The Sinai Strategy
Economics and the Ten Commandments

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*Moses and Pharaoh* (1985)
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This book is dedicated to

**Lewis Lehrman**

philosopher, businessman, and politician, who understands that long-term meaningful change must be grounded in permanent moral principles
Why should you devote the many hours that it will take to read this book, which is over 450 pages long? Here are a dozen possible reasons.

You want to understand the Ten Commandments better.
You want to understand economics better.
You want to know more about the importance of the Ten Commandments in history.
You want to answer theological liberals who attack the Ten Commandments as valid only in an ancient agricultural world.
You want to answer political liberals who insist that Jesus was a socialist revolutionary, or close to it.
You want to see if the Bible sets forth moral and judicial principles that inevitably produce a free market economy if widely obeyed.
You want to answer skeptics (humanists and pietists) who insist that “There is no such thing as Christian economics.”
You want to know if the Ten Commandments are an unbreakable unity.
You want to know why Christians take a day off on Sunday rather than Saturday.
You want to know if the civil government should prohibit people from working on Sunday.
You want to know how the Ten Commandments should be applied in the modern world.
You want to know how the Ten Commandments ought to be numbered and why.

This book is part of a project: an economic commentary on the Bible. It is the third volume in a series that today has 17 volumes. When I wrote the first edition of this volume in 1985, and the Institute for Christian Economics published it in 1986, I did not have anything like the volume of verse-by-verse exegesis behind me.
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I have today.

This book had an odd history. In my 1986 Preface, I recorded the following series of events.

The day I finished the final reading (ha!) of the page proofs of The Sinai Strategy, I sat down and began editing a manuscript on the covenant by Ray Sutton. It is an insightful book, one which I suspect may provide Bible students with the fundamental framework for understanding the biblical concept of the covenant, which is the Bible’s most important doctrine relating to the relationship between God and man.

As I was reading his chapter on the Ten Commandments, I was stunned. He had entirely missed the most important single piece of evidence for his thesis. So had I. So has every commentator I have ever read. What he had failed to see was that his five-point outline of the covenant, which he had developed independently of the Ten Commandments, fits them like a glove. More than this: It opens up the whole structure of the Ten Commandments.

My immediate thought was: “Here comes a major revision of The Sinai Strategy, and there goes $4000 in typesetting charges, plus two week’s work on the index I just completed.” The indexing upset me most. Above everything else associated with writing a book, I hate to index. Yet if I were to attempt to incorporate my discovery into the text, I would have to rewrite everything.

Or else I could change the Preface by adding a summary of Sutton’s outline. So I went back to the page proofs to see how lengthy the Preface was. Guess what? No Preface. Nothing. It was listed right there in the Table of Contents, but there was nothing in the page proofs, nothing in my original manuscript, and nothing in my computer. I had forgotten to write a Preface. It would have been listed in the Table of Contents, but there would have been nothing in the book . . . .

So, what I have decided to do is to take the easy way out. I am not going to rewrite this book. I am going to tell you here what the out-
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line should have been, and you can insert it into the chapters mentally as you read. None of my conclusions should need revising, I hope. There is some space left at the end of most of the chapters, so I will add a few comments if necessary. The content of the book should not be affected, but the ability of the reader to “fit the pieces together” might have been easier if I had seen Sutton’s manuscript earlier, assuming I would have spotted its applicability to the Ten Commandments.

In retrospect, I see that I made the correct decision. I did not know enough to revise the book to the extent that I have revised it in 2006. In 1985, I was not in a position to re-write this book. I did not grasp the fact that the Pentateuch itself is structured in terms of the five-point biblical covenant model.\(^1\) I did not recognize that the Book of Exodus is structured in terms of this model.\(^2\) I did not recognize that the Book of Leviticus is structured in terms of this model,\(^3\) or that the five sacrifices in Leviticus are structured in terms of it.\(^4\) I did not recognize that the Book of Revelation is structured in terms of it, and neither did David Chilton.\(^5\) I did recognize that Deuteronomy is.


\(^2\) Ibid., pp. xlix–liv, 45–47.

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Sutton had reminded me of Meredith G. Kline’s discussion of this fact in *The Treaty of the Great King* (1963), following George Mendenhall’s discovery in the 1950’s.6

The Covenant’s Outline

What Sutton argues is that there is a five-part structure to both the Old Testament and New Testament covenants. This points to the fact that there is continuity between these two covenants. He modified the structure suggested by Kline for the Book of Deuteronomy, substituting “hierarchy” for “kingdom prologue” (point two). I had never carefully considered this structure before, and surely not as a guide to the structure of the Bible. Neither had Sutton. But I recognized instantly the enormous importance of this discovery for a correct understanding of the Biblical covenant and covenants generally. His book, *That You May Prosper*, was published in 1987. The model:

1. Transcendence/immanence (redemption)
2. Hierarchy/authority (submission)
3. Ethics/dominion (stipulations)
4. Judicial/evaluational (sanctions)
5. Legitimacy/inheritance (continuity)

This may not seem to be a revolutionary insight, but it is. It is not possible for me to reproduce all of his arguments that support this interpretation, nor discuss all of its applications. Sutton’s book is the bare-bones minimum. He had to cut down the manuscript in order to

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keep the book to 318 pages.

Following Kline, he argued that this same structure is found in the suzerainty treaties of the ancient world. The king (suzerain) would initially announce his sovereignty over a nation, demand loyalty, impose sanctions for disobedience, offer protection for obedience, publish a law code, and establish the rules of succession. Sutton believes that these treaties were simply imitations of a fundamental structure of human government which is inherent in man’s relationship with God.

Two decades later, I feel compelled to revise this book.

Chapter 3 required a complete revision: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain.” In 1986, I followed Rushdoony’s exposition in *Institutes of Biblical Law*, which stresses the oath aspect of the third commandment. The hermeneutical problem for my thesis was not clear to me then, namely, that the oath is closely associated with the fourth point of the biblical covenant model. Law is associated with point three. Law and oath are covenantally linked, of course, but the third commandment has to do more with God’s title or possession of His name, and therefore His authority over the uses to which His name can be put.

What brought this discrepancy to my attention was a suggested revision that a reader sent to Sutton after the Institute for Christian Economics published his book in 1987. He had more accurately seen the nature of the five points. He suggested this revision:

1. Transcendence/immanence
2. Hierarchy/authority
3. Ethics/dominion
4. Oath/sanctions
5. Succession/inheritance
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This creative individual had created an acronym: THEOS, the ancient Greek word for God. But he had done far more than this. He had recognized the importance of the covenantal oath in the fourth point, namely, the self-maledictory oath of every biblical covenant. The oath involves sanctions. This, I did not see clearly in 1986.

With this in mind, I now return to the Preface of 1986, but with the revised scheme for points 4 and 5.

1. Transcendence/immanence (sovereignty)

Some of the highlights include the following. In Genesis 1:1 we read, “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” He is the Creator God. He is not part of the creation. Thus, the Bible announces the Creator/creature distinction. This distinction is fundamental to every aspect of life. God is not to be in any way confused with His creation. He is not part of a hypothetical “chain of being” with His creation. As the Psalmist put it: “For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods” (Ps. 97:9). “The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people” (Ps. 99:2). Perhaps the crucial verses in the Bible that deal with God’s transcendence are Isaiah 55:8–9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

7. Those who are familiar with the writings of Christian philosopher Cornelius Van Til will recognize that the Creator/creature distinction is Van Til’s starting point: the sovereignty of God and therefore the non-autonomy of man. John Frame writes: “Van Til’s apologetics is essentially simple, however complicated its elaborations. It makes two basic assertions: (1) that human beings are obligated to presuppose God in all of their thinking, and (2) that unbelievers resist this obli-
God is transcendent, but He is also immanent. He is not so far removed from His creation that He has no contact with it. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God hovered (moved) upon the face of the waters. This imagery of God as a bird hovering over its brood is found throughout the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 32:11 compares God’s deliverance of Israel out of the wilderness to an eagle fluttering over her young. Psalm 91:4 reads: “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” Thus, the Bible denies both deism and pantheism. God is not like the god of deism who “winds up the universe” as a man winds up a clock, and then goes away, leaving it to its own preordained, impersonal devices. We do not live in a world of cosmic impersonalism. God is also not to be identified with His creation, as pantheism’s god is. The creation reflects His glory; it does not participate in God. God is present with His creation; He is not part of it.

2. Hierarchy/authority (representation)

The second principle of the covenant is that of hierarchy/authority. The King of creation comes before men and demands that they submit to Him. God required Adam to obey Him. The relationship between God and man is therefore one of command and obedience. The covenant in every aspect of thought and life. The first assumption leads Van Til to criticize the notion of intellectual autonomy; the second leads him to discuss the noetic [knowledge] effects of sin. . . . The initial description of presuppositionalism shows insight in the prominent place given to Van Til’s critique of autonomy: that is, I think, the foundation of Van Til’s system and its most persuasive principle. We must not do apologetics as if we were a law unto ourselves, as if we were the measure of all things. Christian thinking, like all of Christian life, is subject to God’s lordship.” John Frame, “Van Til and the Ligonier Apologetic,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLVII (1985), p. 282.

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enant is therefore a bond. It is a personal relationship between responsible individuals. It is to be a union. But this union is not ontological. It is not a union of common “being.” God is not some pantheistic being. Men are not evolving into God (Eastern religion). It is a personal relationship based on authority and submission.

3. Ethics/dominion (kingdom)

The third aspect of the covenant is its ethical quality. The terms of submission are ethical. The union between covenant-keepers and their God is an ethical union. The disunion between covenant-breakers and God is equally ethical: They are rebels against His law. Adam’s fall into sin did not take place because he lacked some essence, some aspect of “being.” He was created perfect. He fell willfully. He knew exactly what he was doing. “Adam was not deceived,” Paul writes (I Tim. 2:14a).

This emphasis on ethics separates biblical religion from pagan religion. Man is supposed to exercise dominion, but not autonomous power. He is also not to seek power through ritual, or through any attempted manipulation of God or the universe. Dominion is based on adherence to the law of God – by Christ, perfectly and definitively, and by men, subordinately and progressively. Thus, ethics is set in opposition to magic (what Van Til calls metaphysics).

We are not to misuse God’s name in a quest for power over creation. God spoke the creation into existence by the power of His word.

4. Oath/sanctions (evaluation/imputation)

The fourth aspect of the covenant is its judicial character. The es-
sence of maturity is man’s ability to render God-honoring judgment. God renders definitive judgment in His word, the Bible, and renders final judgment at the end of time. Man is to render analogous judgment progressively through time. During the creation week, God said “It is good” after each day. He *evaluated* His own work, and He *rendered judgment verbally*. God is the supreme King, but also the supreme Judge. When He *declares* a man innocent, because of His grace to the person through the gift of saving faith, God thereby imputes Christ’s righteousness to him.\(^8\) Without God’s declaration of salvation, meaning without the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to overcome the imputation of Adam’s sin, there is no salvation.

When a covenant is “cut,” men are reminded of both the blessings and the cursings attached to the covenant. There are oaths and vows. There are covenant rituals. There are visible signs and seals. We see this in the church (baptism, Lord’s Supper), the family (marriage ceremony), and in civil government (pledge of allegiance, oath-taking of officers).

5. *Succession/inheritance (continuity)*

Finally, there is the succession/inheritance aspect of the covenant. There are covenantally specified standards of transferring the blessings of God to the next generation. In other words, the covenant extends over time and across generations. It is a bond that inks past, present, and future. It has implications for men’s time perspective. It makes covenantally faithful people mindful of the earthly future after they die. It also makes them respectful of the past. For example, they

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assume that the terms of the covenant do not change in principle. At the same time, they also know that they must be diligent in seeking to apply the fixed ethical terms of the covenant to new historical situations. They are respectful of great historic creeds, and they are also advocates of progress, creedal and otherwise. They believe in change within the fixed ethical terms of the covenant.

The following material appeared in the 1986 Preface.

The Structure of the Ten Commandments

What Sutton had not seen when he wrote his first draft was that the Ten Commandments adhere to this same structure, even its very numbering. Once we recognize that this structure undergirds the Ten Commandments, we come to a remarkable insight: There really are two “tables” of the law. No, there was not a pair of stones, with five laws written on each. There were two tablets with all ten written on each. They served as copies, one for God and one for Israel, in much the same way as a modern sales receipt, which is implicitly modeled after God’s covenant. But there were two separate sections of the Ten Commandments (literally: ten “words” [Deut. 4:13]). They were arranged along this same covenantal pattern in two separate sections, 1–5 and 6–10.

In the Bible, there is to be a two-fold witness to the truth. Conviction for a capital crime requires two witnesses (Deut. 17:7; Num. 35:30). Satan in the garden sought two human witnesses against God, to test God’s Word and therefore challenge it. There are two angelic witnesses for every demon, for Satan only took a third of the angelic host with him (Rev. 12:4). Revelation 8 provides a deeply symbolic description of God’s earthly judgment. He sends angels to judge one-third of trees, sea, creatures, ships, rivers, waters, sun, moon, and
stars. In short, *two-thirds are spared*. This is the testimony to God’s victory, in time and on earth. The double-witness pattern is basic to covenantal law and historic judgment.⁹

What we find is that the very structure of the Ten Commandments serves as a two-fold witness to the structure of the covenant. Sutton subsequently concluded that the first five-part pattern deals with the priestly functions, while the second five-part pattern deals with the kingly.

### I. First Table (priestly)

The traditional distinction between the “two tables of the law”¹⁰ is based on (1) what man owes to God, namely, proper worship (first table) and (2) what man owes to his fellow man (second table).

The problem has always come with the fifth commandment, which requires children to honor parents. This one seems to violate any five-five division between the God-oriented “first table” and the man-oriented or society-oriented pattern of the “second table.” In fact, as we shall see, the fifth commandment is right where it belongs, on the “priestly side of the table.” Martin Luther’s concept of the priesthood of all believers is applicable here.

This arrangement has implications for the kingly category. It deals with coveting as a comprehensive sin. Coveting in general is prohibited.

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¹⁰ The traditional language of two tables, with five laws on each, is incorrect. The physical tables were not divided this way. But there is a five-five division conceptually.
1. Transcendence/immanence (sovereignty)

The first commandment begins with a description of who God is. He is the God who delivered Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Therefore, we must have no other gods before Him.

This God is the God of liberation – liberation in history. He is transcendent because he is the God of gods, the one true God who exercises absolute sovereignty. How do we know this? First, He says so in Genesis 1. Second, He offers evidence: His defeat of the gods of Egypt. In fact, because He is transcendent, He must be immanent. He is omnipresent. The Psalmist says: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Ps. 139:7–8). Jeremiah writes: “Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD” (Jer. 23:23–24). Not only is He generally present throughout creation, He is specially present with His people. “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? (Deut. 4:7). He is a universal God, the God of creation, yet He is also the God of history. In short, this most high God is the God of deliverance. Therefore, men are to have no other gods before Him, meaning above Him.

2. Hierarchy/authority (representation)

He then forbids the use of graven images. Men bow down to their gods. This shows their subordination to them. God said that men are
not to make graven images for themselves, nor are they to serve them. This would be an act of rebellion: removing themselves from the subordination to God, and substituting a rival god of their choice – their autonomous choice – to worship. There is a warning attached: God is a jealous God who visits (sees) the iniquity of men. There is also a promise: God also shows mercy to thousands (of generations) of those who love him and keep His commandments. Keep His commandments, therefore, and gain His mercy. He is in power over men, and He is in a position as a judge to dispense punishments and mercy. In short, obey.

3. Ethics/dominion (kingdom)

Do not take the name of God in vain. In 1986, I made an error of analysis. I wrote:

As I argue in the third chapter, by using the name of a society’s god, rebellious men seek to invoke power. It is an attempt to manipulate that god in order to get him to do the will of man. God warns us against using His name in this way. To do so is to use His name in vain.

This does not mean that there is no power associated with God’s name. On the contrary, there is immense power. This is why men are not to invoke this power autonomously. God promises to honor His name when it is used lawfully by church authorities, which is his ordained monopoly. The church alone can legitimately declare excommunication in the name of God. Thus, what we call “swearing” (profanity) is an unlawful attempt to manipulate God by rebellious men who assume the position of His ordained monopoly, the church.

This analysis confused point four – sanctions – with point three:
ethics. The declaration of sanctions is not what the third commandment is about. The third commandment is about extending God’s name in history by extending His kingdom in history. His kingdom bears His name. His name is not to be associated with words or deeds that are not in conformity to His revelation of Himself in His law.

I then went on to apply what I had written about the oath.

The magician believes that “words of power” can be used to manipulate external events. Man seeks power by manipulating his environment. He attempts to become master of the creation by the use of secret phrases or techniques known only to initiates, whether witch doctors or scientists. Men seek power through manipulation rather than by ethics, obedience, and service to others.

The prohibition on the misuse of God’s name cuts off magic at the roots. The commandment, being negative, is nonetheless positive: ethical. We are considering the priestly function here, however; the ethical and dominical aspects are more clearly seen in the eighth commandment, which parallels the third.

This is accurate, but it is incomplete. The magician and the power religionist mistake invocation for dominion. This is a fundamental distinction between dominion religion and power religion. Biblical religion establishes dominion by covenant, as Sutton’s subtitle affirmed. God’s Bible-revealed law is His mandated tool of dominion. Thus, ethics rather than power is the heart of biblical religion. Obedience is central, not the use of God’s name as a means to power. Power religion uses magical words in the broadest sense – “word magic” – to extend the power of the manipulating person or group. Power religion substitutes words for ethics. It seeks to imitate God, who spoke the universe into existence. Man does not have creative power, only re-creative power. Obedience to God’s law is man’s lawful way to extend the kingdom of God outward: subordination.
4. Oath/sanctions (evaluation/imputation)

Sutton argues that the sabbath was the day of evaluation in the Old Testament. As I argue in chapter four, following James Jordan’s exegesis, the sabbath was also the day of judgment by God. On that day, Satan tempted man. Thus, there had to be judgment. There was supposed to be judgment of Satan by Adam provisionally, and then by God upon His return that afternoon. Instead, Adam sided with Satan against God’s Word, and God returned to judge both man and Satan. But it was indeed judgment day. The sabbath was therefore a day of rendering judgment on the efforts of the previous six days. Men halted their normal labors and rested, as God had rested after His six-day efforts. In the New Testament, the church celebrates the Lord’s Supper on the Lord’s day, which is analogous to (but not the same as) the Old Testament sabbath. Each church member is to examine himself for the previous week’s transgressions, making confession before God before taking communion (I Cor.11:28–32). Paul’s words are forthright: “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (vv. 31–32). Those who judge themselves falsely can thereby come under God’s earthly judgment, which is why Paul points to sickness and even death within the Corinthian church (v. 30). In short, the fourth commandment is judicial.

I also argue that the sabbath millennium is coming, and that this will be an era of rest and judgment, when God’s people will take dominion by exercising godly judgment, thereby bringing Satan and his host under preliminary condemnation, in preparation for God’s return at the end of the millennium to render final judgment.
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5. Succession/inheritance (continuity)

Honoring father and mother is required because of the testamental nature of the covenant. Men grow old and need care; they also transfer wealth and authority to successors. To this fifth commandment a promise is attached: long life in the land which God gives to us. This commandment seems to be man-oriented, and also a uniquely positive law, in contrast to the priestly negatives of the first four. Nevertheless, if we see this law as essentially priestly in scope, then it places the family under the overall protection of the church, or in Old Testament times, under the protection of the priests. The priesthood, not the civil government, is the protector of the primary agency of welfare, the family, and therefore the church is the secondary agency of welfare, should the family prove incapable of providing for its own.

This is why Jesus cited the fifth commandment when He criticized the Pharisees for giving alms in public but not taking care of their parents (Mark 7:10–13). They were being unfaithful to their calling as sons. They were therefore illegitimate sons. Jesus was calling them bastards. He also told them that they were the sons of their father, the devil (John 8:44). Again, He was calling them illegitimate spiritual sons rather than sons of Abraham, which they proclaimed of themselves.

It should not be surprising that the church is required to care for “widows indeed,” meaning 60-year-old women who have not remarried and whose younger relatives refused to support them (I Tim. 5:2–5). This is because the protection of the family is a priestly function. It should also not be surprising that the same passage says that the man who refuses to take care of his family is worse than an infidel.

11. The sabbath law was essentially negative: no work.

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(I Tim. 5:8). This is why the church can and should excommunicate such people. They come under the priestly ban.

It is clear that the civil government is not the economic protector of the family when it breaks down. The church is. The unwarranted growth of the welfare State in the twentieth century is therefore a manifestation of a satanic pseudo-family and a pseudo-priesthood of the modern messianic State. This development has paralleled the breakdown of the family, a breakdown which the State in fact subsidizes through tax-financed welfare programs; it has also paralleled the default of the church as the secondary agency of welfare.

II. Second Table (kingly)

There is no question that this second table of the ten is not ecclesiastical and priestly in focus but rather social (familial) and political. On the other hand, the second table is no less religious than the first table of the law. Both tables are inescapably religious. But the two are separated in terms of the primary locus of sovereignty: family and civil government, not church.

6. Transcendence/immanence (sovereignty)

It is illegal to kill men. Why? Because men are made in the image of God (Gen. 9:5–6). They reflect His transcendence in a way that animals and other aspects of the creation do not. Man is uniquely symbolic of God.

God is transcendent. He is untouchable, absolutely sovereign, and beyond challenge. Man, His image, is not equally sovereign or equally protected. To a limited extent, he is protected. Animals, for
instance, are afraid of him (Gen. 9:2). Still, he is vulnerable to attack since Adam’s Fall. Thus, to attack man seems to be an indirect way to attack God. This is one reason why Satan tempted man in the first place. To a kill man unlawfully is an affront against the image of God.

I discuss “God’s monopoly of execution,” the civil government, in chapter six, but I failed to link this commandment with the first commandment. The transcendence of God is the basis of this commandment: The transcendent God must be worshipped, and His image must not be slain.

7. Hierarchy/authority (representation)

Adultery is prohibited. Adultery in the Bible is linked theologically to idolatry. Ancient pagan societies adopted ritual prostitution, sometimes in the temple or at the entrance to the temple. To break the marital covenant is the earthly equivalent of breaking the covenant with God. This was the message of the prophet Hosea. Adultery is the equivalent of worshipping a false god, an idol. This is why it is punished by execution (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Like the sixth commandment, which is analogous to and reflective of the first commandment, so is the seventh analogous to and reflective of the second commandment: the worship of graven images. Ultimately, both violations are the worship of autonomous man, the worship of the products of man’s rebellion.

The man is head of the household. He represents God before his wife and children. They are to obey him. His authority is analogous to and reflective of God’s authority. The wife is functionally subordi-

12. This is still practiced in India.
nate to the husband, just as the Son of God is functionally subordinate to the Father. The wife is not ethically inferior to the husband, just as the Son of God is not ethically inferior to the Father. There is hierarchy in the family, just as there is hierarchy in the Godhead itself. (This is what theologians call the “economical Trinity,” to distinguish it from the “ontological Trinity,” meaning the co-equal nature of the three Persons. Both doctrines are true, depending on what aspect of the Trinity you are discussing.)

Adultery is a ritual denial of the faithfulness of Christ to His church, which Paul compares to a marriage (Eph. 5:22–33). It is a denial of the permanence of the hierarchical bond between Christ and the church.

Adultery is also a ritual denial of the Trinity. It says that the covenantal bond between marriage partners is breakable. But this bond is analogous to the bond among the members of the Trinity. Thus, it is a denial of the Trinity, for if men can lawfully break the marriage covenant at will, then analogously, so can God break the covenant that binds the Persons of the Godhead. This leads to polytheism, which is why polytheistic cultures of the ancient world so often had ritual prostitution. This ritual reflected the theological foundation of these cultures. Adultery is therefore a form of idolatry, and analogous to the idolatry which is prohibited by the second commandment. It is a denial of man’s subordination to God.

8. Ethics/dominion (kingdom)

The eighth commandment protects private property. This is a fundamental aspect of dominion. The third commandment prohibits using the Lord’s name in vain. This commandment prohibits any interference with another man’s tools of dominion (his capital goods),
and it also protects the fruits of his labor, consumer goods. Just as a deceiver deliberately misuses God’s name in order to gain people’s trust, so does a thief appropriate wealth that was produced by the owner, or bought by the owner, or lawfully inherited by the owner. The deceiver wants to manipulate those around him in order to gain his ends apart from lawful service. The thief has a similar view of life: to enrich himself at the expense of others without voluntary exchange and service to the victim. Both the deceiver and the thief seek to escape the limits God has placed on them. Both seek power without covenantal faithfulness to the laws of God.

9. Oath/sanctions (evaluation/imputation)

The ninth commandment prohibits false witness. This commandment implicitly refers to a law court. It is illegal to harm another person by testifying falsely to his character or his actions. Satan asked Adam and Eve to act against God’s law – in short, to deny the integrity of God and the reliability of His Word. God’s judgment is imposed in terms of an accurate assessment of all the facts, and then these acts are evaluated by Him in terms of His law. He bears true witness to Himself and to the acts, thoughts, and motives of all men. God does not bear false witness against others. In other words, He evaluates reliably. On the day of judgment, His judgment will be perfect. Meanwhile, in time and on earth, men are to “think God’s thoughts after Him.” They are to evaluate everything in terms of God’s standards, and in terms of an accurate perception of external events. They are to regard history as God’s product. To testify falsely against a truthful historical record is to violate the ninth commandment.

The link between the sabbath law and the false witness law is the
day of judgment. Just as each person at the end of the week in Israel was supposed to evaluate his work, and whose rest was an acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty over all of history, so is the commandment against false witness designed to force men to acknowledge God’s sovereignty over history. Man does not create a new story by distorting the past. Man does not create a new future by distorting the past. Man only brings himself under condemnation by attempting such a crime against man and God.

10. Succession/inheritance (continuity)

Coveting another person’s goods is to covet the inheritance he will leave to his children. This also prohibits a premature coveting of parents’ wealth by the children. Coveting is the first step to theft (eighth commandment). It is also a first step before adultery (seventh commandment, “thy neighbor’s wife”) and sometimes before murder (sixth commandment, e.g., David’s murder of Uriah). Coveting is a denial of the ninth commandment, too: an implicit assertion of the illegitimacy of the present legal order which establishes the owner’s rights to his property and his children’s legal rights of inheritance. Evil men are tempted to misuse the courts to achieve their goals. Ahab’s theft of Naboth’s vineyard (I Kings 21) is representative: Coveting led to the corrupting of justice through the hiring of false witnesses and then the murder of a righteous man.

The jubilee law in Old Testament Israel was designed to reduce such coveting with respect to land. Land had to be returned to the lawful, legitimate heirs every 50 years (Lev. 25).

In effect, the covetous person regards himself as the true heir to his neighbor’s patrimony. He wishes to dispossess the lawful heirs. He plots against history – the history which led to his neighbor’s position
and goods – in the name of his own autonomy.

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections of five commandments each. The first section is priestly, while the second is kingly or dominical. Both sections reflect the same five-part aspect of the Deuteronomic covenant structure.

Is this structure permanent? Sutton traces it back to Adam, Noah, and Abraham. He traces it forward to David, Malachi, and Jesus’ Great Commission. I find it also in the temptation of Christ by Satan, and in the trial of Jesus by the Jewish leaders.

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments are the archetypal summary of the two covenants of God, Old and New. They manifest the five component parts of the Deuteronomic covenant, and they manifest them twice: commandments 1–5 and 6–10. They provide a dual witness to the truth. By identifying all five elements of the covenant, we can better understand God’s legal claims on all men in general and redeemed men in particular. These claims involve economic claims and requirements, as we shall see.

In this revised edition, I have added footnotes that refer the reader to materials that I wrote after 1986, especially my other commentaries. I have also removed two sections from this Preface: “Satan’s Temptation of Jesus” and “The Pharisees’ False Covenant Lawsuit Against Jesus.” Readers who want to read the original version of this book can download a free copy here: www.freebooks.com.
INTRODUCTION

A standard remark that we hear in Christian circles is this: “The Bible has answers for all of man’s problems.” This sounds impressive. Problems arise, however, when we begin to ask specific questions about the Bible’s answers for specific problems in any one area of cultural or civic life. All of a sudden, people who only moments before had assured us that the Bible has the answers now begin to backtrack. “Well,” they say, “the Bible has all the answers for man’s spiritual problems.”

This is a significant qualification. It is an admission of failure. If the Bible has answers for only narrowly defined spiritual problems, and not for the concrete, day-to-day problems of economics, family relationships, politics, law, medicine, and all other areas of life, then Christians are faced with a terrible dilemma. Either these areas of life are not areas affected by the “spirit”—the so-called “spiritual” concerns— or else the Bible doesn’t really have the specific answers that men desperately need in their daily decision-making. Either we live in a dualistic world—a world of totally separated parts: “spirit” and “matter”—or else we have been mistaken about the ability of the Bible to answer man’s questions.

But what if we refuse to accept either of these explanations? What if we still want to insist that the Bible does have answers for men’s problems? There is a third explanation, namely, that the original statement is correct after all: The Bible really does have answers to all of men’s problems. These answers are in the form of first principles. These biblical first principles apply to every area of life. Sometimes they apply specifically, such as this law: “Thou shalt not kill.” In other situations, they apply in principle, such as the scientific principle that the universe is orderly. But why is it orderly? Because it is sustained providentially by the absolutely sovereign God who created it out of nothing. Biblical principles do apply, and without them, there can be no accurate explanation for “the way the world works.”
There is a fourth possibility. Sometimes the Bible presents very specific laws that modern men mistakenly believe no longer apply to our era. People misinterpret these Old Testament laws as temporary instructions given by God in ancient times – laws that no longer apply to the modern world. But what if God still intends for His people to honor these laws? What if these laws really are valid in modern times? What if the presumed dualism between spirit and matter is false in the case of specific biblical laws, as well as false in theory?

