being able to make individual decisions, because it is (they are) not omniscient, makes mass or collective decisions. Freedom is gone. Agape — love — becomes its own destroyer. Good intentions turn into tyranny. Sanctimonious goals deteriorate into destructive forces.

That which sets out to outdo what Moses and Christ taught turns out to be inestimably inferior -- accursed.

This idea, that the foundation of the Mosaic system and of individualism and of capitalism, is a realistic epistemology — a sound appraisal of the limitations of the human mind — is most clearly described in Friedrich A. von Hayek's essay "Individualism: True and False" (Chapter I in *Individualism And Economic Order*, The University of Chicago Press, 1948). fn

The Mosaic System (Including Individualism And Capitalism) Is Not An Anarchic System

Laissez-faire capitalism is probably an institution as much slandered as any of the institutions of men.

Christians have been among the noisiest of the slanderers.

The general impression created is that *laissez-faire* capitalism is do-as-you-well-please capitalism, that is, that it is a merciless, heartless, cruel, inhuman, selfish, exploitive system.

Laissez-faire capitalism is condemned as roundly and as loudly as communism. The World Council of Churches meeting in Amsterdam in 1948 condemned *laissez-faire* capitalism in the same breath that it condemned communism; it declared that

> . . . the Christian churches should reject the ideologies of both communism and *laissez-faire* capitalism.

Anything mentioned in the same breath as the monster, communism, must be bad!

Let us consider the first accusation usually made against *laissez-faire* capitalism. The accusation is *assumed* from the name *laissez-faire*. *Laissez-faire* is taken to mean *irresponsible* capitalism;a capi-

talism which admits no restrictions to its actions; a capitalism which says nobody may keep us from pursuing our own "selfish" aims; we shall do as we please; the devil take the hindmost.

This idea regarding *laissez-faire* capitalism is erroneous. What goes by the name *laissez-faire* capitalism has never said that it believed in the right to violate the sixth commandment (engage in coercion, monopoly, etc.); or the right to steal; or the right to engage in fraud; or the right to covet another's property.

Laissez-faire capitalism is founded on nonviolence, truthfulness, honesty, cooperation. Business generally has that character; it is peaceful, truthful, honest, cooperative. That is not because business men are subjectively one whit better than others. They are not. Nor are they worse. But objectively in relations to their fellow men they are better than the mine run of men. Why?

Because it is in their advantage to be peaceful, honest, truthful, cooperative. Those are the internal laws by which *laissez-faire* capitalism must live. *Laissez-faire* capitalism wants to be *free;* but that idea means that the customers of capitalism's goods are also free. If the customers are free, the goods must be good and priced right or the customers will not buy. Similarly, sources of raw materials are also free. If capitalism treats a supplier unequally, he refuses to sell; he turns to another buyer who buys at a better price. If capitalism treats its labor uncompetitively, that labor (being free) can withdraw its labor capacity from the service of that employer.

If everybody is *free* in his dealings with me, the moment I offer less than others do, they readily shift away from me to someone else. My success, therefore, depends on my equalling the service of all others. I am under inducement to attempt maximum service.

But the situation changes the moment that *coercion* enters the picture. If I can coerce my customers because I have a monopoly, if I can coerce my suppliers and my employees, if neither customers, suppliers or employees have freedom to "pursue their own self-regarding interests" then *laissez-faire* breaks down.

Business men then are honest because for them "honesty is the best policy." That is alleged to be a low or even contemptible

principle. It is, of this everyone may be sure, a very wise and salutary principle, regardless whether it is low and unelevated.

Laissez-faire capitalism may, secondly, be charged with being "humanistic" and not "Calvinistic." Man should, it is urged, be evaluated as being depraved; further, the trouble with humanism is that it does not appreciate the sinfulness of man and is too optimistic. *Laissez-faire* capitalism, presumably founded on the humanist conception of the goodness of man (or at least the being good only because it is the "best policy), is therefore alleged to be on the wrong base. A system which does not assume man's depravity is a defective system; so the reasoning goes.

We agree. The self-operation of the *laissez-faire* system on the basis that "honesty is the best policy" is inadequate.

But where is there a scintilla of evidence that *laissez-faire* capitalism has wanted to be above the Mosaic law. The mere fact that *freedom* was the basic premise of *laissez-faire* capitalism involved the recognition that no wrong should be done to the neighbor; because he could, if free, escape the wrong.

Now *laissez-faire* capitalism to our knowledge has never had a spokesman or acknowledged a spokesman who declared it wanted no laws against violence, theft, fraud. *Laissez-faire* capitalism has always wanted that. It is the restrictions which are more restrictive than the Mosaic law that *laissez-faire* has objected to. It is wholly erroneous — false — to imply that *laissez-faire* was or is lawless or anarchic. *Laissez-faire* wanted freedom, except it never claimed (as far as we know) freedom to break the Second Table of the Law.

Laissez-faire is a French term. The whole idea of *laissez-faire* is not lawlessness or anarchy, but freedom from government red tape. In France the system in the eighteenth century was mercantilist. *Mercantilism* was the system which became dominant in the time of Louis XIV. Under mercantilism every detail of the affairs between men was regulated. Everything was strapped down by endless and paralyzing restrictions. The *laissez-faire* idea arose as a reaction against mercantilism. American New Dealism is a reversion — reaction — to mercantilism.

Ludwig von Mises in his article "Laissez-faire or Dictatorship" writes the following (originally printed in *Plain Talk,* January

1949, reprinted by permission of Isaac Don Levine, editor, in *Planning For Freedom,* 1952, pages 37-8):

> Learned historians have bestowed much pains upon the question to whom the origin of the maxim *laissez-faire, laissez passer* is to be attributed. At any rate it is certain that in the second part of the eighteenth century the outstanding French champions of economic freedom — foremost among them Gournay, Quesnay, Turgot and Mirabeau — compressed their program for popular use into this sentence. Their aim was the establishment of the unhampered market economy. In order to attain this end they advocated the abolition of all statutes preventing the more industrious and more efficient people from outdoing the less industrious and less efficient competitors and restricting the mobility of commodities and of men. It was this that the famous maxim was designed to express.

Laissez-faire capitalism is the "free market" system which establishes one special kind of freedom — the freedom of every producer and seller to outdo any other, thereby serving all men to the maximum, and genuinely by deeds manifesting "love to the neighbor." fn

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Interventionism — Presented As A Messianic Hope For Society

The last chapter of De Koster's *All Ye That Labor,* covering 18 pages, carries the title, "Liberalism, Marxism and Christianity." This is the "economic" chapter in the book, in contrast to the earlier "philosophic" chapters.

This last chapter is a combination of economic errors and piety.

De Koster holds that liberalism (*laissez-faire* capitalism) has failed; socialism will not do; but Christianity via Interventionism (*Dirigisme*) is the great solution to the problems of society.

It is not the atheists nor the agnostics nor the Mohammedans nor the Buddhists who will destroy Christianity. When Christianity is destined to be destroyed it will be from within. When erroneous but plausible ideas are presented as the Christian hope for this troubled world there will eventually be a day of disillusionment. *Experience* will finally prove to everybody — learned and unlearned alike — that those ideas were wrong. Then people will ask: did religion all along agree to those errors? And when the answer must be that pious religion did just that, Christianity will be discredited.

We shall give painstaking critical consideration in future issues to this proposed Messianic interventionism as the great hope of this life. Thus far in the history of mankind the State has always proved itself to be a false Messiah. fn

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