

630 Forbes Street
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Dear Virginia,

How delighted I was to hear from you! I feel unworthy of your trust; you seem to have more confidence in my opinions than I do. But I am glad that you are considering fresh ideas. Remember, the main thing is: be honest with yourself, and, if Jesus was correct, then truth (or fragments thereof) will triumph.

I repeat; certainly it is no sin to question, to doubt, and to analyze. One thing is certain (or as certain as human understanding can ever be) - the only great strides forward in man's material welfare (as distinct from spiritual) have been taken by skeptical men, men who dared question the authorities, yes, who even suffered martyrdom for their pursuit of truth and freedom.

And their principal enemies have invariably been organized religious leaders who persecuted these men as being heretics, and delivered them to prisons, to torture, and to death. I am convinced that Jesus is not the author of such attitudes.

It may be, and I suspect it is so, that human knowledge was originally a stolen attribute; it was desired to make one wise as the gods and didn't Jesus say, "Know ye not, ye are gods?" And it may be that it cannot open the door to salvation and eternal life -- all this I grant -- But I am convinced that it of itself is not sinful, it cannot defile one's mind or destroy one's soul. Paul said, "Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good."

Well, you certainly have opened a Pandora's box. You could not have picked a more controversial subject. I suppose hundreds of volumes have been written on the subject by brilliant scholars since the time, at least, of ancient Greece, circa 600 B.C. I can only give you a few impressions I have and an opinion; it would seem veritably impossible to ever prove or disprove the various contentions concerning predestination and free will.

First, I will state that various philosophies are similar to fashion of dress - they are cyclic and have periods of popularity followed by periods of neglect and disfavor, only to be resurrected in slightly modified versions and reinstated. Furthermore, a really fundamental idea, such as this one, will pervade and influence all branches of human thought while it is popular. In fact, many theories will be constructed that use the idea as an axiom or postulate; I will attempt to explain a little later.

The main object of this modest essay will be to give you some feeling for the background of thought that was prevalent when John Calvin and his followers founded the Presbyterian movement, especially in the physical sciences. Then, to show what the current thinking is among the physicists of today; also, certain ideologies such as Catholicism, Judaism and Communism.