**Spiritual Problems and Biblical Law**

The original statement is true. The Bible does provide the answer for every problem, not just narrowly defined “spiritual” problems. What we need to understand is that all of man’s problems are spiritual problems.

The dualism of spirit and matter is an ancient heresy. It was called gnosticism in the ancient world, and it was a major rival philosophy to Christianity. Forms of it have revived throughout history. We must reject it entirely. We must recognize that man’s so-called “earthly” problems are in reality spiritual problems, because when Adam rebelled, he really rebelled. It wasn’t some Sunday morning rebellion; it was an “all week long” kind of rebellion. He rebelled in spirit, but this rebellion had an outward manifestation: eating the forbidden fruit. Was that forbidden fruit an earthly problem? Of course; Adam was an earthly creature. Was that forbidden fruit a spiritual problem? Of course; Adam was a spiritual creature. Did God’s judgment on Adam involve his flesh, not to mention his environment? Yes. Did God’s judgment involve Adam’s spirit? Yes. And what we say of Adam we also must say of ourselves, and of mankind in general. Every problem is a spiritual problem, for man’s spirit is in ethical
rebellion against God’s Spirit.

Modern Christians have had a false view of spirituality because they have had an incomplete view of sin. They have failed to understand how comprehensive the effects of sin really are, and because of this, they have not understood how comprehensive the redemption of Jesus Christ really is.¹ They have failed to understand that the redemption of Jesus Christ involves both the spirit of man and the body of man. It also involves the redemption of the environment of man. In short, Jesus Christ definitively (once and for all) removed the curse of God from redeemed men. Because that curse was comprehensive, so is the removal of that curse. Progressively redeemed men are told to work out their salvations with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Finally, God will declare them righteous before all men and angels at the day of judgment, when the removal of the curse will be complete. In short, what was definitive at Calvary – Satan’s defeat – is being progressively revealed in history, and will be finally revealed at the day of judgment and in eternity.

Because Christians in our day have failed to understand these fundamental biblical principles, they have misunderstood the meaning of “spiritual.” David Chilton’s comments are to the point: “When the Bible uses the term Spiritual, it is generally speaking of the Holy Spirit. . . . To be Spiritual is to be guided and motivated by the Holy Spirit. It means obeying His commands as recorded in the Scriptures. The Spiritual man is not someone who floats in midair and hears eerie voices. The Spiritual man is the man who does what the Bible says (Rom. 8:4–8). This means, therefore, that we are supposed to get

involved in life. God wants us to apply Christian standards everywhere, in every area. Spirituality does not mean retreat and withdrawal from life; it means dominion. The basic Christian confession of faith is that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9–10) – Lord of all things, in heaven and on earth. As Lord, He is to be glorified in every area (Rom. 11:36). In terms of Christian Spirituality, in terms of God’s requirements for Christian action in every area of life, there is no reason to retreat.”

But how do we know when we are being Spiritual? By looking to the Bible in order to discover the principles of Spiritual living. What is this system of permanent principles called in the Bible? The law. Modern Christians may prefer to use some other word to describe these fixed, permanent principles – rules, guidelines, blueprints for living – but the Bible calls these principles the law of God. This is why faith in, respect for, and obedience to the law always accompany true Spirituality.

Let us return to the question at hand: Does the Bible speak to every kind of problem that man has? It does. I believe in the third explanation: The Bible provides the only source of true principles of knowledge, with God the Creator as the only source of order. I also believe in the fourth explanation: the continuing validity of many Mosaic laws. We have ignored these laws in modern times, and we have paid a heavy price. We will pay an even heavier price if we continue to discount the laws of God.

How do we know that a particular Old Testament law is no longer legally binding, let alone no longer morally binding, in New Testament times? There can be only one legitimate answer: because the New Testament says so. There should be a specific injunction that a

particular Mosaic law, or a particular class of Mosaic laws, is no longer binding in New Testament times because Jesus’ work of redemption has fulfilled it and also annulled it. If the New Testament does not reveal this, then the law still must be in force.  

If a New Testament principle implicitly annuls a category of the Mosaic law, then that law no longer is in force. But this must be proven through exegesis and theology, not merely assumed. For example, if a Mosaic law was tied explicitly or implicitly to the priesthood, the land of Israel, or the tribes of Jacob, it is no longer in force, because the priesthood, the holy status of the land of Israel, and the tribes of Jacob no longer exist in the New Covenant era. But a Bible scholar must show that a case law was uniquely tied to one of these three Mosaic Covenant factors in order to make his case that a particular case law was annulled.

Most Christians say that they believe in the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue). A few say that these laws no longer apply in New Testament times, but most Christians refuse to go this far. If we turn to the Ten Commandments, we should expect to find principles, as well as specifics, that give us guidance for evaluating the successes or failures of our own era and civilization. If God threatens a rebellious civilization with temporal judgment, just as He threatens individual sinners with final judgment, then we ought to be able to discover laws that God expects us not to violate. If we turn to the Ten Commandments, we should be able to discover the foundational

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standards of biblical social order.⁵

At the very least, we should find in the Ten Commandments laws that apply to civil government and economics. After all, God delivered these laws to a nation that had experienced many decades of tyrannical slavery. God announced Himself as their deliverer in the very first commandment. Wouldn’t we expect to find rules that govern economics and politics in these laws? The answer should be an unequivocal “yes.”

Why is it, then, that so few commentators have ever addressed this problem? What are the political and economic laws of the Ten Commandments? Why don’t commentators ask the two crucial questions:

1. How did these commandments apply in Old Testament times?
2. How should they apply today?

The reason is fairly simple: They do not believe in the God of the Bible or God’s revealed will for mankind, His law. This is especially true of seminary professors.

Useful Idiots

A good example of the professional drivel of modern antinomian “scholarship so-called” is a book by Walter Harrelson, *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights*. This book is as forthright and honest a defense of the Ten Commandments as the late Premier Konstantin Chernenko’s book on human rights in the Soviet Union was for

human rights in the Soviet Union. What Harrelson and other academic “experts” on the Ten Commandments really want is to escape from the Ten Commandments. Their faith is clear: better situation ethics than the restraining effects of God’s law. As he says, “In contemporary, secularized Western society there is a wistful longing for such norms, upon which individual and family could depend in all circumstances. One reason for the rapid growth today of evangelical religion of a fundamentalist nature, or for the growth of charismatic religion, with its rigid personal and communal norms, is that such communities are thought to supply just norms. . . . We should know, however, that if we are to find a way to supply nourishment to meet this hunger, we have to do so with the utmost care. The gains of a contextualist and existentialist ethic are too numerous and too solid to be endangered by facile returns to absolutist norms. The enslavement of the human spirit in the name of religion is too well known in history. We dare not risk a recurrence of such enslavement out of fear that our society is about to collapse into normlessness. And the misuse of norms for the protection of the privileged is a perennial danger.”

Or, as another concerned student of biblical law and authoritarian regimes once asked: “Hath God said?”

But God hath said! God said that Egypt was the tyranny, not Israel. God showed the Israelites that Assyria and Babylon, not His law, were the true threats to human rights. But in the name of Jesus, and in the name of human rights, today’s academic specialists in the law

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of God come before us and warn us of the supposedly frightful risks of asserting the eternal validity of an eternal law-order of an eternal God. They worry about offending the defenders of “a contextualist and existentialist ethic,” meaning their old professors at Yale Divinity School (or wherever). They survey the strongholds of these situation ethicists, and rather than seeing the looming collapse of humanist civilization as the greatest opportunity in man’s history for the triumph of God’s law as the only possible substitute for this collapsing moral order, they urge faithful Christians to restrain themselves. Why, such efforts might embarrass these waffling theologians among their peers, and their peers are not the tithing people in the pews who pay their salaries, but the tenured atheists in the prestige divinity schools that awarded them their coveted (and low market value) doctorates. (I’ve got a Ph.D. myself; I know how little it is worth these days.)

In short, these fearful, obscure, and academically irrelevant drones, with their Ph.D.’s, their tenured seminary positions, and their minimal prospects for future employment if righteous Christian people ever purge the seminaries of heretics, now see what is coming: a revival of interest in God’s law, and the rapid development of political skills on the part of those who take God’s law seriously. They see their liberal, pleasant, tenured little world on the verge of disaster, for those naive people who have funded their rebellion – the little people in the pews – may soon catch on to their game. The court prophets are once again in trouble on Mt. Carmel. They saw what happened last time, and they are not happy about it.

Sadly, they have allies in the conservative camp: those who preach the irrelevance of the Ten Commandments in New Testament times. But pietism’s influence is also waning. The ecclesiastical irrelevance

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of the older pietistic fundamentalism is becoming pronounced. What has taken place in the United States since 19809 – really, since 196510 – has exposed the nakedness of the fundamentalist antinomians. They had no concrete, specifically biblical social answers for the radicals of the late 1960’s, and they knew it. They went into retreat in the 1970’s, and they are now being ignored into oblivion.

At last, conservative Christian laymen, and even a growing number of pastors, are beginning to see the light. They are beginning to understand the choices laid before them:

God’s law or chaos
God’s law or tyranny
God’s law or God’s wrath

Proof Texts, Blueprints, and Economic Antinomianism

The Ten Commandments set forth a strategy. This strategy is a strategy for dominion. The general principles of the Ten Commandments summarize the whole of biblical law. The case-law applications of Exodus 21–23 illustrate ways in which the Ten Commandments are to be applied.11 The Decalogue itself is the master plan, the


10. When the counter-culture became visible publicly, and fundamentalists had nothing biblical to offer in place of the establishment’s humanist culture, yet also offered nothing explicitly biblical to challenge the counter-culture.

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blueprint for biblical social order. These laws have very definite economic implications. This sort of thinking is foreign to virtually all modern Christian social and economic thinkers, whether conservative or liberal, Protestant or Catholic.

If I were to offer a single sentence of warning with respect to the misuse of the Bible by modern scholars, it would be this: Beware of doubletalk and outright gibberish. I will put it even more bluntly: If you cannot understand what a theologian has written concerning a perfectly plain passage in the Bible, trust your instincts; you are probably being conned by a professional. These hypocrites for over three hundred years have made a lifetime occupation out of hiding their radical ideas behind a mask of orthodox language. They want to be low-risk revolutionaries, fully tenured, with their salaries provided by unsuspecting Christian sheep. Furthermore, they are, almost to a man (person?), desperate for public acceptance by secular scholars. They are humanists by conviction, even though they operate inside the churches. If they forthrightly proclaimed the doctrines of the historic Christian faith without compromise, they would be ridiculed by humanist scholars. They fear this above all. So, they write endless reams of convoluted language in order to hide the academic irrelevance of their concepts. (German theology is especially afflicted by this verbal constipation.) Their concepts are dangerous to orthodoxy and irrelevant to humanism, except as a tool of confusing the faithful. Liberal theologians are simply examples of what Lenin called “useful idiots.” They are middlemen for the humanists in a great deception of the faithful. They have been described best by David Chilton: “Modern theologians are like a pack of dogs who spend most of their time

omics, 1984).

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sniffing each other’s behinds.”

**Roman Catholic Economic Antinomianism**

The Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy was a conservative group whose members were some of the most famous American Catholic conservative social thinkers and political figures. It was formed in 1984 by William Simon, who had served as Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Nixon and Ford, and Michael Novak, its main theoretician. The organization’s study of Catholic economic thought announced on the opening page: “... Christian Scripture does not offer programmatic guidance for the concrete institutions of political economy.” It then cited someone it referred to as “the great Catholic economist Heinrich Pesch, S.J.” who proclaimed that morally advanced societies will be better prepared to endure hard times, but “this does not mean that the economist should theologize or moralize in the treatment of his subject matter or, what is worse, try to derive an economic system from Holy Scripture.” This document was written specifically to counter the ultra-liberal proposed first draft of Catholic bishops regarding the United States economy. And what first principle regarding biblical authority governed the liberal bishops? The same as the one adopted by the Catholic lay conservatives: “Although the Bible does not and cannot give us simple and direct answers to today’s complex econo-

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mic questions, it can and must shape our vision of the meaning of economic life.” The conservatives cited the free market economists they liked, while the liberals cited the anti-free market non-economists they liked. No one invoked biblical law.

Conservative Protestant Economic Antinomianism

Conservative Protestant philosopher Ronald Nash is opposed to liberation theology and Christian socialism. His book, Social Justice and The Christian Church (1983), is a ringing defense of capitalism. But not biblical capitalism. He appeals, not to the Bible, but to universal standards of logic, i.e., universal truths that can be recognized by all right-thinking people. He begins with the implicit but unstated presupposition that the Bible is not sufficiently self-attesting and clear to provide generally agreed-upon conclusions; an appeal to universal logic is therefore necessary. He writes:

Chapter 6 considers what the Bible teaches about justice. This book intentionally rejects any proof-text approach to its subject. [But why should we expect to find autonomous proof in opposition to a biblical text?–G.N.] Many other treatments [but not all!–G.N.] of the topic purport to “discover” revealed truth about economic and social theory in the Bible and then deduce the appropriate applications of that truth to the contemporary scene. The great problem with the proof-text method is the extent to which the participants beg the question. [Beg what question?–G.N.] In most cases [but not all!–G.N.], what happens is that the writer finds some passage in the

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Old Testament that relates to an extinct cultural situation. [Is human reason eternally applicable, and biblical principles that undergirded the “extinct cultural situation” merely temporary?–G.N.] It is often the case [but not always!–G.N.] that such passages are ambiguous enough to give any interpreter problems. [Is human reason never ambiguous, and therefore more reliable than the “ambiguous” Bible?–G.N.] But before the reader knows it, the passage is used to prove the truth of socialism or capitalism. [Are serious Christians unable to determine good from bad exegesis in the case of biblical economic policy, so must we therefore appeal to “unambiguous” logic? And is the Bible equally ambiguous, and readers equally defenseless, with regard to everything else it speaks about? Must autonomous logic also be used to establish theological truths?–G.N.] This book takes a totally different approach. It assumes the unity of all truth. Truth in any area of human knowledge will be consistent with truth in every other area. [So why not begin, and end, with biblical revelation, since it is unquestionably true, while the speculations of men are unquestionably fallible in part?–G.N.]

Notice the qualifying phrases: “many other treatments,” “in most cases,” “it often is the case.” Fine and dandy; then why not search for the exceptions to these generalities, and then adopt them when we find them? Why not search out those unique cases in which biblical texts are used properly by expositors, and then follow their lead? The answer is fairly simple: Nash does not believe that any Christian ever has successfully used the Bible to create a coherent, accurate, God-given and man-interpreted biblical economic framework. Furthermore, he obviously does not believe that such an effort should be attempted. He avoids the temptation, certainly. After all, why should we appeal to the Bible instead of appealing to universal human

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reason, which unlocks “the unity of all truth”? Implicitly, he is arguing that the Bible is not the bedrock universal; human reason is. Some people do not accept the Bible; presumably, all rational people will accept the findings of human reason.

As a devoted follower of the Protestant philosopher Gordon Clark, Dr. Nash rejects the idea of Van Til’s presuppositional, Bible-based (i.e., “proof-text”) approach to the intellectual defense of Christianity. He relies instead on the hypothetical natural, unbiased, and reliable reasoning abilities of natural (unregenerate) man. In short, he appeals to biblically unaided (autonomous) reason because of his personal preference and philosophical commitment. He then discovers what he regards as inescapably clear free market principles in the conclusions of autonomous human reason. Unfortunately, “radical Christians” somehow have escaped from this inescapably clear set of economic conclusions.

Liberal Evangelical Economic Antinomianism

We find the same sort of “anti-proof text” reasoning in the camp of the “radical Christian Protestants,” the left-wing targets of Nash’s book. In a symposium on Christian economics published by the neo-evangelical Protestant InterVarsity Press in 1984, three of the four contributors were defenders of more State planning and authority over the economy. I was the lone critic of the State.18 All three of the anti-

18. The book was taken off the market in 1985 by IVP, which sold me thousands of copies at 25 cents each. I like to think that it was my uncompromising defense of the free market and my rhetorically robust challenges to the three other authors that led to IVP’s decision. My original article appears as Appendix E in Gary North, Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy, 2nd electronic edition (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Dominion Educational Minis-
market essayists explicitly denied that the Bible gives us any specifics concerning economics.

The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it another way. 19

The Old Testament gives detailed laws regulating economic relationships. Although we need not feel bound by these laws, the general concern of justice and shalom found there is repeated in the New Testament and is meant for us. 20

There is no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy. 21

If this is true – if there are no biblical blueprints – then how can we, as Christians, come before a fallen, rebellious society that is threatened by the judgment of God, and announce confidently, “Thus saith the Lord”? How can we criticize specific economic sins with the confidence of Old Testament prophets? How can we call men to repent, if we cannot say for certain what specific biblical laws they


are violating? And more to the point, how can we offer biblical alternatives? How can we confidently affirm with Paul: “. . . God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able [to bear]; but will, with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13b)? Are we saying that God offers no specific way to escape? Are we saying that any old way will do, just so long as it feels right, just so long as it conforms to the recommended political and economic outlook of political liberals fifteen years ago (which they discarded five years later)?

David Chilton has called this attitude toward the Bible on the part of economic radicals, “The Case of the Missing Blueprints.22 These “concerned Christians” reject modern free market capitalism in the name of “biblical justice,” just as the so-called Social Gospel’s promoters did in the first half of the twentieth century.23 Unlike Social Gospel theologians, who really did believe that the Bible teaches some form of socialism, the more recent evangelical statists tell us that the Bible does not provide a specific blueprint or outline of the godly economic system. The reason for their rejection of the Bible as a guide for economics is clear: They understood what the Social Gospel theologians should have understood but did not, namely, that the Bible categorically affirms legal, moral, and economic principles that lay the foundations of a free market economic system. They stand firm with John Gladwin, who affirmed: “Scripture offers no blueprint for the form of modern government. This means that I will resist any idea that decentralized or privatized versions of management of the economy and the provision of services are necessarily more Christian

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than the centralized solution.”24 He saw that the Bible does teach such a decentralized and privatized view of society, so he rejected from the start any suggestion that this blueprint is still morally or legally binding on Christian societies. (Gladwin later became a bishop in the Church of England.)

InterVarsity Press in 1983 published one of its typically statist tracts in the name of Jesus. The author, a British Ph.D. from Cambridge, who was teaching theology in India, rejected the idea that Old Testament law is still literally binding in New Testament times. “In the economic sphere, the Old Testament paradigms provide us with objectives without requiring a literal transposition of ancient Israelite practice into twentieth-century society.”25 In other words, Old Testament law, which drastically limited the centralization of power by the civil government, is no longer supposed to bind the State.

Here is the two-part argument which virtually all of these clever fellows have adopted. First, they say they believe that the Mosaic law’s objectives are still binding today, and the State must see to it that its objectives are achieved. Second, the means established by the Mosaic law to achieve these objectives are rejected as being old fashioned or inappropriate for today’s complex society, namely, men acting as individuals or as agents of the church, voluntary charitable societies, or families. In short, he proposed what virtually all academic Christian social commentators proposed in the twentieth century: the substitution of the State for society. This has been a common error in the modern world, and an exceedingly pernicious one.26


Wright stated that “there are societies where the conditions of allegedly ‘free’ employees are pitiably more harsh and oppressive than those of slaves in Israel.” He did not mention the giant slave societies created by the Communists. “In such situations, the paradigmatic relevance of the Old Testament economic laws concerning work and employment can be taken almost as they stand. To introduce statutory rest days and holidays, statutory terms and conditions of employment, statutory protection from infringement of personal rights and physical dignity, statutory provision for fair wages promptly paid, would revolutionize the face of economic life for multitudes of workers in some parts of the world. And all of these are drawn from the economic legislation of God’s redeemed people, Israel.”

Such statutory actions would indeed revolutionize the face of economic life for multitudes of workers. Such actions would guarantee continuing unemployment in all legal markets. They would, if enforced universally, transfer a monopoly grant of power to industrial economies, and specifically to the State-licensed and protected monopolistic trade unions, whose members cannot stand the wage competition that is offered by Third World employees.

“Statutory” was Dr. Wright’s key word, and it is this word that was not used in the Old Testament. God, not the State, is sovereign. God issued His economic laws, and it is market competition and self-government under God’s law, not statutes, that are supposed to govern men’s economic actions in the vast majority of cases, as my commentaries on the Pentateuch and the New Testament demonstrate. Those scholars who deny my assessment of the texts have an obligation to show how and where I misinterpreted the texts. They have
great many texts to consider. As of 2006, I have written over 400 chapters of exegesis, plus appendixes and support volumes.

What is noticeable is Wright’s hostility to the binding character of Old Testament law literally transferred to today’s political institutions, for what that law would bind is the messianic State. Predictably, we find antinomianism – hostility to the continuing validity of God’s Bible-revealed law – in close association with statism and a mania for legislation. What the Bible warns against – the divinization of man – and what the Bible’s law-order undermines whenever it is taken seriously, modern academic antinomians have implicitly accepted. The divinized State that the Bible’s law-order militates against is the sacred cow of the intellectuals today. In short, there is a relationship between false gods and high taxes. These armchair socialists proclaim their allegiance to the “paradigmatic principles” of Old Testament law, but not its State-restricting specifics. They proclaim the “principle of the tithe,” and then go on to promote massive compulsory taxation by the State. In short, they are devoted to Old Testament laws only on an ad hoc basis: whenever such verbal allegiance can be misdirected to glorify the authority of the State.

Whose Word Is Sovereign?

We discover that contemporary Christian social commentators are agreed: The revealed law of God is not applicable in New Testament times. God’s Bible-revealed law-order is somehow out of date. It deals with “an extinct cultural situation.” Antinomians view the Old Testament as some sort of discarded first draft, “the Word of God (emeritus).” These commentators want to avoid the restrictions that God has said must be placed on men, institutions, and governments, if freedom and justice are to prevail. How, then, will freedom and
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justice be maintained? How will “the word of man (tenured)” est-
establish and defend freedom and justice?

The biblical program is clear: self-government under revealed biblical law, with various aspects of this law enforced by a biblically revealed system of decentralized courts. There is no other valid program for the establishment and maintenance of biblically sanctioned government. All other programs are aspects of false religions. Christians have adopted aspects of false religions for two millennia. Christian social thought has been syncretistic from the beginning. Christians have failed in their attempt to establish freedom and justice for this very reason.

With the publication of Rushdoony’s Institutes of Biblical Law in 1973, this syncretism was at long last systematically challenged. Cornelius Van Til’s presuppositional apologetic method, when coupled with a renewed interest in (and exposition of) biblical law, has opened the possibility of the establishment of a self-conscious Christian civilization. To accomplish this, Christians must go forward in terms of the law delivered to man at Sinai.

Conclusion

We see the “privatized” nature of the biblical social order in the eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.” But we also find the foundational principles of a free market economy in all the other nine commandments. The Ten Commandments are as fine a statement of the principles of liberty, including liberty of voluntary exchange, as we can find anywhere in the history of man. The Old Testament is an anti-statist document. It limits the civil government in the interests of personal self-government. Limited civil government is one of the two political preconditions of a free market economy. The other political
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precondition is predictable law, which places limits on civil government. This, the Ten Commandments and the Old Covenant’s case laws also provide.

The Bible does not teach a doctrine of salvation by law. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the doctrine is clear: “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4). The Bible teaches dominion under God, but it does not teach salvation by law. In contrast, all other religions teach either salvation by law or salvation by mystical escape, with the techniques of asceticism and mysticism serving as the “laws” that save man.\(^\text{29}\) Humanism teaches salvation by law, and most forms of humanism in the twentieth century were statist, for the State is clearly the highest and most concentrated form of power. Salvation by the State, or by an agency of the State,\(^\text{30}\) was the common faith of twentieth-century humanists. This is why the Bible was repugnant to twentieth-century humanists. This is not going to change in the twenty-first century.

In the ten chapters that follow, you will learn more about the relationship between the Ten Commandments and economics. You will also learn more concerning the relation between the Ten Commandments and the dominion covenant.\(^\text{31}\) The Ten Commandments certainly have implications outside of the realm of economics, but they surely have implications at least for economics. When men see how relevant the Ten Commandments are for economics, they should gain new respect for the importance of the laws of God for all of life,\(^\text{29}\) Gary North, *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). Introduction.


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but especially for the life of dominion man, the man redeemed by grace through faith in the one true Dominion Man, Jesus Christ.

This book can serve as a model. We need more studies: in politics, education, and social structures.
I. Priestly

1

THE GOD OF LIBERATION

*God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me (Ex. 20:1–3)*.

The theocentric issue here is obvious: *the sovereignty of God*. God mandates absolute devotion. He is number-one. All biblical laws are extensions of this law. All of them rest on this law.

But who is this God? In this passage, God identifies Himself as the God of liberation. He also reveals Himself as the God of the covenant. His self-revelation here invokes four of the five points of the biblical covenant model: sovereignty, hierarchy, law, and sanctions.

The Biblical Covenant Model

*Sovereignty*. God here announces that He has intervened decisively and miraculously in the lives of the Hebrews. This intervention was radically personal. The events of the exodus cannot be cogently explained as a series of impersonal natural events. There could be no doubt in the minds of the Hebrews of Moses’ day that God had been the source of their liberation from Egypt. There was certainly no doubt in the minds of the people of the Canaanitic city of Jericho, as Rahab informed the spies a generation later (Josh. 2:10–11).

By identifying Himself as the source of their liberation, God announces his total sovereignty over Israel. A God who intervenes in history is not some distant God. He is a God of power. He had already
revealed to them by His deeds that He possesses the power to reshape nations, seas, and history. No other God possesses such power; therefore, the Israelites are required to worship only Him. Sovereignty is point one of the biblical covenant model.32 Events are controlled by a God who can bring His words to pass. Cosmic personalism is inescapable.33

**Hierarchy.** He is also their king. Eastern kings of the second millennium B.C. used a formula for announcing their sovereignty similar to this and to God’s announcement to Moses of His name (Ex. 6:2). Even when their names were well known, they announced them in the introduction to their proclamation.34

Second, it was customary for him to record his mighty deeds. Cassuto summarizes God’s announcement: “I, the Speaker, am called YHWH, and I am your God specifically. Although I am the God of the whole earth (xix 5), yet I am also your God in the sense that, in consideration of this sanctification, I have chosen you to be the people of My special possession from among all the peoples of the earth (xix 6); and it is I who brought you out of the land of Egypt, not just bringing you forth from one place to another, but liberating you from the house of bondage. Hence it behooves you to serve Me not out of fear and dread, in the way that the other peoples are used to worship their gods, but from a sense of love and gratitude.”35 Meredith G. Kline identifies this as the second part of the suzerainty
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treaty. Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant model.37

God contrasts life in Egypt with life outside of Egypt. Egypt had been the house of bondage for Israel. Their deliverance has been a liberating act on God’s part. The contrast is between bondage in Egypt and liberty under God. The Israelites were in the wilderness when God revealed this law to them. The wilderness was a place of liberation by comparison with Egypt. The issue is hierarchy – which God will men serve? – not geography. Men are always under authority: point two of the biblical covenant model. The question is: Under whose authority?

Ethics. This God of power is a God of ethics. Ethics is point three of the biblical covenant model.38 His power was revealed by His act of freeing the Hebrews from their Egyptian masters. He therefore has the authority to lay down the law, beginning with the first commandment.

The Hebrews had deliverance as the historical foundation of their faith in God and His law-order. This law-order is summarized in the Ten Commandments. The commandments are the foundation of righteous living. The whole of Old Testament law serves as a series of case-law applications of the ten.39 Thus, the case laws must be regarded as the basis of all social institutions and all interpersonal relationships. Whatever the area of life under discussion – family,


37. Sutton, That You May Prosper, ch. 2.

38. Ibid., ch. 3.

business, charitable association, military command, medicine, etc. – biblical law provides the standards that should govern the actions of men.

Men can choose to ignore the requirements of biblical law. God dealt harshly in Egypt and in the Red Sea with those who flagrantly and defiantly rejected the rule of His law. The Israelites had experienced firsthand the institutional effects of a social order governed by a law-order different from the Bible’s. They had been enslaved. The God who had delivered them from bondage here announces His standards of righteousness – not just private righteousness but social and institutional righteousness. Thus, the God of liberation is simultaneously the law-giver. The close association of biblical law and human freedom is grounded in the very character of God.

Sanctions. God had delivered them in history. This involved imposing negative sanctions on Egypt. The positive sanction of God’s deliverance of covenant-keepers was inextricably associated with negative sanctions against covenant-breakers. Sanctions are point four of the biblical covenant model.⁴⁰

The only covenantal point not found in this verse is point five: succession.

How does all of this relate to economics? By means of the biblical covenant model. There are numerous systems of economic theory and organizations. Their defenders all come in the name of the liberation of individuals and the society. We must test these claims. But how? By means of the biblical covenant model.

Because God identifies Himself in this commandment as the God of liberation, we should begin our study of economic theory with a detailed study of His comprehensive law-order. The summary of His law-order is found in the Ten Commandments.

Causation and Providence

Causation is never impersonal. This is the ultimate message of the first commandment. The Israelites were not in the wilderness because of the impersonal forces of history, or the impersonal mode of production, or the impersonal rise of the middle class. They were in the wilderness awaiting the next move of God in history. He had raised up Moses and Aaron to lead them out of Egypt. This was behind them. Now their task was to conquer Canaan. This was the promised inheritance that had been given by God to Abraham. The fourth generation after the Israelites’ descent into Egypt would conquer Canaan, God had prophesied. “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16).

The basis of cause and effect is the providence of God. This includes economic causation. The laws of economics are not impersonal. They are not random. They do have purpose. They are reliable as a way to predict the outcome of policies. Economics is covenantal. It involves a sovereign God, man made in His image, economic law, causation, and economic growth. This is taught by the Decalogue as a whole. But it begins here, with the doctrine of the sovereignty of the God of liberation.

The God of liberation does not set forth laws of bondage. The Israelites could safely trust the laws of God because He had delivered them from bondage. The proof of His goodness and also His reliability was His deliverance of Israel out of Egypt.

This means that they could trust His economic commandments. His verbal commandments are consistent with His acts of deliverance in history. He possesses the power to produce the results that He promises in His law. This description encompasses His economic commandments. The structure of the universe and the universal rule
of providential cause and effect are not impersonal. They are also not random.

If men are to obey God over the long run, they must have faith that they are placing their trust in a reliable law-order that is backed up by a reliable, predictable God. He must be the God of the biblical covenant model. If God is not reliable, then His law is not reliable. If He is weak or forgetful or inconsistent, then his sanctions are unpredictable. If His sanctions – positive and negative – are unpredictable, then the inheritance of His people is problematical.

This verse announces that the God of liberation has proven in history that He is sovereign over history. He brought negative sanctions against Egypt and positive sanctions for Israel. He therefore commands His people to worship Him and no other.

What is worship? It is subordination to a sovereign God and obedience to His law.

Can men legitimately have confidence in the law of God in the area of economic affairs? Yes. Why is this confidence justified? Because the same God who delivered Israel from the Egyptians also established the laws of economics. This means that the basis of these economic laws is not man, or random chance, or historical cycles, or the impersonal forces of history, but instead is the sustaining providence of God. The guarantor of the reliability of economic law is a personal Being who delivers His people from those who defy His law.

Liberation Economics: True and False

The Bible sets forth the only valid liberation theology, which undergirds the only valid liberation economics. The moral, institutional, and legal foundations of this economic system are found in God’s law.
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What was commonly called liberation theology in the latter decades of the twentieth century was very often warmed-over Marxism or some other type of socialistic economics. Appeals to the example of exodus were made by self-professed liberation theologians, but few if any references were made to the many Old Testament case-law applications of the Ten Commandments. In fact, the continuing validity of Old Testament laws that deal with economic relationships was denied by liberation theologians; only those laws that seem to expand the economic power of the State – and there are very few of these in the Bible – were cited by them. This “pick and choose” aspect of modern liberation theology – a choice governed by the standards of socialism and revolution rather than by the standards of orthodox theology – undermines the church’s ability to reconstruct social institutions in terms of God’s revealed Word.

Biblical economics is liberation economics. Anti-biblical economics is therefore bondage economics. Those who proclaim liberation economics, but who refuse to be guided by the concrete, explicit revelation of God in the Bible concerning economic law, are wolves in sheep’s clothing. They were dominant in academia until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. That historic event made it embarrassing for anyone to admit that he was a socialist, or ever had been.


Chapter 1 . . . Exodus 20:1–3

If theologians proclaim some variant of Marxism, socialism, interventionism, or some other form of State-deifying economics, they are the equivalent of the Egyptians. They are laying the foundations of what Hayek called the road to serfdom. On the other hand, if they proclaim radical libertarianism – a world devoid of all civil government – they are laying the foundations for an ethical and political backlash, which will aid those who are seeking to expand the powers of the State. Men will not live under anarchy.

Historically, anarchists have allied themselves with statist revolutionaries at the beginning of a revolution, but they have invariably been destroyed after their former allies capture control of the coercive apparatus of the State. Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin initially cooperated in the founding of the First International (International Workingmen’s Association), but the two men later split, and Marx and Engels destroyed the organization in the late 1870’s – by transferring its headquarters to New York City – rather than allow it to fall into the hands of Bakunin’s followers. In the case of the Russian Revolution, the anarchists were among the first dissidents to be arrested by the Cheka, Lenin’s secret police.


Darwinism vs. Economic Law

Modern economic theory is grounded on the assumption that mankind is autonomous, that there is no need to invoke the concept of God, that all cosmic law is impersonal, that all social laws are either derived from the State or from the voluntary association of individuals, and that laws evolve over time. All modern economic theory is Darwinian, either statist Darwinian or free market Darwinian.46

The secular economist must find a way to adjust his theories of causation to an evolving society. If economic law is separate from social conventions, then the economist must find a way to relate conceptually the independent laws of economics to the beliefs and practices of each individual and each society. How can this be done? This is the age-old question of epistemology: “What can a man know for certain, and how can he know it?” In a changing social world (Heraclitus), how can a man’s mind find permanent principles of economics (Parmenides)? How can one man communicate his discovery to others?

Darwinism undermines all concepts of permanent law, whether biological or social. It undermines economic theory. If the laws of economics are unchanging, then how can they be relevant for a changing world? If economic laws change, then how does an economist know for sure whether the laws that he thinks are internally consistent really do connect with the evolving world around him? In short, what is the Darwinian economist’s principle of final sovereignty? In an evolving world, where everything is moving toward the

46. North, Dominion Covenant, Appendix B.
heat death of the universe, what is sovereign other than the frozen tomb of absolute zero?47

Exodus 20:1–3 provides the intellectual foundation of epistemology. A sovereign God controls history. He must be worshipped, and He alone. Those who have been delivered from bondage possess legitimate hope that their worship will not result in bondage. They will secure their liberation by worshipping this God.

There is nothing remotely Darwinian about this worldview. It is expressly anti-Darwinian. There is nothing remotely humanistic about it. It begins, not with man, but with the God of the Bible, who is sovereign over history and who controls history for the benefit of those who worship Him and Him alone.

Law and Liberation

The Hebrews could not have misunderstood this relationship between God’s law and liberation. God identifies Himself as the deliverer of Israel, and then He sets forth the summary of the law structure which He requires as a standard of human action. The God of history is the God of ethics. There can be no biblical ethics apart from an ultimate standard, yet this standard is fully applicable to history, for the God of history has announced the standard. Ethics must be simultaneously permanent and historically applicable. Permanence must not compromise the applicability of the law in history, and historical circumstances must not relativize the universal standard. The dialectical tension between law and history, which undermines every non-biblical social philosophy, is overcome by God, who

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is the guarantor of His law and the social order which is governed by this law. He is the guarantor of the law’s permanent applicability because his is the deliverer, in time and on earth.

The prophets of Israel repeatedly announced their detailed critiques of Israel and Judah by first recalling that the God in whose name they were coming before the nation was the same God who had delivered them from Egypt. Having made this identification, they would go on to catalogue the sins of the nation – sins that were prohibited by biblical law. Ezekiel wrote: “Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them” (20:10–11). The New American Standard Version translates this final clause, “if a man observes them, he will live.” In other words, the very foundation of life is the law of God, if a man lives in terms of this law. The prophets then listed the sins of the nation which were inevitably bringing death and destruction – the external judgment of God.

Biblical Law: God’s Prescription for Healing

Daniel Fuller has provided a helpful analogy of the relationship between biblical law and salvation by grace through faith. He describes God as a physician who prescribes a particular health regimen

48. Cornelius Van Til offered the two pre-Socratic philosophers, Parmenides and Heraclitus, as the supreme examples of this dialectic. Parmenides was the philosopher of static law and logic. Parmenides was the philosopher of historical change. He wrote, “everything flows” – panta rei. He was the original philosopher of “go with the flow.”

to patients. Jesus likened Himself to a physician with the task of healing mankind’s sins (Matt. 1:21). “We avoid legalism to the extent that we acknowledge how truly sick we are and look away from ourselves and, with complete confidence in the Doctor’s expertise and desire to heal us, follow his instructions (the obedience of faith!) in order to get well. We should understand that the entire business of our lives is the convalescence involved in becoming like Christ.”

While a physician expects patients to deviate occasionally from his prescribed program, he understands that a patient who consistently rejects his advice has lost faith in the physician and his program. “That is why the Bible emphasizes persevering faith.” This biblical faith looks toward the future, for saving faith is essentially “a confidence directed toward a future in which God will do and be all he has promised in the Bible.”

“It should now be clear,” Fuller continues, “why the necessity for obedience in no way clashes with sola gratia (‘by grace alone’), for the Doctor is administering his cure just from the sheer joy he has in extending a blessing to others and in being appreciated for what he does. The Doctor does not bless people because they are the workmen who have rendered some necessary service to him which obligates him to reimburse them with medical care. It should also be clear why the obedience of faith is sola fide (‘by faith alone’), for obedience is impelled wholly by faith and is not something added on to faith as though it were coordinate with it. . . . Finally, there should be no difficulty in understanding how the Doctor receives all the glory (sola gloria), the credit for the cures that are performed, and for the addi-


51. Idem.

52. Ibid., p. 112.
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Those who worship any god other than the God who reveals His standards in the Bible are worshippers of a false god. No other god, no other goal, no other standard is to replace men’s faith in the living God who delivered Israel. God is primary; there is no secondary God. From this it follows that those who proclaim a law-order alien to the one set forth in the Bible are thereby proclaiming the validity of the word of some other god. They have become idolators – perhaps not conscious idolators, but idolators nonetheless. They are aiding and abetting the plans of men who worship another god. A god’s personal (or impersonal) attributes are revealed by its law-order. To proclaim a rival law-order is to proclaim a rival god. Religious pluralism is political polytheism.  

Conclusion

God’s announcement to His people that He is the God who delivered them from Egypt lays the basis for the next nine commandments. This verse makes the connection between freedom and worship, which in turn requires obedience to God’s law, beginning with this law governing worship.

To abandon faith in the sovereignty of the God who delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage is to abandon any reliable foundation for discovering cause and effect in the world, including the world of economics. This confessional-epistemological principle lays the foun-

53. Ibid., pp. 119f.

Abandonation for the next nine. To abandon faith in God’s Bible-revealed law-order is to undermine men’s faith in the reliability of God’s laws of economics. This is to abandon faith in the what the Bible proclaims as the only basis of liberation, namely, liberation under the sovereign power of God, who sustains the universe and calls all men to conform themselves to His ethical standards in every area of life, in time and on earth.
GRAVEN IMAGES AND RIVAL CIVILIZATIONS

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Ex. 20: 4–6).

The theocentric principle here is stated plainly: the jealousy of God. This law is an extension of the first commandment. The first commandment establishes the principle of God’s exclusive sovereignty over history. The second commandment establishes the principle of legitimate authority: no bowing down – physical subordination – to rival gods.

The Structure of This Commandment

The second commandment is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the prohibition against graven images. The second section deals with the punishment and mercy of God.

It is not initially clear just how these two sections are linked together. Possibly because of this confusion, the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches combine this commandment with the first commandment, so that the prohibition against worshipping other gods, the prohibition against graven images, and the promise of judgment and
Chapter 2 . . . Exodus 20:1–6

mercy are all considered as a single commandment. To get ten commandments, they divide the tenth, the prohibition against covetousness, into two: coveting the neighbor’s house, and coveting the neighbor’s wife, servants, and work animals.¹ This handling of the tenth looks strained, but the handling of the first two by other Protestant groups also initially looks strained. They do seem to be one unit, rather than a one-part commandment followed by a two-part commandment.

The theological solution to this ancient debate is the five-point biblical covenant model. As I have argued in the Preface and will demonstrate in this book, the biblical covenant model structures the Ten Commandments into a pair of five-five sections, priestly and kingy. This conforms to the traditional Reformed and Anglican division. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran arrangement does not.

The first commandment is clear: People are not to worship any other god. The first part of the second commandment is also clear: Make no graven images. This is an application of the principle governing the first commandment, namely, that no rival gods are allowed. In other words, first there is faith in God and no other god; then there is an application of this faith in action (or better, inaction): no graven images. The second commandment is an application of the principle governing the first commandment. Men must not bow down to the hand-crafted images of rival gods.

One reason why we can legitimately conclude that these are two separate commandments is that both share a common feature: a prohibition and a reason for the prohibition. The first commandment gives a reason for obedience: God delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt. This was both a positive sanction and a negative sanction. The

second commandment also gives a reason for obedience: God is the One who brings judgment against those who hate Him, and who also brings mercy and love to those who love Him.

The third, fourth, and fifth commandments also follow this pattern: command and explanation. The third says not to take the name of the Lord in vain, “for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain,” (20:7b). The fourth prohibits work on the sabbath. In the Exodus version, the reason offered is that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. In the Deuteronomy version, the reason offered is that they had been bondservants in Egypt, and God had delivered them (Deut. 5:15). The fifth commandment, honoring parents, also has a reason for obedience: a promise of long life.

So, the first five commandments reveal a common pattern: commandment and explanation (or motivation). The second five do not. Because of this, it is reasonable to consider the prohibition against graven images as a separate commandment: one of five.

There is a far stronger reason to divide the first two commandments in this way. The first commandment parallels the first point of the biblical covenant model: sovereignty. The second commandment parallels the second point of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy/representation.

The issues here are hierarchy and representation. The economic issue dividing biblical religion and pagan religion is the issue of representation.


dominion vs. power. Dominion is based on a hierarchy: God > man > nature (resources). It involves the extension of God’s kingdom on earth and in history. Power is based on one of three rival theories of hierarchy: (1) Satan > man > nature; (2) Man > nature; (3) Nature > man. Power involves the extension of the kingdom of whichever sovereign is at the top of the hierarchy. In terms of the language of political philosophy, dominion is based on authority because authority is legitimate, while power is illegitimate because it represents a revolt against lawfully constituted authority.

In economics, the dividing issue is ownership vs. theft. To determine the lawful owner of any asset, the court must have a theory of hierarchy, meaning a concept of delegated authority, or as Christianity has used the term, of stewardship.

Thus, every social order requires a theory of authority. To sort out this crucial issue, we must first understand the second commandment. To do this, I offer an analysis of the second commandment as it applies to social theory and then economic theory. Part I applies to social theory and civil government. Part II applies more specifically to economics.

I. No Graven Images
   A. The Theology of Images
   B. Rival World Orders
II. The Compounding Process
   A. The Iniquity of the Children
   B. Mercy Unto Thousands

I. No Graven Images

The reason offered for this law was God’s jealousy. God had delivered Israel; the nation therefore owed Him exclusive loyalty.
God had brought negative sanctions against Egypt; the Israelites should therefore fear Him. This was the dual testimony of the first commandment. Loyalty was to be based on gratitude and fear, which was in turn based on historical experience. These were underlying implications of the first commandment. The second commandment made explicit what the first commandment implied. Not only were the Israelites not to honor any god before the true God, they were not to bow down to images that represented rival gods.

A. The Theology of Images

Man is made in God’s image. He has authority over the creation as a lawful subordinate to God. But rebellious man is not content to remain a steward to God, i.e., a subordinate creature. He wants autonomy. At least, he wants to operate under some creature rather than God. So, man makes an image, thereby imitating God, who made man, His image. This image is a point of contact between man and the supernatural being associated with the image. The image represents the supernatural being. Man has an integral part in the formation of this being’s point of contact. Man believes that he participates in the work of the divinity by giving shape to its image.

Ironically, man worships something less than man when he worships an idol. He worships power – power that is limited to the period of history prior to Christ’s final judgment. But man himself is God’s image. Redeemed men (the church) will eventually judge the angels (I Cor. 6:3). Therefore, in an attempt to imitate God’s original creativity by making an image – just as God made man in His image – men identify themselves with the eschatological fate of some fallen angel, for the graven image serves as a point of contact with some fallen angel. Men thereby identify themselves with ultimate impotence.
“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but speak not. Eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not. Noses have they, but they smell not. They have hands, but they handle not. Feet have they, but they walk not. Neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Ps. 115:4–8; cf. 135:15–18).

Fallen man wants a mediator between himself and God. He wants that mediator to be the work of his own hands. This is an attempt to make himself a co-equal with God, or at least a co-participant with God in their “mutual struggle” against the unpredictable forces of nature and history. The idea that there is a God-ordained mediator who was not the product of men’s hands – a “stone cut out without hands” (Dan. 2:34) – is repulsive to fallen man. Such a concept of God denies man’s own sovereignty and places him at the mercy of God exclusively. He would rather worship some other kind of god. As Rushdoony writes, “the only God they can tolerate is one who is immersed in history, one who is Himself a product of natural process and is working together with man to conquer time and history. God and man are thus partners and co-workers in the war against brute factuality.”

### Representing God

God was not to be represented visually by the people of the Old Testament, because He had not yet appeared as the Incarnation, the perfectly human mediator between God and men who perfectly

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Can we legitimately represent Jesus? Men did see Him. If a camera had been available to one of His followers, He could have been photographed. He was not an apparition. Someone could have made a sculpture of him, or a painting. But no one did. Should we guess concerning His appearance? We make guesses at what other biblical figures looked like. Moses, since the days of Michelangelo, has come to be thought of in a particular way. But Moses was a man, not divine. So we face a dilemma: Jesus Christ was both human and divine. We can legitimately represent Him in His work on earth. He was an historical figure. On the other hand, representations of Christ with a pagan halo around His head are not historical representations of His humanity, and are therefore illegitimate. On the pagan origins of halos in medieval art, and their relationship to the occult phenomenon of the “human aura,” see “aura,” in Nandor Fodor, Encyclopedia of Psychic Sciences (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1934] 1966), pp. 17–18; Lewis Spence, Encyclopaedia of Occultism (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1920] 1960), pp. 50–51. Also, any use of icons or paintings that “aid” us in the worship of God – aids that supposedly provide a point of contact between the worshipper and God – are illegitimate.
of the creation, whether in heaven, on earth, or under the earth.\textsuperscript{7}

Idols are weak. The Hebrews had seen that idols had not protected the Egyptians, and their children would see that the idols of the Canaanites would be equally impotent. At best, idols put men in contact with demonic beings that can manifest power, but nothing comparable to the awesome power of God. Forbidden rites place men in bondage to underworld spirits that can control them, even as men hope to control the spirits and the external environment by means of idol worship.

God forbade the use of tools in the construction of His altar. “Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon” (Ex. 20:23–26).\textsuperscript{8} The Hebrews were not allowed to design and build at their own discretion the shape of the place of atonement before God. God provided the raw materials, and they were not to reshape them.

When the early church spread the gospel, the image-makers suffered financial losses. Acts 19 records the confrontation between the evangelists and the silversmiths who made the images of the temple of Diana. The leader of the craft guild, Demetrius, warned his colleagues: “Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but

\textsuperscript{7} I am indebted to Prof. John Frame’s class syllabus, \textit{Doctrine of the Christian Life}, for these insights.

\textsuperscript{8} Deuteronomy 27:5; Joshua 8:30–31.
Graven Images and Rival Civilizations

almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands” (v. 26). The gospel had negative economic consequences for the pagan craftsmen of idols.

The prohibition of graven images was not a universal condemnation of all religious images. The tabernacle had images of the cherubim (Ex. 25:18–22) and bowls shaped like almonds (Ex. 25:33–34). The cherubim were not “cherubs” in the modern sense – not ruddy-faced children. They had four faces: a man’s, an ox’s, an eagle’s, and a lion’s (Ezk. 1:10). The temple actually had a large basin supported by twelve oxen (I Ki. 7:25), yet bulls were a familiar part of pagan worship. But the permitted likenesses were spelled out by God and limited to the Old Testament house of God. Men were not acting autonomously when they put these likenesses in the tabernacle. In short, these specified likenesses were symbols, not icons. As symbolic of God and His relationship with man, they rested on the doctrine of creation, the absolute distinction between Creator and creation. The icon, in contrast, points to a supposed scale of being, an ontological link between God and the image. This is the theology of magic.

Icons and Magic

Let us consider an Old Testament example of a legitimate use of an image for religious purposes. It is one of the strangest events in the Bible. The setting, however, was only too typical an event in the life of that first generation in the wilderness. They had made a vow with God to deliver a Canaanitic nation into their hands, if they in turn utterly destroyed the city. He did, and they did. The victory was complete (Num. 21:1–4). Then they journeyed around Edom, and once
again they grew discouraged. They made their standard complaint: “And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water: and our soul loatheth this light bread” (Num. 21:5).

This time, God responded in anger. He sent fiery serpents among them to bite them. Many of them died (21:6). They repented. Moses then prayed for them (v. 7). God instructed him to make an image of a fiery serpent and place it on a pole. Everyone who looks at it after he is bitten will live, God told Moses (v. 8). Moses made the image, and God’s word came true: Merely looking at it saved their lives (v. 9).

Was this magic? No, for God had instructed them on a one-time basis to follow this one-time ritual. The use of the serpent on a pole was not to become part of Israel’s worship. Moses had been instructed by God to make such an image. Of all images, this one is the one that we would assume could never be made legitimately. The serpent became a universal symbol in pagan civilizations. The Sumerian god Ningishzida was the son of the healing god Ninazu, and he was represented by a pair of snakes entwined around a rod. This god was worshipped in Babylon in the late Bronze Age era in which the exodus took place.9 In Greece, the symbol of a snake was also associated with divine healing: Asklepios, a snake-god, was their god of healing. He was symbolized as a snake wrapped around a staff.10 We still see the Sumerian snakes’ use as a symbol of healing: the medical


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profession’s symbol is a pair of intertwined snakes on a pole. Yet God instructed Moses to construct a snake image.

Why was this image not an icon? Because it was used in an actual historical event. This is the key that unlocks the New Testament era’s standard for the proper use of images. Now that God has come in the flesh and has manifested Himself among men, it is legitimate to represent God by making representations of Jesus Christ. How can such statues or paintings be kept from becoming magical talismans, amulets, or icons? By placing the representations in a Bible-revealed historical setting.

We do not know what Jesus looked like. We know that He was sufficiently nondescript that the Jews paid Judas to identify Him. So, we cannot legitimately represent Jesus apart from recognizable historical settings from the Bible. The historical setting is the identifying mark of who the image represents. It points also to a one-time only event in man’s history. In this way, the image does not readily become a continuing incarnation. It does not readily become a link in the present between the worshipper and the object of his worship. Thus, the presence of statues or paintings or stained glass windows in a church need not be violations of the second commandment. But when these images are used as links between the present worship of God in prayer, except as a way to recall the memory of some mighty act of God, they become idols.

The use of icons as mediating instruments between worshippers and God does involve elements of the forbidden practice, but this is not always a self-conscious defiance of the second commandment. 11

11. The iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium in the eighth century A.D. was a war by the emperors against the use of icons in the church. As Ladner noted in 1940, this was a political struggle. The emperors wanted a monopoly over the use of icons. The icons of the emperors in public places were to be the manifestation on earth of material aspects of God’s kingdom. In short, “they did not wish to
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Eastern orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are marked by practices that are rebellious in this regard, but this may not always be self-conscious rebellion. The leadership of both churches has unquestionably failed in the past to limit the use of images within the worship ceremonies to strictly historical settings. By failing to limit the use of visual representations of Jesus or the “saints” – historical figures from the Bible – to their historical settings, churches have there by implicitly or explicitly encouraged the misuse of images. They have not warned the worshippers that the use of images is to be historical, not ontological. Images are to remind men of the deliverances in history by God of His people. They may be used to remind men of the power of God in history, and to reinforce their faith in God’s power in the affairs of this world. They may not be used to link a specific worshipper with a specific mediator who is represented by the image so closely that the very presence of the image is the source of the mediation. In other words, worshippers can easily be lured into substituting magic for Christian faith.

We can understand how easy it is for a believer to make this illegitimate substitution when we examine the case of Moses’ tapping of the rock in order to bring forth water for the Israelites. Moses tapped the rock in order to get water out of it. Why? He had once been told by God to smite a rock in order to bring water out of it (Ex. 17:6), and he made a false conclusion: God rewards the man who properly manipulates the talismans or implements of ritualistic power. He concluded that a one-time historical link between tapping a rock and getting water out of it was in fact an ontological link between ritual

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precision and desired effect. He was lured into heresy. The influence of the power religion of Egypt was still strong in his thinking. He began to think in terms of ritual rather than ethics, of the precise repetition of a familiar formula rather than obedience to God’s revealed word. In short, Moses adopted magic in place of biblical religion.12

God knew that this shift in Moses’ thinking had taken place. This is why He tested Moses. He told Moses in the desert of Zin to take the rod and gather the assembly, and then speak to the rock before earth any other but their own image or more exactly their eyes, “and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock” (Num. 20:8). Moses did not believe God. He relied instead on ritual. He concluded that adherence to a form (formula) that had produced results in the past is the key to tapping God’s power. So he tapped the rock in order to “tap” God’s power. He even added a touch of his own – literally: a second tap of the rod. “And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (vv. 11–12). This was a high price to pay.

A legitimate symbol reminds us of what God is like by revealing what kinds of physical blessings God has given to His people. Its prohibited pagan equivalent is the amulet or talisman, which commands a god’s obedience because of the presence of the object, or because of ritual precisely performed by man. It assumes that both the god and man are under the bondage of ritual, but that man can impose his will

on the god through manipulating a talisman or other implement of power. Budge writes: “The use of amulets dates from the time when animism or magic satisfied the spiritual needs of man. Primitive man seems to have adopted them as a result of an internal urge or the natural instinct which made him protect himself and to try to divine the future. He required amulets to enable him to beget children, to give him strength to overcome enemies, visible and in visible, and above all the EVIL EYE, and to protect his women and children, and house and cattle; and his descendants throughout the world have always done the same. When the notion of a god developed in his mind, he ascribed to that god the authorship of the magical powers which he believed to be inherent in the amulets, and he believed that his god needed them as much as he himself did. He did not think it possible for his god to exist without the help of magical powers. . . . The gods became magicians, and employed magic when necessary, and dispensed it through their priests to man kind.”\(^\text{13}\)

A legitimate image of a Bible event reminds men of what God has done. An icon is the hypothetical representation of a person out of the Bible – a representation that offers the worshipper power over today’s events because it manifests the displayed power that the person represented by the image once possessed. It is an illegitimate device, because the worshipper seeks to appropriate the power that was once revealed historically in the life of the person represented by the image. It is not biblically significant that the person represented by the image once possessed such power. What is significant is that he was placed under grace and received power sufficient to perform his God-assigned task or sufficient to demonstrate God’s power in history. The basis of this gift of power was not the precision of his ritual performance, or his special place on the hypothetical (and nonexis-

\(^{13}\) Budge, Amulets and Talismans, pp. xv, xvi.
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tent) chain of being between God and man, but rather his position in history, meaning his place in the providentially controlled history of God’s people. Worshippers should never forget that the biblical personality represented by the image never used an image to appropriate the power he received. There are no indications that worshippers in the Old Testament or New Testament church used images of historic persons to aid them in their prayers and devotions.

Similarly, our possession of power is not based on our ability to repeat precise rituals, or on our position in some chain of being. Our power is dependent on the providence of God. Thus, it is obedience, not ritual, that is essential. It is ethics, not power, that is our lawful goal. Extending the kingdom of God, not extending the kingdom of man, Satan, or autonomous nature, is our primary goal (Matt. 6:33).¹⁴ Thus, the use of images to enhance our power by bringing us closer to God metaphysically or ontologically is illegitimate. Images are to bring us closer to Jesus Christ ethically. To reduce the likelihood of our misusing images, they must be kept historical in their frame of reference. They must remind us of what God once did for people who verbally and ethically proclaimed biblical religion, not what He did for people who ritually proclaimed the power religion. What God did to the latter is what faithful worshippers wish to avoid.

As I have said, the improper use of icons, candles, or other objects used in worship is not always self-consciously magical. In the world of occultism, on the other hand, we still find a self-conscious acceptance of the old religion of images. The revival of an occultist political order under Nazism in the 1930’s indicates that the lingering traces of occultism can be revived at any time. If occultism continues to expand its influence, we can expect to see more examples of the

ancient practice of image-worship.

**B. Rival World Orders**

The image, the god represented by the image, and the social order are always closely linked. Bowing down to an idol means the acceptance of that god’s law-order. “Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works; but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images” (Ex. 23:24). To *bow down* to any deity means to *walk in his ordinances*. “After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances” (Lev. 18:3). The history of Israel testifies to the inescapable link between gods and their social orders: “They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them, but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and daughters unto devils” (Ps. 106:34–37).

Making a graven image means to participate in the creation of a *new world order*. This new world order is in opposition to God’s world order. A different god is elevated to a position of sovereignty. In the Old Testament era, this meant that some demonic being became the source of health and prosperity. In modern civilization, which is the historical product of Christianity, most men no longer worship demons explicitly. They attribute sovereignty to impersonal forces of history (Marxism), or forces of the unconscious mind (Freudianism), or the spirit of the Volk (Nazism), or the impersonal forces of nature (Darwinism’s explanation of pre-human evolution). Modern man has attempted to become what C. S. Lewis prophesied:
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the materialist magician. Ultimately, man is the sovereign agent, by means of the proletarian Party (Marxism), economic planning (Fabianism), genetic manipulation (eugenics), conditioned response training (behaviorism), psychoanalysis (Freudianism), the führer (Nazism), higher consciousness techniques (New Age transcendentalism), compulsory public education (progressive education), scientific planning (Darwinism), or scientific management (Taylorism).

Satan did not tempt Adam and Eve to worship him openly; he only asked them to violate the law of God. The violation of God’s law was the equivalent of worshipping Satan. Only when he approached Christ did he ask to be worshipped (Luke 4:7). The worship of man and his works is essentially the worship of Satan. In short, man the idol-maker and idol-worshipper is man the Satan-worshipper. Humanism is inescapably satanism, which is why satanism revives during periods of humanistic dominance.

The construction of a world order that is opposed to the new world order set forth by God is therefore theologically comparable to constructing a graven image. There may be no official graven image


at first. Men may not be asked to bow down to it at first. But the substitution of the ordinances of man for the ordinances of God is the heart of idol-worship. It is an assertion of man’s autonomy, which ultimately results in the subordination of man to the ordinances of Satan. The society of Satan does not need graven images to make it operational.  

It is a testimony to the impact of Christianity on Western culture that graven images have all but disappeared. Humanists have adopted faith in the original promise of Satan to Eve, namely, the impossible offer of autonomy to man, but they do not bow down to graven images. To make a profession of faith in man’s autonomy is to become ethically subordinate to Satan (under the overall sovereignty of God). Men who believe that they worship no god have nevertheless conformed themselves sufficiently to Satan’s standards to warrant eternal punishment, and to that extent, Satan is pleased. In worshipping the works of their own hands, they refuse to worship God. Their idols are not explicitly religious or explicitly rebellious ritually. They do not celebrate their faith by adopting the ancient rituals of satanism, namely, by making graven images. Worshipping graven images would make manifest their ultimate theology, so in


20. C. S. Lewis’ insightful novel, That Hideous Strength (1945), presents a literary prophecy of a coming fusion of power-seeking modern science and power-seeking ancient demonism. This experiment ends in the novel with the destruction of the scientists: one by a suicidal but consistent application of modern dualistic psychology (Frost), another as a blood sacrifice to a demonic god-head whose scientific “creator” never suspected (until the moment of his death) that it was anything but a strictly scientific phenomenon (Filostrata).
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this respect Christianity has influenced humanism and has also restrained it.

Images and Political Covenants

The prohibition against worshipping graven images was unique in the ancient world. Whenever archaeologists dig up the remains of some ancient city, they find images of all kinds – in temples, in the palace of the king, in graves, and in the homes of the people. Ancient cultures were polytheistic. The proliferation of civic and household images was a universal phenomenon. By prohibiting the use of graven images, God was separating the Israelites from the surrounding cultures. It was always the mark of rebellion when the Israelites began to worship graven images.

Because images were prohibited in Israel, this made political covenants with surrounding nations impossible during the periods in which Israel remained faithful and avoided images. Temporary alliances were allowed (Gen. 14), but not oath-bound covenants. In the ancient world, including the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome, political alliances involved a peace treaty between the gods of the city-states. Politics was fundamentally religious. Citizenship was based on a free man’s right by birth to participate in the religious rites of a particular city. He could participate only in the rites of his own city. Dual citizenship was therefore impossible. The gods of the ancient city were jealous gods. Their worshippers were not allowed to participate in the religious rites of other cities.

Where did the local gods come from? A Greek city-state could adopt local gods that were identified with certain families within the city. When a family consented to allow its deity to become the god of a city, it generally retained the hereditary right of priesthood for that
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dehity. Different cities would have local deities named Zeus or Athena, but these were not the same gods.

Warfare between cities was simultaneously warfare between the gods of each city. A conquered city had to be allowed to remain independent, or else it had to be destroyed. “There was no middle course,” Fustel de Coulanges wrote. “Either the city ceased to exist, or it was a sovereign state. So long as it retained its worship, it retained its government; it lost the one only by losing the other; and then it existed no longer.” Understandably, this made warfare total. Soldiers burned crops because the crops were dedicated to other gods. Cattle were slaughtered. The sacred fires of the defeated city and its households were extinguished. There was no sense of duty towards the enemy.

What about peace treaties between cities? They were established by religious acts. The ceremony of the treaty was conducted by the priests of each city. “These religious ceremonies alone gave a sacred and inviolable character to international conventions. . . . With such ideas it was important, in a treaty of peace, that each city called its own gods to bear witness to its oaths. . . . Both parties tried, indeed, if it was possible, to invoke divinities that were common to both cities. They swore by those gods that were visible everywhere – the sun, which shines upon all, and the nourishing earth. But the gods of


23. Ibid., p. 205.

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each city, and its protecting heroes, touched men much more, and it was necessary to call them to witness, if men wished to have oaths really confirmed by religion. As the gods mingled in the battles during the war, they had to be included in the treaty. It was stipulated, therefore, that there should be an alliance between the gods as between the two cities. To indicate this alliance of the gods, it sometimes happened that the two peoples agreed mutually to take part in each other’s sacred festivals. Sometimes they opened their temples to each other, and made an exchange of religious rites.”

Fustel wrote about Greece and Rome, but similar theologies reigned in the Near East. Thus, it was impossible for Israel to make covenants of peace with the foreign nations and still remain faithful to God. “Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods” (Ex. 23:32). The nations of Canaan had to be utterly destroyed (Ex. 23:27), for their altars had to be destroyed (Ex. 34:13). “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down their high places; and ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein; for I have given you the land to possess it” (Num. 33:51–53).

It was also forbidden for the Israelites to intermarry with foreigners who were not under the covenantal authority of God (Deut. 7:3–4).

How could God deny His own sovereignty? He was the God who had delivered His people from Egypt, demonstrating that He was no local god, but a God over all kingdoms. Pharaoh had not conquered God by subjugating His people. Pharaoh had wanted to negotiate with God through Moses, but God had issued a non-negotiable demand to

let His people go for one week to worship Him. When Pharaoh refused to capitulate, God destroyed him. No self-proclaimed human divinity could come before God as an equal. No common rites were possible between God’s people and the foreign gods of pagan cities. It was this issue that got the early church into a life-and-death confrontation with Rome. Members were willing to be honest citizens, but they could not be citizens in Rome’s view. They refused to participate in the rites of the Empire. The Roman pantheon was filled with the gods of the various conquered nations, which was the basis of the peace treaty between Rome and each of its subject peoples, but neither Israel nor the church could conform to the ritual terms of this treaty. Israel was scattered in the diaspora in the second century A.D., and the church was intermittently persecuted until Constantine’s era. This is why Fustel could write, “The victory of Christianity marks the end of ancient society.”

When God told the Israelites they could not make graven images or worship them, He was announcing the terms of the dominion covenant. There had to be religious separation in Israel. They were to be isolated culturally from pagan nations. But this prohibition was more than a means to separate the Israelites culturally from their neighbors. It was a call to conquest. There could be no peace treaties with the people dwelling in the land which God had given to them; God imposes unconditional surrender or ultimate extinction.


II. The Compounding Process

We come now to the reason given for the prohibition against constructing graven images. The reason is that God is a jealous God. What kind of God is that? It is a God who visits the iniquity of the fathers on subsequent generations of ethical rebels. It is also a God who shows mercy to generations of covenantally faithful people. The presence or absence of graven images testifies to the spiritual condition of the two ethically distinct and ritually distinct types of people.

The heart of the description of the jealous God is the covenantal process of compound growth: either growth unto destruction or growth unto dominion. History is linear. It develops over time. What goes before affects what comes after. Nevertheless, it does not determine what comes after. God determines both the “before” and the “after.” God is sovereign, not the forces of history. But the criteria of performance are ethical. We know which covenant we are in by evaluating the external events of our lives in terms of God’s list of blessings and curses (Deut. 28).

A. The Iniquity of the Children

We read: “[F]or I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations…” (Ex. 20:5b). This verse is frequently misunderstood. It does not say that God punishes sons for the sins of their fathers. The Bible’s testimony concerning the responsibilities of children for the sins of their fathers is clear: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the
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fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16). This principle was reaffirmed by Ezekiel: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezk. 18:20). We therefore must interpret the unique phrase, “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children,” in terms of this clearly stated principle of judgment.

What we have in view here is a covenantal framework of reference. The Hebrews had just come out of Egypt. They and their ancestors had labored under slavery. The year of release had not been honored by their captors. Year after year, the Egyptians had built up their cities by the use of Hebrew labor. This capital base kept expanding. The wages that would have been paid to free laborers, as well as the capital that was to be given to slaves in the year of release (Deut. 15:13–14), was retained by succeeding generations of Egyptians. Thus, the later generations became the beneficiaries of the compounding process. They were richer, they supposed, than their ancestors because they possessed the visible manifestations of labor extracted illegally over decades.

Then came God’s judgment. With the compound growth of the visible benefits came the compound judgment of God. Both had built up over time. The final generation suffered incomparable judgment because they had not repented, made restitution voluntarily, and freed the Hebrews. For God not to have judged that final generation in terms of the benefits they had received illegally – benefits conveyed to them as a continuing legacy from their ancestors – would have been an act of extreme mercy on the part of God.

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Repeated Iniquities

The iniquities of the fathers were repeated by the sons. The fathers escaped the full temporal retribution of God. In this sense, God showed them mercy, in time and on earth. But the sons also did not repent. They continued in the sins of their fathers. If anything, they enjoyed the luxury of sinning even more flagrantly, because they were the beneficiaries of a larger capital base – a capital base of evil.

How long will God allow the sins of the heirs to go on? Unto the third and fourth generation. How long had the Hebrews been under the dominance of Egypt? Three generations.31 The historical precedent should have been obvious to any Hebrew in Moses’ day. God visits the iniquity for several generations. He punishes iniquity, according to one possible translation. He numbers iniquities, according to another.32 It can also mean remember (I Sam. 15:2).

The sons of the final generation in Egypt indulged in the sins of their fathers. The same sins were popular. God numbered or remembered these sins. This is the meaning of “visiting the iniquity.” He visits and sees the sins, generation after generation. A satanically covenantal society becomes skilled in certain sins. There is a systematic specialization in particular evils. Men are creatures. They are limited. Men have to specialize in order to achieve their goals. This is as true of sinfulness (and righteousness) as it is of economic production. As time goes on, the sinners get very good at what they are doing. Their unique cultural sins compound over time. As God

31. Kohath, Moses’ grandfather, was alive before the descent into Egypt (Gen. 46:11). His son was Amram (Ex. 6:18), Moses’ father (Num. 26:59). For a discussion of the problem of the period of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt, see Donovan Courville, The Exodus Problem and its Ramifications, 2 vols. (Loma Linda, California: Challenge Books, 1971), I, pp. 137–41.

32. Numbers 1:44; 4:37, 41, 45, 46, 49.
put it with reference to the iniquity of the Amorites, their cup had to be filled up before the heirs of Abraham could inherit the promised land (Gen. 15:16b). The cup of iniquity of the Egyptians filled up one generation (40 years) before the cup of the Amorites filled up. Thus, in the fourth generation (Kohath’s generation to Joshua’s), Israel returned to Canaan, just as God had promised (Gen. 15:16a).

The compounding process that builds up the capital base of iniquity explains Isaiah 65:7: “I will repay your iniquities, yours and your fathers, all at once, says the LORD, because they burnt incense on the mountains and defied me on the hills; I will first measure out their reward and then pay them in full” (NEB). It is not that the sons have broken with the sins of the fathers, but nonetheless are going to be judged in terms of their fathers’ rebellion. On the contrary, it is that the sons have become even more efficient in sinning. Mercy had been shown to the fathers in not destroying them. The fathers had been able to pass down a legacy of evil to the sons. Thus, the sons suffer for their own sins, but their sins are more deserving of judgment, for this final generation has not repented in thankfulness for the mercy shown to their fathers by God. The final generation exists only because God had not destroyed their fathers, yet they refuse to repent. God’s massive judgment is just, for their sin is greater. Why? Because, first, they did not repent in the face of God’s mercy to their fathers, and second, because they have inherited a legacy of evil that has built up over time – a covenantal inheritance of death.

B. Mercy Unto Thousands

In contrast to the compounding process of evil, which is cut short after a few generations, stands God’s promise to show mercy to thousands of those who keep His commandments. Cassuto interpreted
this to mean *thousands of generations*. Nachmanides translated it: “He showeth mercy unto the thousandth generation.”\(^{33}\) The contrast is between a few generations and many – so many that it really means eternity. Cassuto cites Deuteronomy 7:9: “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.”\(^{34}\) The next verse is also significant, although Cassuto neglects it: “And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face” (Deut. 7:10).

This is one of the most optimistic concepts in the Bible. What God is saying is that *the works of evil will be cut short*, sometimes after three or four generations, and sometimes immediately. The process of compound growth for the sinners will not go on forever, in contrast to the compounding process for the righteous. The evils of the sinners overtake them; their cup becomes full and they are destroyed. But for the righteous man and the righteous society, the cup runneth over (Ps. 23:5b). Even the now-empty cup of the vanquished wicked – the economic base in which sin was finally filled to the brim – is inherited by the righteous. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22b).

Could the Hebrews really have understood all this? In general, yes. Abraham had been told that the fourth generation would inherit the land of Canaan. This was the generation that succeeded Moses’ generation. The children of the exodus were told this explicitly by God,


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with respect to the external blessings that He was about to give them, and were reminded of their covenantal responsibility to obey His law and teach it to their children (Deut. 6:5–9).  

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 6:10–12).

The compound growth rate of evil is temporary. Such growth is always brought into judgment by God. The “positive feedback” of growth is always overturned by the “negative feedback” of judgment – sometimes overnight, as in the case of Babylon when it fell to the Medo-Persian Empire (Dan. 5). The compound growth rate of righteousness is long term. More than this: It is perpetual. God shows mercy to thousands of generations, meaning throughout history and (symbolically) beyond history. But this growth process does include history; generations are historical phenomena. There can be intermittent departures from faith by God’s covenant people. This interrupts the growth process. But the contrast is between a brief period of three or four unrighteous generations and a stupendously long period of mercy to those who love God and keep His commandments. The magnitude of the growth period of mercy and mercy’s works is enormous, compared with the growth period of evil. This fact points to comprehensive dominion by God’s people in history. It points to the fulfilment of the dominion covenant in history.

35. North, Inheritance and Dominion, ch. 15.
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Exponential Righteousness

The implication should be obvious: The capital base of righteousness will grow to fill the earth over time. Even a little growth, if compounded over a long enough period of time, produces astronomically large results – so large, in fact, that exponential growth points to an eventual final judgment and an end to time, with its cursed, scarce creation. The righteous widow’s two mites (Luke 21:2–4), if invested at 1% per annum over a thousand generations, would be worth more than all the wealth on earth. In other words, the concept of “a thousand generations” is symbolic; it means everything there is, a total victory for righteousness. Furthermore, this victory is no overnight affair; it comes as all growth processes come for a society: step by step, line upon line, here a little, there a little.

The sheer magnitude of righteousness’ compounding capital base will inescapably overcome the feeble capital structure of iniquity, as surely as God’s army will overcome Satan’s. Men who work diligently and faithfully in terms of God’s law can legitimately have confidence in the snowball effect of their efforts. There can be a comparable snowball effect for rebellious societies, but rebellion’s snowball eventually is melted by the heat of God’s fury. Four generations of compounding – even “leveraged” compounding – cannot match a thousand generations of compounding.

Kingdoms: Simultaneously Internal and External

It is difficult to interpret Exodus 20:4–6 in terms of the idea that


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Satan’s kingdom grows externally, but God’s kingdom grows only internally. If Satan’s kingdom is essentially external and cultural, rather than both internal (“spiritual”) and external, then why did Satan demand that Jesus worship him? On the other hand, if God’s kingdom is essentially internal (“spiritual”) and not also external and cultural, then why does He demand visible conformity to His commandments? Even more important, why does God promise external blessings to those who conform themselves to his law (Deut. 8:1–13), and warn against the lure of the religion of autonomous man when those blessings tempt men to forget God (Deut. 8:14–20)? Why should God tell His people not to worship graven images, and then immediately thereafter list all the external blessings – agricultural and military blessings, plus peace – that they can confidently expect if they obey this commandment (Lev. 26:1–12)? The answer should be obvious. *Both kingdoms are simultaneously internal (“spiritual”) and external*; the spirit and the flesh are interconnected. Both kingdoms operate in the supernatural realm and in the temporal realm. Both seek dominion over the creation. Both have periods of growth, internally and externally. But Satan’s kingdom is cut down early, “in the midst of its prime,” so to speak, just as Jesus was cut off in the midst of His prime, and the animals sacrificed in the Old Testament were cut off in the midst of their prime, so that God’s kingdom might have long life and not suffer the judgment of Satan’s kingdom.

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39. Young turtledoves or young pigeons (Lev. 5:7), young bullocks (Ex. 29:1; Num. 28:11, 19), a three-year-old heifer, goat, and ram (Gen. 15:9), a virgin heifer which has never been yoked (Deut. 21:3), and the archetype of all sacrifices, the lamb (Gen. 22:7; Ex. 12:3–5; etc.).
Graven Images and Rival Civilizations

The comparative growth rates are, of course, symbolic. Egypt’s case was literal, and the Hebrews should have recognized the power of God to bring His word to pass. Nevertheless, some pagan societies have gone on in their rebellion far longer than four generations. The Roman Empire is one historical example, although the Pax Romana lasted less than two centuries before the Empire began to be subjected to major crises. The point is, compared to the long-term growth of God’s kingdom, in time and on earth as well as beyond the grave, Satan’s earthly kingdoms are short-lived. The mercy that God shows to pagan kingdoms by not bringing judgment on them the moment they transgress His law is ultimately a form of judgment. They receive common grace, meaning an unmerited and temporary gift of an extension of time without judgment, but this only increases the magnitude of the eventual wrath of God. We should not expect to see Satan’s kingdom cut down overnight in the future, after having attained a position of universal dominion. The process of growth for Satan’s kingdom is not continuous. The “negative feedback” phenomenon of external judgment repeatedly cuts back the growth of Satan’s external dominion long before it can achieve worldwide dominion. These verses point to a far different future: the steady growth of Christ’s kingdom as the leaven of righteousness overwhelms and replaces the God-hindered leaven of Satan’s kingdom.40

The Gambler

Satan’s kingdom manifests itself intermittently during temporary periods of exceedingly rapid growth, but this growth cannot be

sustained for “a thousand generations.” The growth rate of Satan’s kingdom is the growth rate of the gambler who has a string of successful bets, or the highly leveraged (indebted) investor who predicts the market accurately for a time and multiplies his wealth with borrowed money. Such growth is rapid, but it cannot be sustained. It is the growth rate of a person who has limited time, and who must make his fortune in one lifetime. He requires rapid growth, for he has no faith in long-term growth over many generations. The compound growth rate must be high, and it must be rapid, for it will not last for long.

Paganism and gambling are closely linked, especially in periods of declining social order. Rushdoony writes: “Gambling comes to have a religious prominence and passion in the minds of men, so that it is more than a mere pastime: it is a hope for life. . . . The gambler denies implicitly that the universe is under law; he insists that ‘all life is a gamble’ and a falling brick can kill you, and totally meaningless events always surround you, because chance, not God, is ultimate. Since chance, not God, rules the universe, causality does not prevail. It is therefore possible to get something for nothing, and the gambler, knowing what the odds are, nevertheless expects chance to overrule law and enrich him.”\(^{41}\) The gambler believes in law-overcoming chance, or luck. Such an outlook was dominant during the Roman Empire, and it destroyed the foundations of classical civilization.\(^{42}\)

Such an outlook is also the ideology of the revolutionary. Faith in the great revolutionary discontinuous event, the run of successful

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Graven Images and Rival Civilizations

bets, or the overnight “killing” in the market marks the short-run view of fallen man. Continuity holds no promise of victory for him, for he knows that time and continuity are his great enemies. The run of luck for a gambler cannot hold; the law of averages (statistical continuity) eventually reasserts itself. Similarly, the traditions and habits of men (social and ethical continuity) thwart the revolutionary; if the revolutionaries cannot capture the seats of central power overnight, in a top-down transfer of power to the newly captured central government, they fear that all will be lost.

Even a successful revolution is threatened by institutional continuity: lethargy, corruption, bureaucracy. This was the fate of the Soviet Union. To overcome these results, Communists argued for the

43. Karl Marx, who spent most of his life in self-imposed poverty, inherited a fortune in 1864. As the money was being sent in chunks, Marx invested in the stock market. He wrote to Engels on July 15: “If I had the money during the last ten days, I would have been able to make a good deal on the stock exchange. The time has come now when with wit and very little money one can make a killing in London.” As his biographer reports, a year later he was again begging for money from Engels. Robert Payne, Marx (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), p. 353. Marx was supported entirely by Engels, a successful businessman, from the early 1870’s until his death in 1883. In contrast to Marx’s profligate, gambling ways was his uncle, Lion Philips, who despised his nephew. Philips’ grandsons founded the Philips Company, which is still one of the largest manufacturing companies in Europe. In the United States, it is known as the North American Philips Company, or Norelco.

44. Lenin wrote a secret message from his hiding place to the Bolshevik Central Committee on Oct. 8, 1917, a few days before the Communists captured Russia. It outlined the tactics for the capture of power. He ended his letter with these words: “The success of both the Russian and the world revolution depends on two or three days’ fighting.” “Advice of an Onlooker,” in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), The Lenin Anthology (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 414.

necessity of continual revolutions. Trotsky\textsuperscript{46} and Mao\textsuperscript{47} both called for a continuing series of revolutions, echoing the instruction given to Communist proletarians by Karl Marx in 1850: “Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence.”\textsuperscript{48} Billington has traced the idea back to the Bavarian Illuminati.\textsuperscript{49} Thomas Jefferson used similar language: “What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants. It is its natural manure.”\textsuperscript{50} He was writing of Daniel Shays’ rebellion (1786–87), the reaction against which became one of the main motivations of the Constitutional convention in 1787.\textsuperscript{51} Yet here was Jefferson, writing: “God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion.”

God’s people, on the contrary, should have faith in both time and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology}, edited by Isaac Deutscher (New York: Dell, 1964).
\item \textsuperscript{47} “Revolution was the proper occupation of the masses, Mao believed, for only through perpetual revolution could he realize his vision of an egalitarian collective society.” Dennis Bloodworth, \textit{The Messiah and the Mandarins: Mao Tse-tung and the Ironies of Power} (New York: Atheneum, 1982), p. 187.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Billington, \textit{Fire in the Minds of Men}, p. 597, note 309.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Gary North, \textit{Conspiracy in Philadelphia: Origins of the United States Constitution} (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Dominion Educational Ministries, Inc., 2004), Appendix B.
\end{itemize}
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continuity.52 God governs both. The steady efforts of the godly man accomplish much. God’s Word does not return to Him void (Isa. 55:11). Through the covenantal community, over time, each man’s efforts are multiplied for “thousands of generations.” The regenerate person should expect a long-term return from his efforts: the establishment and steady expansion of the kingdom of God, in time and on earth, and then beyond the grave.

Conclusion

The prohibition against graven images is fundamentally a prohibition against man’s worshipping the works of man. When man worships an image created by man, he does not worship the Creator, whose image man is. He is worshipping something less than man. All men should see this, but only regenerate men do. The prohibition of graven images should therefore be understood as the repudiation of humanism (Ex. 20:4). All forms of idolatry are ultimately variations of self-worship, for it is man, as a self-proclaimed sovereign being, who asserts the right to choose whom he will worship in place of God. Man, the sovereign, decides.

Men are called to exercise dominion over all creatures, but ethically rebellious men worship images of creatures (Rom. 1:22). Sometimes these images are graven images; sometimes they are mirror images. In either case, men bow down to the creation. What appears to be an act of human autonomy – worshipping the creation of one’s own hands – is ultimately an act of subordination to the dark one who is supposed to be judged by men, not worshipped by men, and who will be judged by God’s people (I Cor. 6:3).

52. See North, Moses and Pharaoh, ch. 12: “Continuity and Revolution.”
The fulfillment of the dominion covenant is based on simultaneous subordination and rulership. Men are under God and over the creation. There is no escape from the governing principle of subordination and fulfillment. It is an inescapable concept. The questions are: To whom will men be ethically subordinate, and over what will they exercise dominion? Whose ethical yoke will men wear: Christ’s or Satan’s? Men cannot operate without an ethical yoke. Whose law-order will they uphold and conform themselves to?

When men worship the creature, including man, they are worshipping Satan, who is temporally and temporarily the most powerful of creatures. They have adopted a religion of exclusively temporal power. Supernatural forces may or may not be invoked, but the goal is the same: the acquisition of temporal power. Anton Szandor LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan in the mid-1960’s, has put it well: “Anyone who pretends to be interested in magic or the occult for reasons other than gaining personal power is the worst kind of hypocrite.” This is the heart and soul of all Baal worship. But Satan’s rule is doomed. It can grow in influence culturally for short periods, but ultimately temporal judgment comes, as it came to the Egyptians. The capital investment of the idol-worshippers is eventually squandered, destroyed, or inherited by the faithful.

On the other hand, when men worship God, they place themselves within a covenantal framework that is guaranteed for “thousands of generations.” They can take dominion over the external realm because they operate in terms of God’s tool of dominion, His law. Time and continuity are not the enemies of God’s people, for long-term growth eventually brings prosperity to the spiritual, covenantal heirs of the faithful. The continuity of faith over time brings the...

53. North, Dominion Covenant, ch. 7.

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continuity of expansion over time, spiritually and culturally.

Men are to seek covenantal dominion, not autonomous power. Dominion comes through obedience to God. God possesses ultimate authority. Man cannot escape being subordinate to something ultimate, and this ultimate something is God. By refusing to make graven images, the ancient Hebrews ritually affirmed that their covenantal yoke was imposed by God, not by themselves.

To whom will a man or society be subordinate: God or Satan? Will a man become part of God’s hierarchy or, as C. S. Lewis puts it in his Screwtape Letters, part of Satan’s “lowerarchy”? Whose covenantal yoke will men wear, Christ’s or Satan’s? There is no escape from yokes; the question is: Whose? The issue of hierarchy and obedience is crucial in this commandment. God commands men to worship Him, and not to attempt to escape subordination to Him by seeking autonomy. Worshipping anything other than God is an affirmation of autonomy, for man autonomously determines for himself that he will worship something other than God. The second commandment prohibits man from setting up any visible manifestations of a representative of any supernatural authority other than God.
LAWFUL TITLE

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain (Ex. 20:7).

The theocentric principle here is God’s control over the use of His name. This commandment asserts a property right. This commandment parallels the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.”

God’s Name and God’s Covenant

The covenant is a systematic judicial arrangement. The name of God is at the center of the covenant. To deny that God is the God of the patriarchs, Moses, and the conquest of Canaan is to deny His name. When studying the name of God, it is safest to begin where God begins: with what God says about who He is.

Sovereignty

God has a name. He is the source of His name. Covenantally speaking, He is the owner of His name because He is absolutely sovereign. Theologians speak of the aseity of God. This means that God is self-existent. So rare is this concept today that standard dictionaries sometimes do not include the word.

When Moses asked God who he should say had sent him to the Israelites, God replied, “I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And
God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Ex. 3:14–15). (The Hebrew can also be translated, “I will be who I will be.”) We learn, first, that He is the self-defining God: “I am.” Second, we learn that He is the God of Israel’s history. So, He is eternal, yet He enters into history. That is, He is both transcendent and immanent. This is point one of the biblical covenant model.

Any creature who claims to be the Creator has violated the third commandment. Any agent of such a usurper has identified himself as an interloper. He has profaned God’s name. The original name violation was the serpent’s.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (Gen. 3:1).

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4–5).

He implied that God’s Word is unreliable. He implied that God was envious of Adam and Eve, withholding what was legitimately theirs. The serpent asserted God’s ulterior motive: to deny to Adam and Eve their ability right to become gods, knowing good and evil. In other words, the serpent insisted that God is not who He said He is, and what He said would happen to them for violating His command would not happen. This was false testimony about the Creator God who defines Himself and defines reality, rendering judgment on it, both in history and at the final day. “Hath God said?” is the age-old false rhetorical question of covenantal rebels.
Another example of name violation is Ben-hadad’s, the Syrian king, whose forces had been defeated by the Northern Kingdom, whose king was the monstrous Ahab. Ben-hadad had even worse counsellors than Ahab had.

And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And do this thing. Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms: And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so (I Kings 20:23–25).

Ben-hadad invaded again, and again he was defeated. God defended His name and His authority as the universal God, not a god of the local hills. He was willing to let a low-life scoundrel like Ahab have the military victory in preference to Ben-hadad’s having the victory in the name of another god. The infraction of the Syrian counsellors was profanity: false testimony about the nature and character of God. Their profanity was not a curse. It had to do with a theological infraction: claiming that God is not who He said He is.

Hierarchy

Title sometimes conveys the sense of office. We identify a high official by the title he possesses in the organization. It is a means of ranking. “Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven” (Ps. 148:13). Christians affirm: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
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of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant model.

Possessing lawful title His own name, God identified Himself with the Israelites. God told Moses, “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (Ex. 4:22–23). The Israelites owed God worship. This is what Pharaoh denied.

Another aspect of point two is representation. The Israelites would represent God to the nations. The Israelites had the right – in fact, the covenantal obligation – to identify their names with His. By the time God gave the Israelites His law, the Canaanites knew the connection between the Israelites and God (Josh. 2:9–11).

Boundaries

Point three involves boundaries or limits on what man can lawfully do. There is a sacred boundary around God and His name. When Moses came before the burning bush, God said: “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Ex. 3:5–6). The ground itself was sacred because of its proximity to a theophany of God. God therefore told Moses to remove his shoes. Next, God explicitly identified Himself with the patriarchs. Then He identified Himself with the Israelites. “And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows” (v. 7).

God was about to take back His people from Pharaoh, who had
stolen them and placed them in bondage. “And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Ex. 6:7).

Pharaoh had claimed to be the owner of Israel-Jacob. In doing so, he violated God’s property. He also violated God’s title as the sovereign Lord over Israel. It was an assertion of sovereignty. This was the dividing issue of the exodus.¹

God’s revealed law is an aspect of dominion. God’s revealed laws are to serve as a way to evangelize covenant-breakers. Keeping the law is an aspect of honoring the name of God among the nations.

But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:4–8).²

Moses gave the law to Israel in preparation for the invasion and conquest of Canaan. When the third generation refused to invade

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(Num. 14), God’s curse on them was four decades of their wandering in the wilderness. When it was time for the fourth generation to invade, Moses recapitulated the law: Deuteronomy. Biblical law is an aspect of dominion.

The third commandment establishes that God possesses title to His name. Title here refers to property. We say that the owner of property possesses *lawful title* to the property. His name is on the certificate of ownership. This ownership is limited to whatever is described in the title. The property has *boundaries*. We also speak of *entitlement*. A person is owed something because he has a legal right to it. Such a person is *entitled* to something. For example, God is entitled to praise, based on His name. “Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven” (Ps. 148:13).

Oath

The males of Israel were marked by circumcision: point four, the oath sign. This was a form of branding. God’s mark was on them. Their flesh testified to the nation they belonged to. This branding was crucial for the Abrahamic Covenant. It was a sign of God’s ownership of them. Yet this was specifically a covenant mark: a negative sanction brought against the flesh.

When ownership is legally established, there must be witnesses to confirm possession of title. Strict monotheism has no doctrine of original witnesses. Christianity does. There are two witnesses to testify to the ownership rights of each individual owner. “And I subscribed

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the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances” (Jer. 32:10).

Usually, the commentators focus on prohibited oaths as the central issue in this commandment. This would place it under point four. But it appears under point three. This has greatly influenced my exposition of the commandment.

**Continuity**

We say that title can be passed to a new owner. That is, the property described in the certificate of ownership continues to exist. Its boundaries do not change because of the change of ownership. The title changes. In the case of God’s name, there is no change of title. In this case, the title is the property. Both the title and the property are continuous. “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6).

God owned the land of Canaan. He had passed title in Abraham’s day to the fourth generation. “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full (Gen. 15:16). Yet this extension of God’s kingdom could be maintained only by Israel’s obedience to God’s revealed law: ethics, point three. “And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God” (Deut. 8:19–20). This is the covenantal basis of the command not to take God’s name in vain.

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The key verb in the passage is the Hebrew word for “take.” Unfortunately for expositors, it is one of the most frequently used words in the Old Testament, and it is used in about forty-five different ways. This has led to considerable confusion on the part of commentators. I believe that the King James Version’s translators were correct in selecting “take” to translate the word. To take something is to remove it from its owner’s immediate control. This transfer can be according to the terms of a contract between two individuals, one of whom is the owner, or it can be a violation of the owner’s property right.

The second commandment is about hierarchy. Man is not to bow down to any god other than the God who delivered the Israelites out of bondage. In this sense, the second commandment re-affirms the principle of stewardship. God is over man. Man is accountable to God.

The third commandment extends the second commandment’s principle of delegation. Because this commandment is presented as a prohibition, it implicitly affirms an authorization. The illegitimate use of God’s name by man implies a legitimate use of God’s name by man. Man is a steward and a priest. God delegates the use of His name to men. But, as with all other aspects of this delegated sovereignty, there are stipulations, meaning terms of use. The third commandment lays down the law of the covenant regarding God’s name. It must not be misused. The translators selected “vain” as the modifier.

What does the Hebrew word that is translated as “vain” really mean? Generally, it refers to something that is false. Later, in the section in Exodus on the case laws, we read: “Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness” (Ex. 23:1). Even more to the point, in the section of Deuter-
Chapter 3 . . . Exodus 20:7

onomony that re-states the Ten Commandments, the ninth commandment uses the Hebrew word for “vain”: “Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Deut. 5:20). Isaiah warned the people regarding the nation: “None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity” (Isa. 59:4). Hosea said, “They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field” (Hosea 10:4).

This commandment prohibits the deliberate misuse of God’s name in some sort of formal declaration. The transgression seems to contain some element of deception, something that pays the violator to promote falsehood by using God’s name. The commentators have not agreed on the nature of this declaration. In fact, most of them have not even mentioned it. Another issue fascinates them: profanity.

**Profanity**

Because of a tradition of biblical exposition going back for many centuries, this law is usually interpreted as the misuse of God’s name in a verbal oath. It is usually equated with obscenity: a verbal violation of social standards. But profanity is different from obscenity. It has to do with an oath. It is an oath in a formal sense: a self-maledictory oath.

Most commentators say little about this law, and when they do, they focus on swearing, not in the sense of a false oath in a court, but in the sense of profanity. There is a sense in which profanity does apply to such language, but the commentators rarely explain the underlying meaning of profanity. As I discuss at length in the full version of my commentary on Leviticus, profanity is a boundary violation of a sacred object or sacred space. It is the misuse of
something holy in the sense of holiness as something sacred. God’s name is surely sacred. So, the misuse of God’s name in cursing is a form of profanity. But it is not the only one. Theologically, it is not the main one.

A verbal curse is an aspect of the oath: point four of the biblical covenant model. The oath is associated with sanctions: specifically, the \textit{self-maledictory oath} of a covenant. An ordained covenental agent of a local church in an excommunication lawfully curses another person. He calls down God’s negative sanctions on the excommunicant. This is the meaning of a covenental curse. This is not profanity.

Profanity’s words may parallel a legitimate verbal oath, but it is performed unlawfully, outside of formal excommunication. The problem with this definition of profanity is that it, too, is associated with point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions. The commentators usually focus on this narrowly circumscribed aspect of profanity. The common verbal habit of using God’s name to emphasize a point is a misuse of God’s name. The question here is this: Why is the third commandment, which has to do with boundaries, almost universally associated by the commentators with the judicial issue that point four of the biblical covenant model is concerned with, \textit{oath}?

Profanity in the context of the third commandment explicitly has to do with \textit{false testimony}. The text does not mention a curse as an aspect of profanity, nor does it mention loose language. The commentators have ignored this for centuries. They write as if this commandment has as its focus intemperate language rather than false language.

Profaning the name of God has to do far more with disobedience in general than with verbal oaths. “Therefore shall ye keep my com-

mandments, and do them: I am the LORD. Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD which hallow you, That brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD” (Lev. 22:31–33). Under the Mosaic Covenant, profanity also had to do with offering false sacrifices.

And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD (Lev. 18:21).

They [priests] shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy (Lev. 21:6).

In the first edition of this book, I followed Rushdoony’s exposition in developing my points regarding contracts. He, too, focuses on the oath. Unlike most commentators, he focuses mainly on the oath in its covenantal sense, not its profanity sense. He devotes only a few pages to profanity and blasphemy. What I did not see in 1985, when I wrote this book, was that point three of the five-point covenant model is concerned with God’s name as a boundary rather than as an oath confirmation or violation. I made the connection between oath-bound covenants and promise-bound contracts. A covenant is not a contract, I argued, because of the self-maledictory aspect of the cov-


7. Ibid., pp. 106–11.

8. Ibid., pp. 124–27.
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enant. This is true enough, but it is not the focus of this command-
ment. It is an implication of the fourth point of the biblical covenant
model, not the third.

I also went into detail about profanity. Because I had not yet
written my exposition of Leviticus 5:14–19, which deals with the
sacred, the profane, and the common, I did not recognize in 1985 the
extent to which the third commandment refers to a boundary viola-
tion, i.e., the profaning of God’s name. But this is profanity in the
sense of a falsehood rather than in the sense of an invocation of God’s
name as a means of harnessing power, either directly from God
directly or through an illegitimate empowering of daily language.

Covenants and Contracts

How does the third commandment relate to economics? By way
of the covenant. The covenant is a judicial relationship between God
and men, which is based on a self-maledictory oath before God. Men
promise to obey God’s stipulations as the sign of their covenantal
faithfulness.

A covenant testifies to the existence of a higher sovereignty.
Biblically sanctioned self-maledictory oaths are formally adminis-
tered by a God-ordained subordinate sovereignty, which possesses
more than a contractual sovereignty: church, State, or family. It pos-
sesses covenantal sovereignty. This is why the eighteenth-century
Enlightenment’s explanations of the origins of civil government by
the so-called social contract theorists are categorically incorrect. The
three governments ordained by God – ecclesiastical, civil, and family
– were not the product of a hypothetical historical social contract
among sovereign individuals. They were the covenantal creations of
the Creator God. They are not organizations that were created by the
equivalent of business contracts.

There is always a tendency for Satan to imitate God. Satan establishes pseudo-covenants, just as he establishes pseudo-churches. Pseudo-covenants include such pagan associations as crime syndicates and secret societies. These are seen by their members as brotherhoods. They are oath-bound associations, with negative physical sanctions for oath-breakers.

A contract is analogous to a covenant, but without a self-maledictory oath before God. This is a fundamental distinction between contracts and covenants. A contract is made between individuals or organizations on the basis of mutual self-interest. So is a covenant. The terms of a contract are governed by the written and customary laws of the civil government. So is a covenant. A contract may or may not be enforceable in civil courts. So is a covenant. But a private contract does not legitimately involve the use of a self-maledictory oath, implicitly or explicitly, since no God-ordained sovereign institution has initially bound the parties by means of such an oath. Oaths may be required in the future by a sovereign government if a dispute concerning the terms of the covenant or the performance of the contracting parties drives the antagonists into civil court. Originally, however, the two contracting parties are not in possession of God’s grant of monopoly authority. A business is not institutionally sovereign in the way that the church or civil government is.

This absence of an oath keeps the contract out of the jurisdiction of point four. A contract is more a matter of name than oath. It is a matter of stipulations more than sanctions. This is what I failed to recognize in the first edition of this book.9

The Business Contract

Men can make better use of their scarce economic resources by co-operating in the activities of production. The idea behind a business contract is that such co-operation involves costs, especially unknown future costs. A contract reduces uncertainty by formalizing various responsibilities of the co-operating entrepreneurs. *A contract therefore is a cost-reduction device.* Men learn to trust one another to fulfill the terms of the contract. Self-government becomes easier, since everyone has a clearer idea of what is expected from him and from others who are parties to the contract. This greater certainty of performance frees up resources that would otherwise have to be expended in policing the venture.

The contract is signed. Two or more people put their names on the contract. This identifies them as people who have made promises. A signer is responsible for the performance of his word. To enter into a contract with a plan to perform otherwise than stipulated in the contract is a form of fraud.

When God’s name is on an individual because of his confession and the mark of the covenant, God’s reputation is at stake. This is why people who acknowledge their position as covenant-keepers have an obligation not to misuse God’s name. It is not merely that they avoid profane language. It is that they do not do in the name of God what will bring a bad reputation on God.

In the Old Testament, no case stands out more clearly of the misuse of God’s name than David’s adultery and his murder of the man who could have brought charges against him, Uriah the Hittite. Nathan the prophet told David this: “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (II Sam. 12:14). The enemies did not blaspheme by calling David an evil man.
Blasphemy is a violation of God’s name. In this case, it meant attributing to God the evil behavior of the king who represented Him. David did this, not as a businessman, but as a king. This was the misuse of the covenantal office of king. His penalty was very great. But, analogously, a corrupt businessman who openly places himself under the authority of a church, and then commits deliberate fraud by means of the trust people have in him as a man of God, has taken the name of the Lord in vain.

A contract may have penalties for non-performance written into it. These are analogous to, but not identical to, the self-maledictory aspect of a covenant. The contract cannot legitimately call upon God to uphold directly the terms of the contract. Depending on circumstances, the ultimate enforcing agency may be the civil government, or an agreed-upon arbitration organization, or even the church (I Cor. 6), but a truly sovereign agency cannot delegate its sovereignty in advance without thereby transferring its character as a sovereign agency to the recipient. For example, the transfer of the seal of government involves also the transfer of governmental sovereignty to the recipient. But this transforms the contract-making ability of the recipient organization into a covenant-making ability.

From “Brotherhood” to “Otherhood”

This is a phrase adopted by the sociologist-historian Benjamin Nelson. He uses the so-called “Weber thesis” to provide an


interpretation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The historical documentation and debates surrounding this thesis are not the main issue at this point. What is important is the concept of the non-covenantal voluntary association. The brotherhood is pseudo-covenantal, but in primitive societies, it sometimes function as a civil government. The otherhood is contractual.

As the West became increasingly Christian during the Middle Ages, men could deal with each other because they belonged to a universal church. Christian associations steadily replaced pagan brotherhoods and tribes. The medieval world was a world of mutual loyalties, often written down. Feudal contracts were military and civil covenants, however. What steadily replaced these covenants was the contract, especially the business contract.

The Protestant Reformation destroyed the ecclesiastical unity of the medieval world, but it did not destroy trade. On the contrary, trade increased. Men who did not share membership in a common church or a common city could still truck and barter with each other, even in the absence of a universal currency, although gold coins minted by the Italian city-states circulated increasingly, especially after 1500. Trade was fostered by men’s adoption of contracts which partially substituted society for the destruction of a common church covenant.

Consider the benefits provided by the contract. Men whose ends are radically different, or even opposed, can trade in the market place in order to capture the benefits of the division of labor. Because the


contract spells out mutual obligations, men can make better plans concerning the future. A contract, because it is not a covenantal document, can bring together people of varying religious beliefs and practices. The division of labor expands, and so does specialization. Per capita output increases. Had men been limited to exchanges within the covenanted “brotherhood,” their markets would have remained small. The division of labor is limited by the extent of the market. Therefore, their per capita wealth would have remained small. Contracts allow men to exchange with members of an “otherhood.”

Deceptive Promises

Consider a person who agrees to perform a specified service for a specified price. “You can count on me. My word is my bond. I agree to perform the service.” But what if he escalates his rhetoric? What if he says this? “I am absolutely trustworthy. I swear on the Bible that I will fulfill the terms of our agreement. But I want payment in advance.”

He has sworn on the Bible. So what? If he is a God-fearing man, he will avoid such covenant-related rituals as a misuse of God’s name. It violates God’s property right in His own name in the interest of invoking God’s authority. But if the person is a deceiver, he may very well use such a phrase. The Bible becomes just another a tool in his tool kit of deceptive techniques. He enlists God’s name, by implication, in this deception. He is able to extract money in advance because the buyer believes that the seller will be too afraid not to perform the promised service. Or perhaps the use of religious-

sounding language calmed the buyer into believing that this is a man familiar with God’s blessings. In any case, vaguely religious and ignorant people can become victims of those who take the name of God in vain.

Such language involves fraud. A person poses as God-fearing, yet his very language belies his claim. But a theologically ignorant person is deceived. This is a recapitulation of Satan’s temptation of Eve in the garden. He used God’s name and religious-sounding language in order to calm Eve’s sense of insecurity. Because of the misleading use of language, Eve believed that her risks were lower than they really were. In business contracts, the misuse of religious language accomplishes the same thing: a reduction in the buyer’s perceived risk. The deal seems less risky than it really is because of the seller’s use of religious language, at least less risky in the mind of the superstitious or ignorant person who is unfamiliar with the third commandment.

A covenant-keeper should be a lower-risk employee than a covenant-breaker. He believes in God. He believes that God’s Word is reliable and sure. He performs his agreed-upon tasks on time and at the level of quality as is customary in his profession, and perhaps above that level. He is not supposed to be an inefficient or unreliable employee. He is supposed to be doing all things for the glory of God, performing his tasks of the dominion covenant.

A Christian’s word should be worth more in the marketplace than other men’s words. If this is not a characteristic feature of Christian service, then there is a glaring deficiency in the church’s level of instruction and discipline. When a Christian says “yea,” then the other person can rely on that “yea.” The other person can make a budget for the future that includes predictable performance on the part of his Christian suppliers of goods and services. He can more accurately plan for the future. This makes his plans less expensive. There is therefore less waste in the economy. God’s resources are allocated
more efficiently. In short, there should be less risk when we rely upon the promises of Christians.

Christians since New Testament times have borne the name of Christ (Acts 11:26). They say, “I am of Christ.” This is not a violation of the third commandment. But if they attempt to create a market in terms of the name of Christ, they must be ready to sacrifice wealth in order to honor that name. To use God’s name explicitly in commercial ventures requires above-average performance, what some have called “going the extra mile.” To swear to a contract, verbal or written, explicitly by God’s name, is a violation of the third commandment.

**Conclusion**

The prohibition against taking the name of God in vain has implications for several areas: civil, familial, and ecclesiastical covenants; private contracts, both business and associational (voluntary societies); public language and therefore public law; and literature. The essence of the prohibition is the question of ultimate sovereignty. Who is sovereign: God, man, or rival gods?

A covenant is not a contract. It rests on higher authority, and it invokes a greater penalty for non-fulfillment of terms. Therefore to swear by God or any aspect of the creation in a contractual situation is to use God’s name in vain. To do this is to create the illusion of more reliable performance because of the presence, implicit or explicit, of a pseudo-self-maledictory oath. This involves deception, and should be penalized by civil statutes governing fraud.

These biblical distinctions between covenants and contracts necessarily involve a rejection of any social contract theory of civil (or any other) government. Government is of God, not of men. Only God, as
Creator, has absolutely sovereign authority and power. Authority, as distinguished from power, is lawfully delegated sovereignty. Its model is what theologians refer to as the *economical Trinity*: the hierarchy of authority and responsibility of the Son to the Father and of the Holy Spirit to both the Father and the Son – the Filioque clause\(^{15}\) – in their relationships to men. By upholding the sanctity of God’s name, all governments thereby testify to this subordination. One aspect of this upholding is the enforcement of the civil law against the misuse of God’s name. The practical problem is to identify those infractions that are a matter of civil law, such as blasphemy and some forms of cursing.

With respect to covenants, the violation of God’s name in open verbal profanity is a matter of civil law, according to the Bible. The blasphemer in Leviticus had to be executed. “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death” (Lev. 24:16). But with respect to economic crimes in which the reputation of God is at stake, civil laws governing fraud are sufficient.

This is additional evidence for the jusicial and conceptual distinction between covenants and contracts. A covenant is established through a self-maledictory oath before God, with God as the sanctioning agent. A contract is not judicially established by a covenantal oath. It is based on mutual promises that are sealed by the names of the parties to the agreement. A violation of a contract does not bring into play a self-maledictory oath before God. A contractual violation...
can be settled through a lawsuit initiated by the injured party or parties. It is not a capital crime.

A detailed study of the third commandment would break down the commandment into five parts, corresponding to the biblical covenantal model. The most detailed section would be point four: oath and sanctions, i.e., curses in a covenantal sense primarily – the invocation of supernatural power – and secondarily as verbal profanity. Verbal profanity is the traditional focus of the commentators on the third commandment. But in the context of the Ten Commandments, the third commandment’s primary implication has to do with the misuse of God’s name in the sense of His name as a boundary. It is an illicit attempt to use God’s name as a kind of brand, in order to further one’s goals at the expense of others who are part of a non-covenantal agreement. This is a prohibited appropriation of a property right: God’s reputation.
REST AND DOMINION

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8–11).

The theocentric meaning of this law is the positive sanction of rest in God. It is grounded in the original six-one pattern of God’s creation of the universe. Here, the basis of the sabbath is said to be God’s week of creation. In Deuteronomy, the reason given is Israel’s liberation from the tyranny of Egypt, where the Israelites were worked unmercifully (Deut. 5:15).

A Major Problem for Bible Commentators

We come now to one of the most difficult of all exegetical and application problems in the Bible: the question of the meaning and enforcement of the sabbath. In economic affairs, only the proper interpretation and application of the tithe principle are equally as difficult and controversial. These economic issues involve the question of what man is required to forfeit in order to honor God: time and money.

Several questions must be considered. First, what is the meaning of “rest”? Second, what is the meaning of “sabbath”? Third, is the Lord’s day (Firstday) the same as the sabbath (Seventhday)? Fourth,
what was the focus of the sabbath in Old Testament times: rest or worship or both? Fifth, how extensive were the restrictions against working in Old Testament times? Sixth, are these same restrictions still required by God in New Testament times? Seventh, who or what agency is to enforce sabbath requirements in New Testament times? In short, where is the locus of sovereignty for sabbath enforcement? Eighth, if the Old Testament’s prohibitions had been enforced throughout the history of the West, could the modern, industrialized West ever have come into existence?

In order to keep this introductory chapter sufficiently short and uncluttered with technical problems, I have decided to add an appendix on the economics of sabbath-keeping. I cover questions four through eight in Appendix A. In this chapter, I devote more space to the meaning of rest and its relationship with dominion, and secondarily, the problem of the sabbath in New Testament times. I argue here that the sabbath principle is related closely to communion with God, and that both are closely related to dominion.

**Autonomy and Creation**

God alone is absolutely sovereign. He is also the Creator. This link between absolute sovereignty and original creation is reflected in man’s nature as the image of God. Man is subordinately sovereign and subordinately creative, or we might say, re-creative. He exercises dominion over the creation because he is subordinate to God. He can never be at the top of the pyramid of power. Only God can occupy that position. To attempt to occupy is an attempt to become divine.

When Adam rebelled, he believed that he had the opportunity of becoming as God, knowing (determining) good and evil (Gen. 3:5). His ethical rebellion was an assertion of human autonomy, a cons-
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cious decision to substitute his own authority and judgment for God’s. Was Adam’s word sovereign, or was God’s?

That single forbidden tree, with its forbidden fruit, was a symbol of Adam’s subordination, meaning his lack of original sovereignty. He did not have authority over that one sphere of the creation. Only God possessed absolute authority over everything, including authority over both Adam and that tree. By asserting his right to eat from that tree, Adam was announcing unilaterally the legitimacy of his quest for total power – the power to control anything and possibly even everything, as if he were God. If he could achieve such control, through autonomous knowledge and autonomous power, then God could not fully control man. Man is therefore truly autonomous and potentially divine, Adam declared by his act of defiance. The sign of his autonomy was his power: the power to eat rebelliously without suffering the predicted consequences. Adam adopted power religion in place of God’s required dominion religion – a dominion process based on ethics.

Adam probably ate of the forbidden tree on that first sabbath. The serpent beguiled Eve (II Cor. 11:3), and Adam listened to his beguiled wife. She was deceived; he was not (I Tim. 2:14). Rather than initially rebuking the serpent, thereby passing preliminary judgment against Satan, and awaiting God’s return to the garden to pass final judgment against him, Adam attempted to render autonomous judgment. By asserting such autonomy, he thereby rendered judgment against God’s Word and in favor of the serpent’s announced estimation of the low or zero likelihood of God’s punishment for Adam’s disobedience.

Adam and Eve could have refused to accept Satan’s evaluation of the effects of eating from the tree. They could have waited for God to return and pass judgment against the intruder, and then to sit down with them to eat of the tree of life. This communion meal with God was postponed by their rebellion and their subsequent ejection from the garden. The celebration of Passover and later the Lord’s Supper
points to a future meal with God after He pronounces final judgment against sin and Satan’s forces, but it also points back to the “meal that might have been.”

Rest: God’s and Man’s

Adam’s rebellion was linked to the question of the sabbath. God had created the world, including Adam, in six days, and He rested the seventh day. The sabbath day was man’s first full day of life. This day began with rest, since God’s original creation activity had ended the day before. Man was the capstone of God’s creation, the final species to be created, but he was nevertheless under God’s sovereignty as a creature. The whole creation, except for one tree, had been delivered into Adam’s hand. The day after the sabbath, the “eighth day,” meaning the eighth day after God first announced, “Let there be light,” Adam was to have gone forth to subdue the earth as God’s subordinate.

Rest means something different for God than it means for man. God rested on the seventh day, after His work was over, and after He had pronounced judgment on it, announcing its inherent goodness. For God, rest is a testimony of His absolute independence. He created the world out of nothing. It is dependent on Him; He is in no way dependent on it. For creatures, on the other hand, rest means subordination. Rest means that God is absolutely sovereign, and that man is absolutely dependent on God. Man begins with rest, for he is subordinate. God ended with rest, for He is absolutely sovereign.

Adam did not rest in his position of dependence under God. To have accepted the first day of the week as God’s gift of rest, to have admitted that the creation was finished, would have meant the acceptance of man’s perpetual position as a re-creative sovereign, not an
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originally creative sovereign. It would have meant that Adam had accepted his position as a creature. The restriction placed upon Adam by God meant that divinity is forever closed to man. Adam refused to accept this. *He could not abide in his God-given rest, precisely because it was God-given.* He wanted rest on his own terms. *He wanted rest as an originally creative sovereign.* He wanted his rest at the end of man’s week, for God had inaugurated a day of rest at the end of His week.\(^{16}\)

Resting the Land

On the seventh day, God rested. Adam should also have rested (his first full day). Thus, for one day in seven, the land is to rest. There was to have been no direct personal attention of man or God to the care of the land. The general personal sovereignty of God undergirds all reality, but there was to have been no visible management of the land on that day. It, too, was to have rested. It, too, was to have been free to develop apart from constant direct attention by another. In this

\(^{16}\) Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 5. I subsequently came to the conclusion that Adam sinned on the sabbath, rather than on the day following the sabbath, in contrast to the arguments I presented in the first edition of Genesis. I revised this in the second edition (1987). The “eighth-day covering” – the eighth-day circumcision of all Hebrew males (Lev. 12:3) and the eighth-day separation from the animal mother of the firstborn male (Ex. 22:30) – makes sense if we regard the evening of the day as the beginning of the next day. “And the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:5b). When God came at the end of the seventh day, He judged them and then covered them, in preparation for their departure from the garden. They would spend the evening and night of the eighth day outside the protection of the garden. Thus, their second full day (God’s eighth day) was their first day of labor outside the garden, the curse placed on their assertion of autonomy.
sense, nature was analogous to Adam, for God had departed and left him physically alone.

This should have pointed to man that he is not ultimately sovereign over nature. The land continued to operate without man’s active supervision. If man rebelled against God, the land would come under a curse, but if Adam remained ethically faithful and enjoyed his rest, the land would suffer no damage from its day of solitude. The forces of nature were never intended to be autonomous from man, but they were nevertheless not entirely dependent on man. This pointed to another source of nature’s daily operations: a law-order created by God, which did not require man or God to be physically present for its continued operation.

After the Fall of man, nature was cursed (Gen. 3:17–18). The Mosaic law imposed an additional form of sabbath on Israel: Every seventh year, the land was not to be worked, for man was not to do agricultural work (Lev. 25:2–7). It was called a sabbath of the land. Just as in the case of that first day in the garden, the land was to be free from man’s care. This pointed to the sovereignty of God over creation.

In that same year, the law was to be read to the assembled nation (Deut. 31:10–13). All debts of Hebrews were canceled (Deut. 15:1–10). All Hebrew slaves (except criminal slaves who were repaying debts, and permanent slaves who had voluntarily covenanted with a family) were to be released (Deut. 15:12–18). Biblical law and freedom go together. They are tied ritually to a sabbath.


18. Ibid., chaps. 35, 36.
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Defining “Sabbath”

What is the meaning of “sabbath”? Scholars debate this point. The Hebrew term means, at the very least, a cessation from activity. It is an intermission. God ceased from the activity of creation on the seventh day, a sign to man that the environment had been delivered to man in a completed form, though not historically developed. Man would henceforth work with this environment to subdue it, but this environment is a gift of God. The first week’s seven-day pattern is to be an eternal pattern – a covenantal symbol of man’s subordination to God. Man is to labor six days and rest one day. Man’s week began with rest. Adam, however, was not content with this pattern, since it began with God’s rest from His labors, which implied that man’s labors must begin with an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. He wanted to become as God, which meant that he chose to imitate God’s week: six days of labor followed by a day of rest. Man would be a creator for six days, and then he would enjoy his rest at the end of the week, after his efforts had been brought to completion by his own hand.¹⁹ The seventh day of rest would be a man-made

¹⁹. Writes Meredith Kline: “For on the seventh day God rested from his work of creation, and this Sabbath of God is a royal resting and enthronement on the judgment seat. One indication that God’s Sabbath-rest consequent to the finishing of his cosmic house was an enthronement is that the Scriptures present the converse of this idea; they portray God’s enthronement in his micro-cosmic (temple-) house as a Sabbath-rest. Thus, when Isaiah makes his challenging comparison between the earthly temple built by Israel and the creation temple of heaven and earth built by God at the beginning, he introduces the Sabbath-rest imagery of the creation history as a parallel to God’s throne house: ‘The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: Where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest (menuhafi)?’ (Isa. 66:1; cf. II Chron. 6:18; Acts 7:49).” Kline, Images of the Spirit (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 111. Man, in his assertion of divine sovereignty, acted as though he himself had created the universe, using it as a throne of his own. He would bring judgment, deciding
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sabbath. Man would rest from his autonomous labors.

What Adam did not count on was God’s response to this rebellion: the curse of the ground. He also did not count on the advent of his own mortality, even though God had warned him that he would surely die if he disobeyed. His time on earth was shortened, while his work load was increased. His work was made burdensome, mixed with his own sweat. The ground would supply him with life, but at the same time, his life would be, in effect, poured into the ground. To dust man now returns. Man’s rest was taken away; his labor is now cursed. By this curse of the ground and this shortening of man’s days, man is made to see that he will never be able to complete his work by himself; completion requires God’s grace. Without a God-imposed day of rest – without God’s re-creating grace, in other words – dominion-driven man would work himself to death: spiritually, culturally, and historically. Without God’s grace, Adam was a dead man. He would never achieve rest, not even in the grave, for there is no spiritual rest for the wicked beyond the grave. There is only impotence and incomparable excruciating pain. The sign of God’s grace is the sabbath day, a promise both of re-creation and the eternal rest to come.

Choices and Costs

What are some of the economic implications of a day of rest? Man’s world is a world of costs and benefits, of choices made in terms of these costs and benefits. It costs men the forfeited income

between God’s Word and Satan’s word. He, like God, would rest at the end of his creative week. But while man was created to enjoy a seventh-day royal resting – God’s seventh day – and to sit at God’s table for a royal meal, man was not to do so apart from beginning with the enjoyment of a first-day, creature’s, vice-gerent resting. He is to begin his week with rest.

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that a day of rest involves, but it also brings them benefits. Leisure is a consumer good, and it has a market value, namely, forfeited income. A day of rest may increase human efficiency, which then results in increased total weekly production (and therefore increased income). Furthermore, God’s covenental promises are available to those who are faithful to the terms of the covenant, so these promised blessings for obedience must also be added to the visible, immediate blessings of man’s external rest. These promised blessings are not always acknowledged by those who are not aware of, or not confident concerning, God’s covenant with His people. They tend to underestimate the benefits of honoring one day of rest in seven. In the Old Testament economy under the Mosaic law, the people of Israel were placed under severe restrictions against sabbath violations. The benefits of rest were in force, but God saw fit to raise the costs of disobedience, thereby encouraging men to remain faithful to the sabbath principle. All those who lived under the civic administration of God’s covenant had to obey. The penalty was stiff: “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD; whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day” (Ex. 35:2–3).

This same penalty was later reinforced during the wilderness period, when a man who was caught gathering sticks on the sabbath was executed by stoning at the express command of God (Num. 15:32–41). No one could miss the message: God wants men to honor the sabbath principle.

The death penalty, when enforced, imposed a tremendous cost on sabbath violators. While all men in Israel were expected to understand the nature of the covenant, with external blessings assured for
external conformity to the terms of the covenant, nevertheless, God relied on the “stick” as well as the “carrot.” The promised benefits were less visible, and therefore more to be taken on faith, than the promised punishment. The punishment was visible and the sanctions were permanent. A man with weak faith still had an incentive to obey.

**New Testament Alterations**

What about New Testament times? Is the Old Testament sabbath still in force? The church has never given a straightforward answer to this question. The church has generally celebrated the first day of the week as the Lord’s day (the Day of the Lord), and Christians have often linked certain Old Testament provisions concerning the sabbath with the New Testament’s day of rest. From the church’s beginning, God’s “eighth day” (Adam’s first working day of the week) was honored as the day of worship 21 (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2a), although it took perhaps a century for the first day of the week to be regarded by most Christians as the sole and exclusive day of worship. 22 This day

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22. Seventh Day Adventist scholar Samuele Bacchiocchi has argued that it was only in the late second century that the Christians, especially in Rome, began to celebrate the first day of the week (Lord’s day) exclusively as the day of rest, in order to distinguish themselves from the Jews: *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), p. 2. This study is an impressive work of historical scholarship, though far less distinguished as a work of reliable biblical exposition. I would guess that the reason why the Pontifical Gregorian University awarded Dr. Bacchiocchi his doctorate and published his
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has also been honored as a day of rest. The church has generally timed the Lord’s day from sunrise to sunrise, in contrast to the Old Testament’s requirement of sunset to sunset. This represents a break from the sabbath. There is another break, far more important judicially.

Capital Punishment

What about the penalty? Has the church maintained that the death penalty should still be enforced on all members of society? The answer is unquestionably no. The church has never required the civil government to execute sabbath violators, although occasionally some commentator does. Examples include the continental Protestant Reformer Heinrich Bullinger in the late sixteenth century and the dissertation is that he presents the Roman Church as the source of the change “from sabbath to Sunday,” thereby attesting to the historical authority of the Roman Church. Church officials were understandably unconcerned about his arguments against all interpretations of New Testament passages that attest to the first day of the week (“Sunday”) as the day of rest and worship. The authority of the Roman Church, rather than the evidence of Scripture, was the crucial criterion in the minds of the churchmen. This, in fact, had been the familiar argument used by Rome against the Reformers: If sola scriptura really is your guide, they asked, why don’t you keep the Saturday sabbath? Luther’s opponent, John Eck, used this argument with great skill. It was repeated in the Zurich Disputation, the Baden Disputation, and at both the pre-Reformation debates in Geneva in 1534 and 1535: Daniel A. Augsburger, “Pierre Viret on the Sabbath Commandment,” Andrews University Seminary Studies, 20 (Summer 1982), p. 92. Andrews University is a Seventh Day Adventist school. For a brief but penetrating critique of Bacchiocchi’s thesis, see R. J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” in D. A. Carson (ed.), From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan-Academie, 1982), pp. 270–73.

23. Appendix B: “Timing the Lord’s Day.”

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American Puritan Thomas Shepherd in the mid-seventeenth. The church has enforced its own laws, even excommunication, on sabbath violators. It has also recommended that the civil government fine violators, or punish them in other ways. But throughout the history of the church, the vast majority of expositors and church officials have hesitated to call for the death penalty. They have, by word and deed, admitted that there has been a fundamental transformation of the civil aspects of sabbath law.

Typical of this approach to sabbath law in the New Testament era is John Murray’s statement. Mr. Murray was a leading twentieth-century Calvinist scholar and a Scot. He acknowledged the “element of truth” in the statement “by good men, that we do not now under this economy observe the Sabbath as strictly as was required of the people of Israel under the Old Testament.” For one thing, they were not allowed to kindle a fire. For another, the death penalty was imposed. “Now there is no warrant for supposing that such regulatory provisions both prohibitive and punitive bind us under the New Testament. This is particularly apparent in the case of the capital punishment executed for Sabbath desecration in the matter of labour. If this is what is meant when it is said that observance is not as strict in its application to us as it was under the Mosaic law, then the contention should have to be granted.” Murray offered no exegesis to explain how the requirement of sabbath observance has survived, but without the civil sanctions attached to Mosaic sabbath law.

F. N. Lee, a South African Calvinist Sabbatarian who, like Mr. Murray, left his country to teach in other English-speaking nations,
writes in his 1966 doctoral dissertation on the sabbath that the capital
punishment provisions of the sabbath law have been abrogated. “It is
important to realize that these aspects of the weekly sabbath, even
though they were ordained by God, were only of temporary ceremo-

nial and/or political significance, and were not intrinsically normative
for the permanent weekly sabbath as such, although they were cer-

tainly temporarily normative for the Sinaitic weekly sabbath of Israel
from Sinai up to the death and resurrection of Christ in which events
all these aspects were fulfilled.”26 (Lee altered his position since the
time of publication of his dissertation in the early 1970’s. He told me
that he believes that Old Testament law is still in force in this age, but
he is not yet ready to recommend, categorically, that the death penalty
should be imposed in all cases of sabbath violations, although continu-
ed willful desecration might be sufficient reason to execute the
rebel, he says.)27

The Sabbatical Year

The church has never honored a sabbatical year, nor has any civil
government. The land is not rested, debts are not canceled, and the
whole law is not read publicly before the gathered nation. Why not?
The New Testament has internalized the locus of sovereignty for
the enforcement of the sabbath. Men are to rest the land, but not as a
nation, and not simultaneously. The civil government honors Paul’s
dictum that some regard one day (or year) as equal to any other, and

26. F. N. Lee, The Covenantal Sabbath (London: Lord’s Day Observance So-

27. Cf. F. N. Lee, Christocracy and the Divine Savior’s Law for All Mankind
some regard one as special, to be set apart for rest. A farmer might decide to rest his entire farm for one year in seven. An alternative arrangement would be to rest one-seventh of his land each year. A Dutch-American immigrant informed me that at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was common in Holland for land owners to lease their agricultural land with a provision that each year, one-seventh of the land would not be planted.

As for debt, the Mosaic laws of debt cancellation applied to two forms of debt: (1) morally obligatory charitable loans in the sabbatical (seventh) year (Deut. 15:1–7) and (2) commercial loans in the jubilee (49th) year (Lev. 25:47–55).28 The latter law was part of the jubilee laws. These laws were annulled by Christ (Luke 4:16–18).29 With respect to charitable loans, the State has no authority in the matter.

## Conclusion

There is a connection between sabbath rest and dominion. Sabbath rest is a tool of and culmination of dominion.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain
place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh
day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter
into my rest (Heb. 4:1–5).

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is
entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God
did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any
man fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:9–11).

The sabbath points to the fulfillment of the dominion covenant.
The eschatological rest that was long ago promised by God is symbol-
ized in the sabbath. A weekly sabbath is God’s “earnest” – His down
payment – on the cosmic sabbath to come. The sabbath may even
have pre-final judgment eschatological implications: a sabbath mil-
lennium. 30

Ours is a Firstday sabbath, or Sunday sabbath, in New Testament
times. We begin the week with rest, as Adam was supposed to but did
not. Adam wanted to create by his own efforts the conditions of
man’s rest, and he never rested again.

The economic implications of the sabbath are extensive. This is
why of necessity I have added an appendix on the topic. The key
question, however, is this: In New Testament times, where is the locus
of sovereignty for the enforcement of sabbath law? If I am correct in
my conclusion that Paul has lodged this sovereignty with the indivi-
dual conscience rather than with church government or civil govern-
ment, then there is no legitimate role in New Testament times for
“blue laws,” or other Sabbatarian legislation. This conclusion repre-
sents a major break with historic Protestantism and should be under-
stood as such. It is a major theological step that needs to be discussed
in detail by Christian commentators.

Chapter 4 . . . Exodus 20:8–11

If commentators decide that mine is not a legitimate conclusion from Paul’s writings, then the locus of sovereignty issue must be dealt with in detail. Who is to impose sanctions? What sanctions? Under what conditions? How will those who must impose sanctions deal with the multiple economic problems raised by compulsory legislation? These problems are discussed in greater detail in Appendix A. This issue has been skirted for centuries. There has been no consistent answer – Sabbatarian, “continental sabbath” or otherwise – concerning the final locus of sovereignty for sabbath enforcement. Until it is faced and dealt with in a manner sufficiently clear for the writing and enforcement of Sabbatarian statutes, in church or State, the issue will remain muddled and an exegetical embarrassment for Christians. It will not be resolved successfully by the election of Christian politicians. They need guidelines for sabbath legislation, and these guidelines have yet to come forth from the 2,000-year-old church.
FAMILY CAPITAL

Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Ex. 20:12).

The theocentric basis of this law is God as Father. Parents’ represent God in a unique way. They are due special consideration from their children.

Population Growth

Paul tells us that this is the first commandment to which a promise is attached (Eph. 6:3). What does it mean, “that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee”? It is a promise given to the nation. It is a collective promise, not an individual promise as such. God does not promise that every single child who shows honor for his parents will enjoy long life, nor does He assure us that every single dishonoring child will die young. Esau went against his parents’ wishes when he married Canaanite women (Gen. 26:34–35), yet he lived to be at least 120, for he and Jacob buried Isaac, who had died at age 180 (Gen. 35:29), and they had been born when Isaac was 60 years old (Gen. 25:26). Joseph was alive at this time, and the Bible speaks of Joseph as the son of Jacob’s old age (Gen. 37:3). In the case of Esau, a dishonoring child lived into old age. Abel, who honored God, and who presumably honored his parents as God’s representatives, was slain by his violent brother, who in turn survived to establish a pagan civilization (Gen. 4).

What God does promise is that a society in which the majority of men do honor their parents will be marked by the long life expectancy
of its members. This longer life span will be statistically significant. The society will enjoy, for example, lower life insurance premiums in every age bracket compared with the premiums in cultures that are marked by rebellion against parents. In other words, the risk of death in any given year will be lower, statistically, for the average member of that age bracket. Some will die, of course, but not so many as those who die at the same age in a parent-dishonoring culture.

The promise is significant. It offers long life. The very first promise that is connected to a commandment is long life. This is indicative of men’s desire to survive into old age. Men want to live. It is a universal desire, though it is marred or distorted by the effects of sin. All those who hate God love death (Prov. 8:36). Nevertheless, a standard expression of honor in the ancient Near East, especially in pagan civilizations, was reserved for the king: “O king, live forever” (Dan. 2:4; 5:10; 6:21). When God attached this particular blessing to this commandment, He could be assured of its initial attractiveness in the eyes of men. Life is a blessing for the faithful, and it is desired even by the unfaithful. It is not a burden to be borne patiently by steadfast “pilgrims” who are stoically “passing through life.” Life is not just something to pass the time away. It is a positive blessing.

We know that the promise to Abraham was that he would have many children, meaning heirs throughout time (Gen. 17:4–6). We know that a large family is a blessing (Ps. 127:3–5). We know that one of the promised blessings for the godly is that miscarriages will be reduced in a nation which is seeking to conform itself to God’s law (Ex. 23:26).¹ The demographic implication of the biblical perspective should be obvious: a large and growing population. When godliness simultaneously increases both the birth rate and the survival rate, the

godly society will experience a population explosion. What God sets forth in His Word is simple enough, although Christians and pagans in my era have refused to believe this: One sign of His pleasure with His people is a population explosion. It is not a guarantee of His pleasure. Ungodly societies can temporarily sustain a population explosion, especially when they have become the recipients of the blessings of God’s law (for example, Western medical technology or the availability of inexpensive wire mesh window screens) apart from the ethical foundations that sustain these blessings. Nevertheless, sustained population growth over many generations is one of God’s external blessings, and these blessings cannot be sustained long term apart from conformity to at least the external, civil, and institutional requirements of God’s law.

*Long life is a biological foretaste of eternal life.* It is an earthly down payment by God. It points to eternal life. It is also a capital asset that enables men to labor longer in their assigned task of subduing their portion of the earth to God’s glory. *Long life is an integral part of the dominion covenant.*

Because the fulfillment of the dominion covenant involves filling the earth, it is understandable why long life should be so important. It is one critical factor in the population expansion that is necessary to fulfill the terms of that covenant, the other being high birth rates. God has pointed clearly to the importance of the family – indeed, the central importance of the family – fulfilling the terms of the dominion covenant. The parents receive the blessing of children (high birth rate), and the children secure long life by honoring their parents. Or,

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to put it even more plainly, a man gains the blessing of long life, including the ability to produce a large family, by honoring his parents. The way in which the people of a civilization define and practice their family obligations will determine their ability to approach the earthly fulfillment of the dominion covenant. Without a close adherence to this, the fifth commandment, no society can hope to receive and keep the capital necessary to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant, especially the human capital involved in a population explosion.

**Parental Sovereignty**

Parents possess limited, derivative, but completely legitimate sovereignty over their children during the formative years of the children’s lives. When children reach the age of civil responsibility, one sign of their maturity is their willingness to establish families of their own (Gen. 2:24). Responsibility therefore steadily shifts as time goes on. Eventually, the aged parents transfer economic and other responsibilities to their children, who care for them when they are no longer able to care for themselves. The man in his peak production years may have two-way financial responsibilities: to his parents and to his children. Maximum responsibility hits at an age when, because of economic and biological patterns, a man attains his maximum productive capacity. This shift of responsibility is mandatory, given the mortality of mankind. The Bible provides guidelines for the proper transfer of family responsibility over time. These guidelines are necessarily economic.

The requirement that men honor their parents preserves the continuity of the covenantal family, and therefore it preserves the *continuity of responsibility*. The totally atomistic family unit is probably impos-
Mutual obligations bind the family units together. Parents have an obligation to lay up wealth for their children: “. . . for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (II Cor. 12: 14b). Parents are not to squander their children’s inheritance. It should also be recognized that each of the children has a legitimate claim to part of the patrimony, unless disinherited because of his rebellion against parents or his personal immorality. The eldest son is entitled to a double portion of the estate (Deut. 21:15–17). Why does the eldest son inherit this double portion? A reasonable explanation is that he is the person with the primary responsibility for the care of his parents. The English system of primogeniture, in which the eldest son inherited all of the landed estate, was clearly unbiblical, and the breakdown of that system in the nineteenth century was a step forward for England. Such a system places too much responsibility on the eldest son, leaving the other children bereft of capital, but also psychologically free of economic obligations toward the parents. It cuts off most of the children from the mutual obligations of the covenantal family.

Economic obligations should flow in both directions: toward the children in their early years, toward the parents in their later years, and back toward the children at the death of the parents, when the family’s capital is inherited by the survivors. In short, children inherit,
but parents must first be provided for.

The Continuity of Capital

The biblical law-order is a unity. Blessings and responsibilities are linked. Without the coherence of comprehensive biblical law, blessings can become curses. We can apply this insight to the fifth commandment. Assume that a son honors his parents during their lifetime. He receives the blessing of long life. Nevertheless, he neglects to teach his own children the requirements of this commandment. He also wastes his own estate in a present-oriented orgy of consumption. He miscalculates his own life expectancy. He runs out of money before he runs out of time. He has nothing to live on in his old age. His fortune is gone, and his own children know it. The break in the family between generations is now a serious threat to him. His children know that he has abandoned them by squandering the family estate, so they in turn abandon him to poverty in his old age, when he most needs assistance. The blessing of long life then becomes a curse to him. He slowly rots away in abject poverty.

Capital, if familistic in nature, is less likely to be squandered. In a truly godly social order, the familiar rags-to-riches-to-rags progression of three generations, from grandfather to grandchildren, is not supposed to become typical, despite the fact that the legal possibility of “rags-to-riches-to-rags” is basic to the preservation of a free society. The example of a man who pulls himself up out of poverty, only to see his children squander his fortune, leaving his grandchildren destitute, is neither normative nor normal in a Christian social order. The godly do not lay up treasure for the ungodly; the reverse is true (Prov. 13:22). Wealth in the long run flows toward provident and productive citizens who exercise dominion in terms of biblical law.
Family Capital

Therefore, these dual obligations, from fathers to sons and from sons to fathers, are an important aspect of the biblical tendency toward economic growth over many generations.

Fathers have economic incentives to expand the family’s capital base, and they also have an incentive to train up children who will not dissipate the family’s capital. The continuity of capital, under God’s law, is promoted by the laws of inheritance-honor. This preservation of capital is crucial for long-term economic development.

In order to preserve family capital over time, godly parents must train their children to follow the ethical standards of the Bible. The biblical basis for long-term expansion of family capital is ethical: character and competence. But this ethical foundation for long-term family capital growth is not acceptable to anti-biblical cultures. They want the fruits of Christian culture without the roots. Thus, we find that civil governments often take steps to preserve already existing family fortunes at the expense of those productive families that are ready and willing to make their economic contribution to the production process. A phenomenon that is supposed to be the product of ethics and education – the expansion of family capital over many generations – is temporarily produced by the use of State power. This substitution of power for ethics is characteristic of Satan’s religions – not power as the product of biblical ethics (“right eventually produces might”), but power as an alternative to biblical ethics (“might makes right”).

The pagan imitation of a godly social order frequently involves the use of legislated barriers to entry. Those who have achieved economic success seek political power in order to restrict their competitors from displacing them. This phenomenon has been described as

“pulling up the ladder after you’ve reached the top.” This discriminates against poor people, who are unable to organize politically and who lack capital, especially formal education. Primogeniture was one such restriction, which held together the great landed estates of England for many centuries. So was entail: the legal prohibition against selling a landed family estate.\(^8\) Other sorts of restrictions prevail in the modern “mixed” economy, all of them hostile to the great engine of progress under capitalism, price competition.\(^9\) These restrictions include: tariffs or import quotas,\(^10\) prohibitions against price competition (price floors) in the name of protecting market stability,\(^11\) protecting the consumer from trusts,\(^12\) minimum wage laws (another

promoted government regulation of the trusts in the name of protecting the consumers, was supported by large businesses that were seeking legislated protection from new competitors. For further evidence on this point, see James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900–1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Clarence Cramer, *American Enterprise: Free and Not So Free* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), chaps. 10–14.

8. This restriction could be overcome through debt. An heir would indebt the estate, with the land as collateral. When he defaulted on the debt, the creditor took possession of the land.


price floor), restrictions against advertising (still another kind of price floor), compulsory trade unionism, restrictions on agricultural production, state licensing of the professions, zoning laws, and the most blatant and universally accepted restriction, immigration quotas. All of these statist economic restrictions reduce people’s


freedom of movement – geographically, economically, and socially. They all involve the misuse of the otherwise legitimate monopoly of State power in order to restrict individual and social progress and personal responsibility. The result of such legislation, if continued and enforced, is the universal destruction of freedom, as the State regulators steadily squeeze away the monopoly profits received by the early members of the protected group. This is especially true of State-licensed professionals, such as physicians. Another result is the reduction of per capita productivity, and therefore per capita wealth.

Macmillan, 1928). Such restrictions, had they been passed into law and enforced prior to 1924, would have greatly reduced American economic growth. On the multiple cultural and economic contributions of several immigrant groups – Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and orientals – see Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). He covers similar material in a condensed way in *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1983), but adds new material on the performance of immigrant groups in other societies. On the spectacular economic miracle of the city of Miami, Florida, as a result of heavy immigration from Cuba after 1960, see George Gilder, *The Spirit of Enterprise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), ch. 5. The political-economic problem today is twofold: (1) new immigrants in a democracy are soon allowed to vote, and (2) they become eligible for tax-financed “welfare” programs. In the Old Testament, it took several generations for members of pagan cultures to achieve citizenship (Deut. 23:3–8), and there were very few publicly financed charities, the most notable being the third-year tithe (Deut. 14:28–29). Thus, mass democracy has violated a fundamental biblical principle – that time is needed for ethical acculturation of pagan immigrants – and the result of this transgression has been xenophobia: the fear of foreigners, especially immigrant newcomers. Cf. Gary North, “Two-Tier Church Membership,” *Christianity and Civilization*, 4 (1985).


Compound Growth

The importance of the continuity of capital can be seen in any example involving compound interest. Let me say from the beginning that we cannot expect to see this compound interest phenomenon continue uninterrupted in any family forever. We also cannot expect to see annual rates of growth over 1% for centuries at a time. As I pointed out in 1986, the four billion people on earth in 1980 would multiply to over 83 trillion in a thousand years, if the rate of population growth were 1% per annum. But, the fact remains, the longer that the compound growth phenomenon continues, the smaller the annual percentage increase needs to be in order to produce spectacular results.

Let us assume that we are dealing with a given monetary unit. We can call it a talent. A young married man begins with 100 talents. Say that he multiplies this capital base by 2% per annum. At the end of 50 years, the couple has 269 talents. Let us assume that the heirs of the family multiply at 1% per annum, on the average, throughout each subsequent family’s lifetime. After 250 years, if the growth rates both of people and capital persist, the total family capital base is up to 14,126 talents. Divided by 24 family units, each family now has 589 talents. This is almost a six-fold increase per family unit, which is considerable. We now have 24 family units, with each family possessing almost six times the wealth that the original family started out with, even assuming that each heir has married someone who has brought no capital into the marriage.

What if the capital base should increase by 3%? At the end of 50 years, the original couple would have 438 talents – over a four-fold increase. This is quite impressive. But at the end of 250 years, the family would possess 161,922 talents, over 1,600 times as large. Even divided by 24 family units, the per family capital base would be 6,747
talents, or over 67 times larger than the original capital base of 100 talents.

Consider the implications of these figures. A future-oriented man – a man like Abraham – could look forward to his heirs’ possessing vastly greater wealth than he ever could hope to attain personally. This is the kind of vision God offers His people, just as he offered to Abraham: heirs two or three generations later who will be numerous and rich. God offers a man the hope of substantially increased wealth during his own lifetime, in response to his covenantal faithfulness, hard work, and thrift. But God also offers the covenantal family truly vast increases in per family wealth, if the disciplined economic growth per family is maintained. The covenant community increases its control of capital, generation by generation, piling up ever-greater quantities of capital, until the growth becomes exponential, meaning astronomical, meaning impossible. Compound growth therefore points to the fulfillment of the dominion covenant, the subduing of the earth. It points to the end of cursed time.

It might be appropriate at this point to clarify what I mean when I speak about a covenant society amassing huge numbers of monetary units called talents. If we are speaking of a whole society, and not just a single family, then for all of them to amass 6,747 talents per family in 250 years, there would have to be mass inflation – the printing of billions of “talent notes.” I am speaking not of physical slips of paper called talents; I am speaking of goods and services of value. The 100 talents per family, multiplied by all the families in the society, would not be able to increase in an economy based on a precious metal standard; instead, prices would fall in response to increased production of 3% per annum. Eventually, if the whole society experiences 3% per annum economic growth, given a fixed money supply, prices would begin to approach zero.

But prices in a cursed world will never reach zero; there will
always be economic scarcity (Gen. 3:17–19). In fact, scarcity is defined as a universe in which total demand is greater than supply at zero price. So, the assumption of permanent compound economic growth is incorrect. Either the growth process stops in the aggregate, or else time ends. That, of course, is precisely the point. Time will end.

A man whose vision is geared to dominion, in time and on earth, has to look to the years beyond his lifetime. He cannot hope to build up his family’s capital base in his own lifetime sufficient to achieve conquest. If he looks two or more centuries into the future, it becomes a conceivable task. Only a handful of men can expect to amass a fortune in a single lifetime. If a man’s time perspective is limited to his own lifetime, then he must either give up the idea of family dominion, or else he must adopt the mentality of the gambler. He has to “go for the big pay-off.” He must sacrifice everything for capital expansion, risking everything he has, plus vast quantities of borrowed money, on untried, high-risk, high-return ventures. He must abandon everything conventional, for an investor earns only conventional returns (prevailing interest rate) from conventional ventures. The man’s world becomes an endless series of all-or-nothing decisions. He “puts it all on the line” time after time.

**Trusteeship: Which Family?**

The continuity of capital is obviously threatened by the rise of the

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23. This is the world of modern entrepreneurship. Only a few people can make huge fortunes. Still, the rest of us benefit from their initiative and uncertainty-bearing: Gilder, *Spirit of Enterprise*. 

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familistic State. It establishes itself as the trustee for all men, from
womb to tomb. It therefore demands support from those who receive
its protection. Like a father, or better yet, like a distant uncle who
guides the fortunes of an orphaned nephew, the State must administer
the funds, always taking a large portion of those funds as a necessary
fee for services performed.

As men steadily begin to perceive the implications of the familistic
State, they seek to hide their assets from its tax collectors. Men try to
find ways to pass along wealth to their legitimate heirs, and the State,
as the enraged illegitimate heir, relentlessly searches for ways of
closing off escape hatches. The new “parent” must not be deprived of
its support from every member of the family. And once the capital is
collected, it is dissipated in a wave of corruption, mismanagement,
bureaucratic salaries, and politically motivated compulsory charity
programs. Men see the erosion of their capital, and they seek to hide
it away. They recognize what the pseudo-family of the State will do
to the inheritance of their children. Still, because of their own
entrenched envy, they are unwilling to turn back. They and their
parents and grandparents accepted the philosophical justifications of
“soaking the rich” by means of the ballot box, but now that price
inflation has pushed everyone into higher tax brackets, they are
horrified by what they find. They have now been snared themselves,
but they seem unable to turn back, for to turn back would involve an
admission of the immorality and inefficiency of the “soak the rich”
programs of modern democratic politics.

Permanent Children

The modern messianic State would like to make permanent wards
of its citizens. This is a primary justification for the State’s existence
Family Capital

today. It must administer the inheritance for the benefit of children. But the children are perpetual servants, and a growing army, increasingly dependent upon the coercive wealth redistribution of politics. What we have here is a reversal of the New Testament teaching concerning sons and servants. “Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all. But is under tutors and governors until the time pointed of the father” (Gal. 4:1–2). The State’s bureaucrats do not recognize what every human parent must eventually recognize, namely, that he is going to become weak, and that he must encourage independence on the part of his heirs if he is to secure safety for himself in his old age. The State, by making men permanent children, guarantees its own demise, for the children cannot forever support the “trustee State,” if the State has, in effect, institutionalized the voters.

The family is a trustee. By acknowledging the legitimacy of the laws of the family, men honor God, although the unregenerate do so unwittingly and in spite of their professed theology of autonomy before God. External blessings flow to those who honor God’s laws. By establishing a tradition of honoring parents, sons increase the likelihood that in their old age their own children will protect them from the burdens of old age. The risks that life poses to the old are therefore minimized. The familistic welfare structure is reciprocal and personal. It is undergirded by revealed law and by family tradition. It need not rely heavily on the far weaker support of sentiment – an important aspect of the religion of humanism.24 The growth of capital within the family increases each succeeding generation’s ability to conquer nature to the glory of God, including the infirmities and vulnerabilities of old age.

Chapter 5 . . . Exodus 20:12

The statist pseudo-family cannot permit this sort of challenge to its self-proclaimed sovereignty. The modern State has therefore laid claim to ownership of the children through the tax-supported public school system. Children are obviously a form of family capital. They are to be trained, which involves costs to the parents. But the parents have a legitimate claim on a portion of the future assets of the children. The relationship involves costs and benefits for both generations. Neither side needs to buy the love of the other, any more than men need to buy the love of God. Each generation gives; each receives. The relationship is both personal and economic. But the modern State intervenes. It provides the children’s education. It lays claim to future payments (taxes) by the children when they have reached maturity. Of necessity, it must try to buy the love (votes) of those children when they reach maturity. The children often remain subservient to the State-parent, unwilling to launch independent lives of their own, given the costs of breaking the financial and emotional tie with the welfare office. Children, the covenant family’s primary resource, are stolen by the modern State. The State promises old age support. The State promises health care for the aged. The State provides State-financed and State-licensed education for the young. The modern State attempts to replace the benefits of the family, and simultaneously must require the same sort of financial support from the adults during their productive years. The relationship is impersonal and economic. The relationship is, by law, coercive and bureaucratic.

Impersonalism and Capital Consumption

This disastrous attempt of the State to replace the functions of the covenant family eventually destroys the productive mutual relationships between generations. It destroys the personal bond, making the
Family Capital

young in general legally responsible for the old in general. The family name – so central to the life of a godly social order – is erased, and computerized numbers are substituted. The incentives for families to preserve their capital, whether for old age or for generations into the future, are reduced, for each generation’s economic future is no longer legally bound to the success and prosperity of the children. “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow there will be government checks.” But the dissipation of family capital, when it becomes a culture-wide phenomenon, destroys economic productivity, which in turn destroys the tax base of the State. The State cannot write the promised checks, or if it does, the monetary unit steadily grows worthless, as fiat money inflates the price level.

By abandoning the principle of family responsibility, the modern messianic State wastes a culture’s capital, destroys inheritance, and makes more acceptable both euthanasia (which reduces the expense of caring for the unproductive elderly) and abortion (which reduces the expense of training and caring for the unproductive young). Lawless men, in their productive years, increasingly refuse to share their wealth with dying parents and squabbling children. They look only at present costs, neglecting future benefits, such as the care that the unborn might provide them in their old age. They have faith in the compassionate and productive State – the great social myth of the modern world. They want its benefits, but they never ask themselves the key question: Who will pay for their retirement years? Not the shrinking number of children, who are even more present-oriented, even more conditioned by the statist educational system, even more unwilling to share their wealth with the now-unproductive aged of the land. With the dissipation of capital, the productive voters will resist the demands of the elderly. The generations go to war against one another – the war of politics.

The pseudo-family State is an agent of social, political, and economic bankruptcy. It still has its intellectual defenders, even within the
Christian community, although its defenders tend to be products of the State-supported, State-certified, and State-aggrandizing universities. *This pseudo-family is suicidal.* It destroys the foundations of productivity, and productivity is the source of all voluntary charity. It is a suicidal family which will pay off its debts with inflated fiat currency. Its compassion will be limited to paper and ink.

The impersonalism of the modern pseudo-family, along with its present-orientation – a vision no longer than the next election – will produce massive, universal failure of the welfare system. It has already done so. The rapid escalation of Federal anti-poverty programs has created more poverty, except for the middle-class bureaucrats who operate the programs.\(^\text{25}\) The great economic experiment that was launched in the twentieth century is failing in a wave of annual government deficits, and all the college-level textbooks in economics, political science, and sociology will not be able to justify the system, once it erodes the productivity which every parasitic structure requires for its own survival. Like the Canaanitic cultures of Joshua’s day, the end is in sight for the modern, messianic, welfare State economies. They have decapitalized their envy-driven, guilt-ridden citizens. Only to the extent that citizens hide their economic assets or vote to reverse the politics of envy will they escape the clutching hand of today’s spendthrift, senile pseudo-parent.

**Conclusion**

It is imperative for Christians to abandon the religion of humanism. It is imperative that they fulfill their responsibilities as members...
Family Capital

covenantal community. It is imperative that they see to it that their old people, as well as their young people, must not become in any way dependent upon the services of a declining welfare State. To become dependent on such an institution is to become a slave. Worse than this: It is to become dependent on a master whose economic resources are almost spent. 26 When men and women honor their fathers and mothers – financially, spiritually, and institutionally – they will have begun the painful but mandatory journey out of slavery. They will have begun to amass family capital for yet unborn generations.

The question is inescapable in any society: Who will inherit? The key issue in the fifth commandment is therefore the question of legitimacy. Every institution faces the question of continuity over time. The biblical pattern for the family is to become representative for all other institutions: The legitimate heir is the one who does the explicit will of the righteous parent. God the Father establishes these eternal standards of performance, including the laws of inheritance. We must begin by honoring the laws of family inheritance. 27

We must de-capitalize the State. This is a moral imperative. The alternative is for the State to de-capitalize us. If we are dependent on the State for its support, we are necessarily fostering the decapitalization of the family. The first and crucial step in decapitalizing the State is to cease calling for favors from the State. It is to create alternative, voluntary, biblical institutions that will replace the pseudo-compassion of the messianic State. If the covenant communities refuse to accept this challenge, then they will see their capital dissi-


27. For an example of a man who misunderstood inheritance, see Appendix D: “Andrew Carnegie: Social Darwinist.”
pated by the spendthrift managers of the humanistic State. The archetypal bastard will then inherit the inheritance of the righteous.

This will not come to pass. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children; and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22). God has made it clear: the bastard should not and will not inherit.

The issue is family capital. The reason why this commandment is found in the first five, which relates to the priesthood, is two-fold. First, the head of the family is a household priest. He was the one who circumcised the newborn males of the household. Second, the church, not the civil government, is the back-up agency of welfare, after the family has either failed to act or has exhausted its resources. To protect the integrity of the Mosaic priesthood, this law made it clear that the family, not civil government, is the primary agency of welfare. Any attempt by the civil government to replace the welfare function of the family is an indirect attack on the authority of ecclesiastical government. It is an attempt to call into question the welfare function of both the family and the church.

Power flows to the agency that takes responsibility for providing aid in a crisis. By placing the family in the front line of welfare, this commandment builds a wall of protection around the church. The civil government cannot lawfully undermine the church by arrogating to itself the welfare function of society. The messianic State seeks both power and legitimacy as the true heir. Thus, it must become a welfare State. This commandment, when obeyed, undermines the legitimacy of the welfare State.
II. Kingly

6

GOD’S MONOPOLY OF EXECUTION

Thou shall not kill (Ex. 20:13).

The theocentric focus of this law is God’s protection of His own image, man. God is sacred. This clearly is an aspect of point one of the biblical covenant model: God’s sovereignty. Thus, His image is sacred in the sense of being holy. As the Creator, God delegates to civil government the authority to execute murderers.

The Image of God

Man’s life is protected because he is made in the image of God. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:6). The explanatory clause – “for in the image of God made he man” – can be understood in two different ways. First, it explains the nature of the violation: man’s life is uniquely important to God, since man is made in God’s image. An assault on man is an assault on the image of God. Second, the clause explains why men, by means of the civil government, are required to execute bloody judgment on murderers. Man is made in the image of God; therefore, as God’s image, mankind can bring

Chapter 6 . . . Exodus 20:13

judgment in the name of God, the supreme Judge who executes final judgment. Man is God’s agent who exercises God’s delegated authority. He is an agent of the King. He is to exercise dominion over the earth. Man is a royal agent, and as such, he deserves protection. Christ’s parable of the rebellious husbandmen who slew the owner’s emissaries, including his son, rests on the principle of God’s ultimate sovereignty and the authority which He delegates to all men (Matt. 21:33–40). Murder is rebellion, but a special kind of rebellion: lashing out at God’s very image, the capstone of His creation. This is the most probable interpretation of the clause in terms of why murder is a capital crime. This explains why man-killing animals are to be executed (Gen. 9:5).

Vengeance belongs to God (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). It is His monopoly. He avenges the blood of his servants


4. Because of the unnecessary exclusiveness of Bahnsen’s interpretation of Genesis 9:6, which I discuss below, I need to stress the point that the right of the civil government to execute an animal should not be surprising, and the biblical defense of this right does not require any detailed exegesis, given the dominion covenant. It is not that the image of God in man uniquely empowers the civil government to execute animals; it is simply that the image of God in man is the reason why it is so heinous an act to kill a human being – so heinous that not even a “morally neutral” animal can escape the penalty. What the passage stresses is the responsibility of the civil government to execute an offending beast, not its authority to do so.

God’s Monopoly of Execution

(Deut. 32:35–43). Individual men do not have the right to act as executioners except by law: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Lev. 19:18). The context of this oft-quoted final clause is clearly the administration of judgment. Because God established His monopoly, transgression brings judgment. This boundary must be respected. We see an example of this – indeed, the example – in the garden of Eden. By challenging God’s single, exclusive, and temporary monopoly in the garden, namely, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve rebelled, for they were attempting to play God, to usurp His position over creation. It was an attempt to worship an image: the image of God in man.

The prohibition of graven images in the second commandment should therefore be understood as the repudiation of humanism (Ex. 20:4). All forms of idolatry are ultimately variations of self-worship, for it is man, as a self-proclaimed sovereign being, who asserts the right to choose whom he will worship in place of God. Man, the sovereign, decides.

Critics of capital punishment could argue that men are not to avenge, and that we must view capital punishment itself as a transgression of God’s sole and exclusive monopoly of execution. This argument is dead wrong. The institution of civil government is entrusted with this responsibility. The individual may not execute another man, as if he were an autonomous agent of judgment, but the covenanted political community may do so. In fact, this power reduces the likelihood of blood vengeance by close relatives of the slain: blood feuds.

Why does the State have the right to slay transgressors? Because man is made in the image of God. God executes; so may covenant

6. See above, ch. 2.
man. Bahnsen explains: “The reason offered is that man is the image of God: man can accordingly carry out God’s judgments on a creaturely level. Thinking God’s thoughts after Him, man judges and penalizes after the commandment of God; man is properly like God his Father and Judge when he too judges crimes as God does. . . . Man should do this as well on his level as a creature, not in personal vindictiveness (i.e., such judgment does not apply to interpersonal affairs: 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17ff.), but as a matter of social justice (i.e., it is the magistrate’s duty to punish criminals for the good of society: Rom. 13:1–4). The man created in God’s image who has the responsibility of rule in human government (not citizens, not the church) is required to punish violators of God’s law for the welfare of his country; he has the right to do this because he is the image of God and has God’s law to direct him.”

Bahnsen then argues that it is not the death penalty as such that is the focus of Genesis 9:6, but rather the right of the civil government to inflict this penalty. “Instead of smoothly saying ‘his blood is to be shed by man’ the verse reads ‘by man his blood is to be shed.’ We stumble over the ‘by man’ due to its obtrusion and conspicuousness. Man’s being made as God’s image explains the infliction of the death penalty by man? In other words, “the proper question at Genesis 9:5f. is: what right has man to retaliate against the murderer? Genesis 9:6 gives the rationale: man is God’s image.” Bahnsen’s interpretation is an attempt to force us to choose between two views: (1) the image of God in man as the cause of the death penalty – the reason why such a harsh penalty must be imposed – and (2) the image as the justification of the civil government’s God-given authority to inflict the penalty.

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8. Ibid., p. 444.
God’s Monopoly of Execution

I do not choose between the two interpretations; I choose them both. The image of God in man makes sacred the life of man, assuming that he has not transgressed the law by committing a capital crime, but this image also legitimizes the execution of the transgressor in the case of murder. Both the reason for the death penalty against murderers and the requirement of capital punishment by the civil government are explained by the presence of the image of God. Nevertheless, there is a stronger emphasis on the image of God in man as the reason why murder must be punished by the death penalty, as I have already argued. The execution of man-killing animals required by Genesis 9:5 points more clearly to the magnitude of the crime than it points to the right of the civil government to inflict the supreme earthly penalty. But ultimately it points to both.

Murder and Execution

The usage, though not the grammar, of the Hebrew translated here as “kill” (ratsach) indicates murder or manslaughter. It means “to dash to pieces,” but it is used in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 4:42 to indicate accidental manslaughter. The biblical definition of murder is the willful execution of one man by another, unless the execution is sanctioned by the civil government; it is referred to as the shedding of man’s blood (Gen. 4:10). It is an act of man in rebellion against God.

The prohibition against the shedding of man’s blood applies even to murderous animals (Gen. 9:5). Guilty animals are to be stoned to death, the Mosaic law’s most common means of public execution (Ex. 21:28). Because owners are covenantally responsible for the administration of their property, if the owner of the beast had been warned beforehand that the animal was dangerous, he also must be
executed. He is permitted to buy his life by the payment of restitution, however (Ex. 21:29–30). Because all ownership is delegated, economic responsibility is necessarily personal.

There are no exceptions based on idiocy, temporary insanity, temporary anger, or anything else. Unless it can be proved that the death came as a result of an accident – no premeditation – the criminal is to be executed. The willful shedding of man’s blood must be punished by the civil government by execution.

**Protecting the Division of Labor**

Each person in history has been assigned a role by God for extending His kingdom in history. There is no escape from the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28). Man’s existence as a creature is defined by this covenant. Therefore, in God’s assignment to mankind as a species, each person contributes something to this process of dominion.

When anyone dies, his or her contribution to this process of dominion ceases. Within the overall providence of God, death plays a role in the process of dominion. Evil is cut short (Ex. 20:6). Its compounding process ceases. But it is for God to determine when each person’s contribution to the process should cease. No other individual is to intervene to speed up this removal on his time schedule. This includes suicide.

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11. See above, chapter 3.
God’s Monopoly of Execution

The division of labor is a crucial concept in the history of economic thought. Adam Smith placed it at the heart of his Wealth of Nations (1776). Smith’s description of the pin-makers is probably the most famous passage in the history of economic thought. The pin-makers who possessed specialized machinery could produce far more than a comparable number of individual pin-makers, each acting alone.

In modern times, Leonard E. Read’s analogy of the pencil rivals Smith’s for its power of communication. In “I, Pencil,” Read has a pencil narrate the story of its origin. No one knows how to make a pencil, the pencil says. No one knows all that goes into wood, paint, lacquer, graphite, rubber, and metal, yet all are necessary for the production of a single inexpensive pencil. Without the complex division of labor, a pencil would be impossible to produce. Read writes:

Does anyone wish to challenge my earlier assertion that no single person on the face of this earth knows how to make me?

Actually, millions of human beings have had a hand in my creation, no one of whom even knows more than a very few of the others. Now, you may say that I go too far in relating the picker of a coffee berry in far off Brazil and food growers elsewhere to my creation; that this is an extreme position. I shall stand by my claim. There isn’t a single person in all these millions, including the president of the pencil company, who contributes more than a tiny, infinitesimal bit of know-how. From the standpoint of know-how the only difference between the miner of graphite in Ceylon and the logger in Oregon is in the type of know-how. Neither the miner nor the logger can be dispensed with, any more than can the chemist at the factory or the worker in the oil field – paraffin being a by-product of petroleum.

Here is an astounding fact: Neither the worker in the oil field nor the chemist nor the digger of graphite or clay nor any who mans or
makes the ships or trains or trucks nor the one who runs the machine that does the knurling on my bit of metal nor the president of the company performs his singular task because he wants me. Each one wants me less, perhaps, than does a child in the first grade. Indeed, there are some among this vast multitude who never saw a pencil nor would they know how to use one. Their motivation is other than me. Perhaps it is something like this: Each of these millions sees that he can thus exchange his tiny know-how for the goods and services he needs or wants. I may or may not be among these items.

Then Read came to his main point. The point is incorrect, but it lies at the heart of all modern economic theory: the absence of an economic central planner.

There is a fact still more astounding: the absence of a master mind, of anyone dictating or forcibly directing these countless actions which bring me into being. No trace of such a person can be found. Instead, we find the Invisible Hand at work. This is the mystery to which I earlier referred.\textsuperscript{12}

But there \textit{is} a Planner: a sovereign God who oversees all things and events. His is the “invisible hand” – Adam Smith’s famous phrase. But this hand operates through a system of secondary, subordinate causation, which includes responsible acting individuals. The free market, through its pricing system and its system of sanctions – profit and loss – allows the creation of pencils and far more amazing products than pencils.

“No man is an island,” the poet John Donne wrote in 1624. In his famous Meditation 17, he set forth the heart of the matter.

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No man is an island, entire of itself.
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were,
as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were.
Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind,
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls.
It tolls for thee.

In the grand division of labor, each person’s productive contribution benefits the entire society to some degree, although usually unmeasurable and unperceived. Even though no one knows how to make a pencil, and no one knows the value of a clod of earth, each plays its part. When anyone dies, the wealth of society is reduced. Murder is therefore an assault on the wealth of nations and individuals. It is one man’s attempt to play God, an attempt to gain an immediate personal benefit – the elimination of an enemy – at the cost of reduced productivity for society. The murderer treats another person as if the victim were a zero-price resource whose negative impact can be inexpensively removed. Yet no man knows what might have been, what contribution the deceased victim might have made. No man is omniscient. No man can calculate the cost that his victim’s death will impose on others.

God protects His image from murderers. He can count the cost of murder. He assesses this cost as being far too high for anyone to be allowed to impose on his own authority. So, He authorizes the civil government to impose a final sanction on murderers.

Delegated Monopoly

God has shared His monopoly of execution with men. The final
power of death is held by Jesus Christ. “I am he that liveth, and was
dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys
of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18). It is He who triumphed over death
(I Cor. 15). Christ is the go’el, the kinsman-redeemer who is also the
family avenger of blood (Num. 35:19). Satan himself could not take
Job’s life without God’s permission (Job 3:6). Only the original
Creator of life has the original right to destroy life; only He can estab-
lish the standards by which man’s life may be legitimately removed,
including the standards of execution by the civil government.

The biblical view of the State unquestionably and irrefutably
affirms the right and obligation of the State to execute men, for the
Bible sets forth God’s law. God has delegated this authority to the
State. This assignment cannot lawfully be neglected – certainly not in
the name of a “higher, more compassionate” interpretation of God’s
holy law. To deny the legitimate, derived, and ministerial sovereignty
of the State in this regard is to deny the original sovereignty of God.
It is to call into question (1) God’s Bible-revealed law, (2) man as the
image of God, (3) the protection this image is entitled to, and (4) the
responsibility of State officials under God. The denial of capital pun-
ishment is, in a very real sense, an attempt to deny God’s right of
final execution, i.e., the imposition of the penalty of the second death,
eternal punishment in fire (Rev. 20:14). Such a position denies the
right of God to offer murderers an earthly, institutional “down pay-
ment” or “earnest” that points to and affirms the reality of their future
eternal punishment to come. It also denies God’s requirement that the
convicted murderer be transferred to His supreme court immediately.
Furthermore, by denying this right of execution to the State, the
opponents of capital punishment are implicitly turning over the power
of execution (as distinguished from the right of execution) to mur-
derers and rebels. It reduces their risk of permanent bodily judgment.

Anarchists, rebels, warlords, and criminals all resent the legitimate
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authority of civil government. Such a authority points to an even higher authority and the final judgment. Man’s very image is repulsive to murderers, for it also points to the subordination of mankind’s being to a sovereign God. Man’s image points to man’s subordinate responsibility, but also possessing lawful authority as a ruler over creation. It points to dominion. Satan and his followers loathe this image. They loathe it and love death (Prov. 8:36). But the image of God in man, when regenerate, is a death-defying image.

When the State executes a murderer, it delivers the criminal to God’s court. Whenever God establishes execution as the appropriate civil sanction, He thereby announces what legal theorists call a change of venue. The accused is delivered to a court with a more comprehensive jurisdiction.

The Question of Deterrence

Do the opponents of capital punishment really play into the hands of the criminal classes? Does a society without capital punishment really transfer power into the hands of the lawless? Consider these historical facts. A murderer in the state of California in 1975 was eligible for parole in seven years. In Massachusetts in the early 1970’s, where no one had been executed since 1947, the median time served in prison for homicide was under 30 months. As Prof. James Q. Wilson notes: “And even in states that practice the death

15. Ibid., p. 166.
penalty, the chances of a murderer’s being executed have been so small that a rational murderer might well decide to take the risk. There were eight thousand murders in 1960, but only fifty-six executions; thus, a murderer’s chances of being executed were only about one in one hundred forty. After 1960 the number of executions dropped sharply, thus improving his chances.”¹⁶

Scholars debate endlessly about whether or not the death penalty deters crime. Mafia members apparently have weighed the evidence and have discovered that swift, predictable execution does indeed influence people’s behavior. Those who act as informers to the civil authorities wind up dead. This has made it difficult for civil authorities to find witnesses who will testify in court against criminal syndicates. The use of the threat of execution by secret societies of many varieties indicates just how effective the death penalty is in modifying people’s behavior. Criminal societies, unlike modern scholars, may not have access to statistical data and complex explanations, but their members think they have adopted an effective approach to the “deviant behavior” problem. They may not have many footnotes, but they are still nearly immune to successful prosecution by the civil government. Capital punishment works well for them.

One of the important factors in designing punishments to fit the crime is the fact that most criminals are lower class. The best definition of class position was provided by Prof. Edward Banfield, in his book, The Unheavenly City (1970). He defined class in terms of future-orientation. An upper-class person is future-oriented. A lower-class person is present-oriented. This is another way of saying that a present-oriented person discounts the future more than a future-oriented person does. Banfield writes: “At the present-oriented end of

¹⁶. Ibid., p. 192.
the scale, the lower-class individual lives from moment to moment. If he has any awareness of a future, it is of something fixed, fated, beyond his control: things happen to him, he does not make them happen. Impulse governs his behavior, either because he cannot discipline himself to sacrifice a present for a future satisfaction or because he has no sense of the future. He is therefore radically improvident: whatever he cannot use immediately he considers valueless.  

Future costs and future benefits register less forcefully on a lower-class person. This applies to punishment. He is not deterred by distant punishments when facing near-term benefits from committing a crime.

With the death penalty, the future cost is both radical and permanent. While the criminal discounts the future, the magnitude of this sanction is so great that he finds it difficult to discount it to zero, as he does with other forms of negative civil sanctions. This makes the death penalty the most important sanction. Once imposed, there is no escape.

At the same time, the death penalty must not be imposed on criminals who commit crimes of lesser threats to social order. If this sanction is used indiscriminately to fight crime in general, the policy will backfire. One goal of civil law is to reduce the number of serious crimes. If the death penalty were imposed for stealing a bicycle, then bicycle thieves would become extremely dangerous. They would be ready to kill anyone who threatened to expose their crime or take action against it. If the maximum penalty for stealing a bicycle were the same as for murder, the imposition of capital punishment for stealing a bicycle would increase the number of murders. But the goal of the civil law is to reduce the number of murders.

If a sanction is considered by a jury as excessive, the jury will vote not to convict. The criminals will understand that, if captured, they will not be convicted. This subsidizes criminal behavior. This is another reason why the punishment must fit the crime. This is why the Bible requires restitution for crimes against property. Juries will more often convict.

The fundamental principle of biblical civil justice is victim’s rights. The victim has the right to prosecute. He also has the right to show mercy. But, in the case of murder, the victim did not survive. The civil government must therefore act on behalf of the deceased victim. It must assume that the victim would have prosecuted.

**Humanism vs. God’s Law**

Humanism has steadily eroded the rule of God’s law. The humanists have, again and again, substituted alternative punishments for those specifically required by the Bible. They have substituted long-term imprisonment for economic restitution to the victim by the criminal. They have substituted life imprisonment for the death penalty. They have substituted parole in three years for life imprisonment. The results have been disastrous. From 1963 to 1992, crime rates in the United States soared. They also soared in Europe, due to similar


causes. They did not soar in Asia.\textsuperscript{21} There, theories of humanistic criminologists did not influence the civil courts.

People want social order. Without this order, too many scarce economic resources must be assigned to crime prevention and safety programs. What voters want is a system of prevention that maintains personal freedom for the innocent and that does not bankrupt the enforcing civil government.

There is little doubt that the vast majority of crimes go unpunished. Very few criminals are apprehended; few of these are brought to trial; few of these are convicted; few of these serve complete sentences. But, eventually, most criminals are caught. When they are “off the market,” they are not victimizing the innocent. How can society reduce the number of serious crimes, given the reality of penalty?

Murder is a major crime. Victims are permanently disenfranchised. Thus, societies throughout history have imposed the death penalty. Even when a criminal knows that he may not be caught and convicted, the presence of the death penalty serves as a deterrent. If he is caught – if “his number comes up” – then the punishment is permanent. Those who believe in a chance universe are willing to take chances. All criminals take chances if they believe that the odds are in their favor. But losing a bet against capital punishment is something else. Losers don’t get to “play the game” again.

When societies raise the stakes to criminals by imposing capital punishment for capital crimes, they thereby reduce the likelihood of criminals’ committing these crimes. Furthermore, those who do murder and who are convicted are not set free to kill again. While any single instance of criminal behavior may not be punished, eventually the professional criminal gets caught and convicted. If he is executed, all future crimes by this specialist in brutality are eliminated.

\textsuperscript{21} Fukuyama, pp. 31–36.
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Society itself must not become brutal. By adhering to biblical law, a society can specify which crimes are capital and which involve paying restitution. But for those crimes that are specified as capital, the biblical commonwealth can reduce their likelihood even in an imperfect penal system which does not operate in terms of perfect knowledge. It raises the stakes so high that risk-taking criminals prefer to commit other sorts of crimes. The imperfection of the legal system is offset by the risk of permanent loss to the murderer.

Conclusion

Man, as the designated agent of the King of kings, possesses lawful authority. He is made in the image of the King, so he is to be protected by civil government. One aspect of this protection is the death penalty. God has delegated the right to execute to the civil government. The civil government can also protect men from kidnapping, a capital crime (Ex. 21:16).22 The police power of the State is to serve as one of the foundations of social stability.

The State thereby permits men to apply time and capital to their callings. It offers them legal predictability, which is vital to the flourishing of personal freedom and economic development. Most important, the right of the civil government to take a man’s life under specified conditions is apt to remind men of the ultimate Judge who gives the gift of life, but who also retains the right to remove life from those who rebel against Him. The civil government’s monopoly of execution testifies to God’s absolute hostility against sin, especially the sin of striking out against God’s own image.

This is an extremely important point. Man’s life is to be protected,

God’s Monopoly of Execution

not because each man possesses a hypothetical absolute and original right of ownership over his own person (the fundamental assertion of most libertarian and anarcho-capitalist theoreticians), but because God is absolutely sovereign and the absolute owner of all things, including men. He will not permit His image, man, to be mortally wounded without imposing a form of judgment which, in time and on earth, is analogous to that final judgment beyond the grave. Peter speaks of “the grace of life” (I Pet. 3:7); to destroy human life is to reject grace. Murderers have no place in God’s inheritance (Gal. 5:21; Rev. 21:8).
THE YOKE OF CO-OPERATIVE SERVICE

Thou shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14).

The theocentric basis of this law is God as the faithful husband of His chosen people, which Israel was in the Old Testament. This clearly is an aspect of point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchy.¹ The faithful wife is not to commit adultery against her superior. The hierarchy of marriage must be maintained by both parties.

Bondage: An Inescapable Concept

As in all covenantal institutions, marriage necessarily involves the restraining factor of discipline. It is therefore a form of bondage. The Bible teaches that all creatures are bound by God through intermediaries established under His authority. All life is bondage. In Egypt, the people of God were in bondage. God delivered them: “I have broken the bands of your yoke” (Lev. 26:13b). Rebellion against God leads to the reimposition of earthly bondage under God’s enemies – an external manifestation of a spiritual condition (Deut. 28:48). The book of Judges is an account of this process.

When the Israelites fell away from God and began to worship the deities of the surrounding Canaanite nations, they were brought under

The Yoke of Co-operative Service

the domination of these foreign nations. They “had their noses rubbed” in the cultures of God’s enemies, until they cried out for deliverance. Therefore, men must bear a yoke of some kind: God’s or Satan’s. They are commanded to take up Christ’s yoke, for it is a light and easy one (Matt. 11:29–30). Men are always in ethical bondage, for they always serve either God or Mammon, the god of this world (Matt. 6:24). Men must do the work of some master. There is no such thing as a free (autonomous) man. Man is always subordinate.

The yoke of marriage, as with all yokes, is a yoke of labor. This is one reason why Christians are cautioned to shun marriages with someone of another religious faith: Labor performed by the partners will ultimately be at cross purposes (II Cor. 6:14). There is a fundamental ethical separation between believers and unbelievers, so the work of the believing partner is necessarily compromised. The Old Testament prohibition against ethical dualism within covenantal institutions can be seen in the case-law application regarding oxen (clean beasts) and donkeys (unclean): They were not to be yoked together (Deut. 22:10). If this rule is binding with respect to plowing,


4. Ibid., ch. 14.

5. A slogan might be: “Marriage should be for the purposes of the cross, not at cross purposes.”

how much more binding in marriage!

A yoke provides *balance and direction* for both laborers. In the case of beasts of burden, the yoke multiplies the output of the two animals, and it also provides the master with a means of guiding their efforts. Neither animal can stray from its master or its partner. Each beast’s labor should therefore complement the productivity of the other. The analogy of the yoke holds true for marriage. The seeds of the kingdom are sown in an orderly, productive, efficient manner. Marriage is a yoke of service.

The establishment of the marriage bond is an affirmation of interpersonal *communion*. Genesis 2:24 presents the concept of two persons’ becoming one flesh, which is a distinctly theological description of the marriage bond. The act of physical union is a symbolic affirmation of this personal communion. Fornication (premarital sexual union) and adultery (post-betrothal sexual union with a partner other than one’s mate) are both prohibited by God’s law. The Bible sets forth explicit theological reasons for this prohibition, namely, God’s ownership of mankind, and His specific design of the body for morality rather than immorality (I Cor. 6:13–20). Other implications are easy to discern. Fornication and adultery are symbolic affirmations of the legitimacy of communion outside of the marital covenant. Paul cites Genesis 2:24 in his presentation of the analogy between marriage and salvation: Christ’s love for His church is like a man’s love for his wife (Eph. 5:22–31).

**Adultery**

Adultery is the symbolic rejection of Christ’s covenant with His church, an assertion of the impermanence of Christ’s love and His commitment to His people. But even more fundamental is the founda-
tion of all interpersonal relationships, the Trinity. The very Godhead is personal: total personalism in mutually self-exhaustive communion. The bond among the Persons of the Trinity is eternal. Adultery is therefore a symbolic denial of the permanence of the Trinity, as well as being a symbolic denial of the permanence of Christ’s love for His church. Thus, when Adam and Eve sinned against God, they felt shame with particular intensity regarding their private parts, and they immediately hid them from each other, thereby introducing a symbolic barrier between themselves which reflected the new ethical barrier between themselves and God. It is not surprising that the Bible specifies the death penalty for adultery (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). It is also not surprising that pagan nations in antiquity, being polytheistic, were marked by ritual prostitution near or inside the temples: many gods, many covenants, many communions.

Marriage is a covenantal institution. It is established by the exchange of vows, both implicit and explicit. These vows are three-way vows initially: man and wife under God. Relationships with children and parents are also involved. Because of the covenantal nature of these vows, their terms are subject to enforcement by external human institutions: family, church, and civil government. No one who violates these vows can legitimately escape the judgment of these earthly institutions, nor can he escape ultimate retribution (Gal. 5:19–21).

Adultery is a straightforward denial of the legitimacy of God’s covenantal yoke. It is a denial of permanent communion, a denial of binding contracts, and a denial of the permanence of God’s grace in election. It is ultimately a denial of the Trinity – an assertion of the

7. This was the maximum penalty authorized, imposed by the civil government at the discretion of the victimized spouse. See Gary North, Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 7, section on “Dying, He Must Die.”
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interpersonal unfaithfulness of the Persons of the Godhead. Adultery affirms the autonomy of man and the impermanence of man’s institutions. It affirms that God’s special love for His redeemed people is at bottom unpredictable and impermanent. In short, adultery affirms that Christ’s love for His church is grounded in chance and lawlessness. Adultery is a symbolic assertion of a radically false theology. The ministry of the prophet Hosea was God’s explicit and symbolic refutation of the theology of adultery.

Adultery disrupts the covenantal bonds of the family unit. It thwarts the proper administration of God’s system of familistic capital. Based on mistrust, unfaithfulness, and a rejection of the restraints of verbal promises, adultery shatters the yoke of service. The result is predictable: the dissipation of familistic capital.

Vows are permanent. They cannot be revoked if they are made to God. “If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth” (Num. 30:2). A woman’s vow is binding 24 hours after her father (if she is single) or her husband has heard of it and has not revoked it (Num. 30:3–8). The vow of a widow or a divorced woman stands (Num. 30:9). Because of the covenantal nature of the vow to God, God holds the vow-taker responsible for the fulfillment of the vow. God is sovereign, and He holds men responsible.

Permanent or household slavery in the Old Testament was a vow taken voluntarily. The slave who wished to remain in his master’s house beyond the sixth year, or beyond the jubilee year, could do so. The master drove an awl through the slave’s ear and into the door (Deut. 15:17). It was a bloody symbol of a permanent relationship,

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even as the blood on the doorpost at the Passover was a sign of a family’s permanent relationship with God (Ex. 12:7). The slave was no longer a chattel slave but rather an adopted son of the house.

Marriage involves the same bloody sign. The “tokens of virginity” of the Old Testament were almost certainly the bloody cloth of the wedding night, which was presented to the wife’s father in order to protect her from the charge of premarital sexual activity made by a lying husband (Deut. 22:13–17). The cloth of verse 17 bore the mark of her virginity; it must have been blood. The blood of the circumcised male was also a covenantal sign of permanence.9

Time and Commitment

Yoked beasts clearly belong to someone. The same is true of yoked marriage partners. They serve some master. The marriage is a covenant bond, metaphysically always under God, but ethically under either Satan or God. The partners build for the future: a future under God or a future dominated by Satan. The yokeless beast is a wild beast; the family yoke domesticates each partner, rather like the yoke on beasts of burden.

The efforts of the marriage partners can be directed toward the future, for the family extends into the future through the children and the expansion of family capital. This future-oriented nature of the family adds incentives for thrift, careful planning, hard work, and economic growth. Each partner can rely on the assistance of the other, as well as the compassion of the other in times of crisis. This frees up the minds of both partners, for each knows that the other is there to

help. What would otherwise be “uneven plowing” by one is smoothed out by the effect of the “yoke”: The family goes forward, day by day, despite the occasional failings of either of the partners.

While yoked together, neither partner can stray far without the other; neither can go his or her own way without regard for the other. One of the most eloquent affirmations of the social value of marriage comes from George Gilder. “The short-sighted outlook of poverty stems largely from the breakdown of family responsibilities among fathers. The lives of the poor, all too often, are governed by the rhythms of tension and release that characterize the sexual experience of young single men. . . . Civilized society is dependent upon the submission of the short-term sexuality of young men to the extended maternal horizons of women. This is what happens in monogamous marriage; the man disciplines his sexuality and extends it into the future through a woman’s womb. The woman gives him access to his children, otherwise forever denied to him; and he gives her the product of his labor, otherwise dissipated on temporary pleasures. The woman gives him a unique link to the future and a vision of it; he gives her faithfulness and a commitment to a lifetime of hard work. If work effort is the first principle of overcoming poverty, marriage is the prime source of upwardly mobile work.”

Gilder also reports that when marriages fail, the now-unencumbered husband may revert to the lifestyle of singleness. “On the average, his income drops by one-third and he shows a far higher propensity for drink, drugs, and crime.” Thus, he concludes, “The key to the intractable poverty of the hardcore American poor is the dominance of single and separated men in poor communities.” Crime and social pathology in general increase when family cohesion decreases.


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This has been documented in literally thousands of sociological studies. The problem for the conventional social scientist is that there are no generally acceptable measures that the civil government can take that will increase the stability of the family. As political scientist James Wilson says, “I cannot imagine any collective action we could take consistent with our civil liberties that would restore a moral consensus...”

There is one step, however, that could be taken without violating civil liberties. In fact, it would increase civil liberties by reducing the size of the State. It is the step that the politicians believe that they dare not consider, yet which must eventually be considered: the abolition of all forms of State welfare payments, especially aid to dependent children. This is the recommendation of Charles Murray, whose 1984 book, Losing Ground, reveals the extent of the moral and social bankruptcy of the Federal welfare programs. Murray makes clear what is taking place. The State is subsidizing immorality, and immorality is disrupting the society. In 1960, approximately 224,000 children in the United States were born to single mothers; in 1980, over 665,000 of these children were born. This increase has been especially marked within the black community. From 1950 through 1963, just before the “Great Society’s War on Poverty” began, black illegitimate births rose slowly from 17% of all black births to 23%. In 1980, 48% of all live births among blacks were to single women.


15. Ibid., p. 126.
Furthermore, a growing proportion of all illegitimate children are being born to teenagers.\textsuperscript{16} This, it should be pointed out, took place during the period in which compulsory “sex education” courses were being established in the government school systems.

In 1950, about 88\% of white families consisted of husband-wife households, and about 78\% of black families did. In a single year, 1968, the percentage for black families slipped from 72\% to 69\%, and in the next five years, it dropped another six percentage points. By the end of 1980, the proportion was down to 59\%.\textsuperscript{17} As Murray says, “a change of this magnitude is a demographic wonder, without precedent in the American experience.”\textsuperscript{18} “As of 1980, 65 percent of all poor blacks who were living in families were living in families headed by a single female. The parallel statistic for whites was 34 percent.”\textsuperscript{19}

What about low-income blacks – not just the hard-core poor? These are people with incomes equal to or up to 25\% above the defined poverty level. “In 1959, low-income blacks lived in families very much like those of low-income whites and, for that matter, like those of middle- and upper-income persons of all races. Barely one in ten of the low-income blacks in families was living in a single-female family. By 1980, the 10 percent figure had become 44 percent.” This was higher than the percentage common among poor whites.\textsuperscript{20}

Murray’s conclusion is eloquent, and it gets right to the point: The presence of long-term poverty is not primarily a function of family

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 127.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 129–30.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 130.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 132.
\textsuperscript{20} Idem.
income. It is a function of morality, time perspective, and faith regarding economic causes and effects. “Let us suppose that you, a parent, could know that tomorrow your own child would be made an orphan. You have a choice. You may put your child with an extremely poor family, so poor that your child will be badly clothed and will indeed sometimes be hungry. But you also know that the parents have worked hard all their lives, will make sure your child goes to school and studies, and will teach your child that independence is a primary value. Or you may put your child with a family with parents who have never worked, will be incapable of overseeing your child’s education – but who have plenty of food and good clothes, provided by others. If the choice about where one would put one’s own child is as clear to you as it is to me, on what grounds does one justify support of a system that, indirectly but without doubt, makes the other choice for other children? The answer that ‘What we really want is a world where that choice is not forced upon us’ is no answer. We have tried to have it that way. We failed. Everything we know about why we failed tells us that more of the same will not make the dilemma go away.”

The dilemma did not go away. In 2002, the rates of illegitimate births in the United States were as follows: whites (non-Hispanics), 23%; African-Americans, 68.4%; American Indians, 59.7%; Hispanics, 43.5%. The poverty rate among racial groups and the illegitimacy rate among these groups remained closely correlated.

The defenders of modern socialism – who are far fewer in 2006 than in 1986 – and defenders of the welfare State have closed their eyes for three generations or more to the testimony of the Bible, and


also to the testimony of the statisticians. They cling to a demonic view of stewardship, with the pseudo-family of the State at the head of the financial household. The result has been the destruction of families and also the productivity and social peace produced by the family.

**Binding Contracts and Economic Growth**

Covenants are binding. If men refuse to accept this truth, the possibilities for economic development in a society are thereby reduced. The historic link between the biblical idea of binding covenants and the West’s idea of binding contracts is obvious enough. The covenant of marriage supports the institution that was the first to implement the division of labor. Without the predictability associated with contracts, the division of labor is hampered. Contracts involve the sharing of the fruits of combined labor.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the family unit. The basis of the idea of a contract, like the idea of a covenant, is personal faithfulness. It begins with the Trinity, extends to the relationship between Christ and His church, undergirds the family, and makes long-term economic co-operation possible. A covenant is binding in the same way that an individualistic vow to God is binding. God is the sanctioning agent. A contract, which does not have the same degree of authority as a covenant or a vow to God, nevertheless is analogous. If the model of permanence for contracts, namely, the vow or the covenant, is denied true permanence, then how much less permanent are contracts!

When J. D. Unwin examined the relationship between monogamy and cultural development, he found that in every society that he studied, the absence of monogamy guaranteed the eventual stagnation
or retrogression of that society.\textsuperscript{23} The Bible provides us with the information concerning man that allows us to understand why such a relationship between monogamy and culture should exist. The promise of external blessings is held out to those societies that covenant themselves with God, and which enforce the terms of that covenant, biblical law. The archetypal symbol of the rejection of God’s covenant is adultery. The old business rule is close to the truth: “A man who cheats on his wife will probably cheat on anybody.” It may not hold true in every single instance of adultery by a businessman, but when a society accepts adultery as “business as usual,” business will not long retain its character as an enterprise marked by binding contracts. Honest business will become increasingly unusual, and litigation costs will rise, as men seek to enforce contracts. This represents needless waste – needless from the point of view of the dominion covenant. Lawyers prosper and multiply – a sign of a collapsing culture.

\textit{Sowell on Contracts}

Thomas Sowell has pointed to the importance of rigid, formal, and enforceable rules regarding marriage. His insights are brilliant. “Society itself may need to guarantee that certain relationships will remain rigid and inviolate in all but the most extraordinary circumstances. Much socially beneficial prospective action will not take place, or will not take place to the same extent, without rigid guar-

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The heavy investment of emotion, time, and resources necessary to raise a child would be less likely in a society where the child might at any moment, for any capricious reason, be taken away and never seen again. Such behavior is rejected not only for its retrospective injustice but also for its prospective effect on parental behavior. Not only will the state forebear from such behavior; it will use severe sanctions against private individuals who do such things (kidnappers). This rigid legal framework of parent-child relationships provides the protective setting within which the most flexible kinds of parent-child social relationships may develop.”

Sowell immediately proceeds to the questions of property and ownership, “Similar considerations apply across a spectrum of other social arrangements, particularly those involving long and large individual investments of efforts for prospective personal and social benefits. Property rights introduce rigidities into the use of vast amounts of many resources – by excluding all but the legal owner(s) from a serious voice in most of the decisions made about the disposition of the resources – on the assumption that such losses as are occasioned by this rigidity are more than offset by the gains in prospective behavior by people acting under these guarantees.”

There is a socially indivisible link between rules protecting the integrity of the family and rules protecting private property. The civil government must enforce these rules.

Christians who are familiar with the commandment against coveting should understand this important link between family and property. “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant,

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nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Ex. 20:17). Socialism is the legislated economics of covetousness. It is as much a threat against the family’s integrity as adultery is a threat to the integrity of the free market’s contractual order.

Sowell’s analysis is accurate. If the following paragraph were understood and implemented by societies that regard themselves as Christian – and even by societies that do not regard themselves as Christian – the world would prosper economically. Writes Sowell: “Someone who is going to work for many years to have his own home wants some fairly rigid assurance that the house will in fact belong to him – that he cannot be dispossessed by someone who is physically stronger, better armed, or more ruthless, or who is deemed more ‘worthy’ by political authorities. Rigid assurances are needed that changing fashions, mores, and power relationships will not suddenly deprive him of his property, his children, or his life. Informal relationships which flourish in a society do so within the protection of formal laws on property, ownership, kidnapping, murder, and other basic matters on which people want rigidity rather than continuously negotiable or modifiable relationships.”

Libertarian Contracts

A major theoretical dilemma for the modern libertarian or anarcho-capitalist is the problem of the lifetime contract. Each man is seen as the absolute owner of his own body. He therefore can legitimately make contracts with other men that involve his own labor services. He is absolutely sovereign over his own person. This is the theoretical

26. See below, ch. 10.
27. Ibid., p. 32.
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foundation of almost all libertarian thought. Murray Rothbard writes: “The central core of the libertarian creed, then, is to establish the absolute right to private property of every man: first, in his own body, and second, in the previous unused natural resources which he first transforms by his labor. These two axioms, the right of self-ownership and the right to ‘homestead,’ establish the complete set of principles of the libertarian system.”

But then there arises the problem of slavery: the lifetime contract. Man, the absolute sovereign agent, seems to be able to sign away his autonomy in such a contract. To say that man cannot legitimately sign such a contract – that such a contract is not morally or legally binding – is to say that there are limits placed on this autonomous sovereignty of man. This is the libertarian’s version of the old question: “Is God powerful enough to make a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it?” The libertarians ask: “Is man sovereign enough to make a contract so binding that he cannot break it?” The theist is not particularly bothered by the real-life applications of the God-rock paradox, but the libertarian faces several paradoxical problems that are only too real. First, how long is a contract really binding, if lifetime contracts are illegitimate? Forty years? Four years? Four weeks? When does the absolute sovereignty of a man to make a binding contract come into conflict with the absolute sovereignty of a man not to be bound by any permanent transfer of his own will? Lifetime slavery is immoral and illegal in a libertarian framework. A libertarian must argue that such a contract should always be legally unenforceable. But what about a ten-year baseball contract? Second, and more to the point, what about marriage?

Murray Rothbard, the most consistent and innovative of the liber-

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tarian economists, has stated his position with his usual clarity: “. . . a man cannot permanently transfer his will, even though he may transfer much of his services and his property. As mentioned above, a man may not agree to permanent bondage by contracting to work for another man for the rest of his life. He might change his mind at a later date, and then he cannot, in a free market, be compelled to continue working thereafter. Because a man’s self-ownership over his will is inalienable, he cannot, on the unhampered market, be compelled to continue an arrangement whereby he submits his will to the orders of another, even though he might have agreed to this arrangement previously.” 29 In the footnote to this final sentence, he adds: “In other words, he cannot make enforceable contracts binding his future personal actions. . . . This applies also to marriage contracts. Since human self-ownership cannot be alienated, a man or a woman, on a free market, could not be compelled to continue in marriage if he or she no longer desired to do so. This is regardless of any previous agreement. Thus, a marriage contract, like an individual labor contract, is, on an unhampered market, terminable at the will of either one of the parties.” 30

The libertarian concept of absolute self-ownership as the foundation of all economic exchanges sinks into oblivion when it hits the libertarian concept of the illegitimacy of lifetime contracts. The libertarian’s universe could not bind a man to perform any sort of future labor service. It certainly could not require him to love, cherish, and support a recently abandoned wife. She may have given him her youth in the days of her beauty – her “high-yield capital” stage, or her


30. Ibid., I, pp. 441–42; footnote 35. Emphasis in original.
“high exchange value capital” stage – but once this capital is gone, she is without legal protection. Thus, the radical impermanence of libertarian contracts would threaten the social fabric of any society so shortsighted as to adopt this social philosophy as its foundation. The future-orientation provided by the safety of permanent vows in a godly society could not exist in a consistently libertarian society. There would be no institutional means of enforcing the terms of covenants, and this would eventually reduce men’s confidence in the enforceability of shorter-run contracts. A society that rejects the binding nature of covenants will not long retain the economic blessings of binding contracts.

Conclusion

A biblical social order protects a man’s life, wife, and property. The woman is protected, too. The time perspective of such a society will be longer term than a social order (disorder) characterized by adultery, divorce, illegitimate births, and single-parent households. Whenever a social order is marked by successful attacks against private property and also by the removal of stringent sanctions against adultery, the social order in question has departed from the standards set forth in the Bible. It has adopted an anti-biblical religion, whatever the official pronouncements of its leaders, including its church leaders. A survey of 950 religious teachers and counsellors, which was conducted by the University of Houston in 1984, revealed that of the 500 who responded to the questionnaire, 40% did not believe that premarital heterosexual sex is immoral, and that 87% believed that adultery should not be a crime. Sixteen per cent said that adultery is not morally wrong, 9% were uncertain, and 75% said it is morally wrong. But almost none of them thought the civil government has any
role in punishing adulterers. Only 53% said that the legal system ought to limit marriage to people of opposite sexes.\textsuperscript{31} When the religious and political leaders of a society begin to wink at adultery, they will soon enough wink at coercive wealth redistribution, confiscatory taxation, and the compulsory retraining of children by statist planners. In fact, we can expect to see these leaders not only wink at such invasions of both the family and property, but also actively pursue these policies. There are too many adulterers in the highest seats of civil government and in the pulpit.

In the sixth commandment, we are told that man’s life is sacrosanct, for man is made in God’s image. In the seventh, we are told that the marriage covenant is also sacrosanct, for it reflects the covenantal bond of Christ with His church, and even the covenantal bond within the Trinity.

The yoke of co-operative service necessarily involves a hierarchy: husbands possess lawful (though biblically specified) authority over their wives. But this possession is mutual, Paul tells us: the man’s body belongs to the wife, and her body belongs to him (I Cor. 7:4). The husband’s authority is therefore limited. Each of the partners belongs to God, whose ownership is absolute. But God’s ultimate authority is reflected in the husband’s authority. This hierarchy reflects the hierarchy of God the Father over God the Son. Thus, the seventh commandment parallels the second: there must be authority, hierarchy, and obedience.

\textsuperscript{31} Associated Press story, \textit{Tyler Morning Telegraph} (Dec. 28, 1984).
THE RIGHTS OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

*Thou shalt not steal* (Ex. 20:15).

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the original owner of the creation. Its judicial precedent was God’s command to Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which belonged exclusively to God. That tree was a symbol of all five points of the covenant: the sovereignty of God, the hierarchical structure of creation, the ownership boundary around property, sanctions – positive (knowledge) and negative (death) – and man’s inheritance in history. But the primary judicial issue was boundaries. Boundaries are an aspect of point three of the biblical covenant model.¹ Those people and institutions to whom God delegates temporary ownership of property are to be protected from theft. This law is a requirement of effective kingdom-building.

The Number-One Passage

It has long been recognized by Christian commentators that the biblical case for private property rests more heavily on this passage

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The Rights of Private Property

than on any other passage in the Bible. Individuals are prohibited by biblical law from forcibly appropriating the fruits of another man’s labor or his inheritance. The civil government is required by the Bible to defend a social order based on the rights of private ownership. The various laws requiring restitution that are found in Exodus 22 explicitly limit the State in its imposition of sanctions against thieves, but there can be no doubt that the civil government is required to impose them.

Rights of ownership mean that God transfers to specific men and organizations the unique authority to use specific property for certain kinds of ends. The State is required to exclude others from the unauthorized use of such property. Property rights therefore refer to legal immunities from interference by others in the administration of property. The duties associated with dominion are more readily and effectively achieved by individuals and societies through adherence to the private property system, which is one reason why the Bible protects private ownership. Private property is basic to effective dominion.

The only conceivable biblical argument against this interpretation of the commandment against theft would be an assertion that the only valid form of ownership is ownership by the State, meaning control by bureaucracies established by civil law. But to argue along these lines demands evidence that the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, authorized the public (State) ownership of all goods. There is not a shred of evidence for such a view, and massive evidence against it. The tenth commandment prohibits coveting the property of a neighbor. The State is no one’s neighbor. The State has no wife to covet. The social order that is presented as binding in the Mosaic law is a social order that acknowledges and defends the rights – the legal immunities – of private property. This prohibition against theft binds individuals and institutions, including the State. This commandment does not say, “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote.”
God’s Ownership, Man’s Personal Stewardship

The foundation of property rights is the ultimate ownership of all things by God, the Creator. God owns the whole world. “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof” (Ps. 50:10–12). God’s sovereignty is absolute. The biblical concept of property rests on this definition of God’s authority over the creation. The Bible provides us with data concerning God’s delegation of responsibility to men—as individuals and as members of collective associations—but all human sovereignty, including property rights, must be understood as limited, delegated, and covenantal.

Christ’s parable of the talents presents the sovereignty of God in terms of the analogy of a loan from a lord to his servants. The servants have an obligation to increase the value of the capital entrusted to them. They are directly responsible to their lord, who is the real owner of the capital. Ownership is therefore stewardship. Men’s rights of ownership are delegated, legally enforceable rights. God’s “loan” must be repaid with capital gains, or at the very least, with interest (Matt. 25:27).² This is one of Christ’s “pocketbook parables,” and while it was designed to illustrate God’s absolute sovereignty over the affairs of men, it nevertheless conveys a secondary meaning, namely, the legitimate rights of private ownership. Each man is fully responsible before God for the lawful and profitable

administration of God’s capital, which includes both spiritual capital and economic capital (Luke 12:48).³

God distributed to Adam and Eve the resources of the world. They were made covenantally responsible for the care and expansion of this capital base when God established His dominion covenant with them. This same covenant was reestablished with Noah and his family (Gen. 9:1–7).⁴ In the originally sinless condition of Adam and Eve, this initial distribution of the earth’s resources could be made by God in terms of an original harmony of anyone’s interests.⁵ This harmony included hierarchy, for Eve was functionally subordinate to Adam (though not ethically inferior).⁶ The God-designed harmony of interests was never an egalitarian relationship. It is surely not egalitarian in the post-Fall world. The church, as the body of Christ, is similarly described in terms of an organic unity which is supposed to be harmonious, with each “organ” essential to the proper functioning of the whole, yet with each performing separate tasks (I Cor. 12).⁷ All are under Christ, the head of the church (Eph. 5:23).

God’s universe is orderly. There is a God-ordained regularity in economic affairs. There is a predictable, lawful relationship between personal industriousness and wealth, between laziness and poverty.


⁵ Ibid., ch. 8.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 91–92.

“How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man” (Prov. 6:9–11). “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase” (Prov. 13:11). This applies to individuals, families, corporations, and nations. Not every godly man or organization will inevitably prosper economically, in time and on earth, and not every evil man will lose his wealth during his lifetime (Luke 16:19–31), but in the aggregate, there will be a significant correlation between covenantal faithfulness and external prosperity. In the long run, the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22). This same principle applies to national, cultural, and racial groups (Deut. 8). Covenantal law governs the sphere of economics. Wealth flows to those who work hard, deal honestly with their customers, and who honor God. To argue, as the Marxists and socialists do, that wealth flows in a free market social order towards those who are ruthless, dishonest, and blinded by greed, is to deny the Bible’s explicit teachings concerning the nature of economic life. It is a denial of the covenantal lawfulness of the creation.

The Theology of the Welfare State

Critics of the capitalist system have inflicted great damage on those societies that have accepted such criticisms as valid. Men have

8. North, Treasure and Dominion, ch. 40.

concluded that the private property system is rigged against the poor and weak, forcing them into positions of permanent servitude. Historically, on the contrary, no social order has provided more opportunities for upward social mobility than capitalism. The remarkable advance of numerous immigrant groups, but especially of Eastern European Jews, in the United States from 1880 to 1950, is historically unprecedented.\textsuperscript{10} Today, the policies of the welfare State are making lifetime dependents out of a substantial minority of citizens.\textsuperscript{11} The modern welfare system is deeply flawed, not simply because it uses coercion to take income from the employed, but because it destroys the will of the recipients to escape from the welfare system.\textsuperscript{12} The politics of welfare is also leading to class conflict. George Gilder’s words are eloquent in this regard: “A program to lift by transfers and preferences the incomes of less diligent groups is politically divisive – and very unlikely – because it incurs the bitter resistance of the real working class. In addition, such an effort breaks the psychological link between effort and reward, which is crucial to long-run upward mobility. Because effective work consists not in merely fulfilling the requirements of labor contracts, but in ‘putting out’ with alertness and emotional commitment, workers have to understand and feel deeply that what they are given depends on what they give – that they must supply work in order to demand goods. Parents and schools must inculcate this idea in their children both by instruction and example. Nothing is more deadly to achievement than the belief that effort will

\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Thomas Sowell, \textit{Race and Economics} (New York: David McKay Co., 1975), Pt. II.


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not be rewarded, that the world is a bleak and discriminatory place in which only the predatory and the specially preferred can get ahead. Such a view in the home discourages the work effort in school that shapes earnings capacity afterward. As with so many aspects of human performance, work effort begins in family experiences, and its sources can be best explored through an examination of family structure. Indeed, after work the second principle of upward mobility is the maintenance of monogamous marriage and family."13

Biblical Cause and Effect

The biblical perspective on marriage, like the biblical perspective on the foundations of economic growth, points to both ideas: the relationship between work and reward, and the central importance of the family bond. Men are told to have faith in the work-reward relationship, which encourages them to take risks and invest time and effort to improve their own personal work habits. The Bible tells us that such efforts will not go unrewarded, whether on earth or in heaven (I Cor. 3:10–15).14 The habits of discipline, thrift, long hours of effort, investment in work skills, and the instruction of children in this philosophy of life will not be wasted, will not be “capital down the drain.” On the contrary, the Bible teaches that such an approach to life is the very essence of the dominion covenant.


14. North, Judgment and Dominion, ch. 3.
When philosophies contrary to the philosophy of capital accumulation and private economic dominion are encountered, Christians should recognize them for what they are. When men are taught that the capitalist system is rigged against them, that they have a legal and moral right to welfare payments, and that those who live well as a result of their own labor, effort, and forecasting skills are immoral and owe the bulk of their wealth to the poor, we must recognize the source of these teachings: the pits of hell. This is Satan’s counter-philosophy, which is expressly intended to thwart godly men in their efforts to subdue the earth to the glory of God. This radically antibiblical philosophy is not simply a matter of intellectual error; it is a conscious philosophy of destruction, a systematically anti-biblical framework that is calculated to undercut successful Christians by means of false guilt and paralysis. That such teachings were popular among Christian intellectuals in the latter years of the twentieth century testifies to their abysmal ignorance – indeed, their judicial blindness (Matt. 13:14-15) – concerning both biblical ethics and economic theory. Christian intellectuals by the mid-twentieth century had adopted the politics of envy from the secular humanists, especially in college and seminary classrooms. We live in an age of guilt-manipulators, and some of them use Scripture to persuade unsuspecting Christians of the truth of their anti-biblical worldview. They are either wolves in sheep’s clothing or else they are ill-informed to the


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Theft and Market Value

Christian commentators have, from earliest times, understood that the prohibition of theft, like the prohibition against covetousness, serves as a defense of private property. Theft is an autonomous, willful act of economic redistribution, and therefore it is a denial of the legitimacy and reliability of God’s moral and economic law-order.

The immediate economic effect of widespread theft in society is the creation of insecurity. This lowers the market value of goods, since people are less willing to bid high prices for items that are likely to be stolen. Uncertainty is increased, which requires that people invest a greater proportion of their assets in buying protection services or devices. Scarce economic resources are shifted from production and consumption to crime fighting. This clearly lowers per capita productivity and therefore per capita wealth, at least among law-abiding people.

The internal restraints on theft that are provided by godly preaching and upbringing help to reduce crime, thereby increasing per capita wealth within the society. Godly preaching and active church courts are therefore forms of capital investment for the society as a whole (what the economists call “social overhead capital”), for they release scarce economic resources that would otherwise have been spent on the protection of private and public property. Such preaching and church court actions also reduce the necessary size of the civil government, which is important in reducing the growth of unwarranted State power.

What is true about the reduction of theft is equally true concerning the strengthening of men’s commitment to private property in gen-
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eral. When property rights are carefully defined and enforced, the value of property increases. Allen and Alchian, in their college-level economics textbook, comment on this aspect of property rights. “For market prices to guide allocation of goods, there must be an incentive for people to express and to respond to offers. If it is costly to reveal bids and offers and to negotiate and make exchanges, the gains from exchange might be offset. If each person speaks a different language [as at the tower of Babel – G.N.], if thievery is rampant, or if contracts are likely to be dishonored, then negotiation, transaction, and policing costs will be so high that fewer market exchanges will occur. If property rights in goods are weaker, ill defined, or vague, their reallocation is likely to be guided by lower offers and bids. Who would offer as much for a coat likely to be stolen?”

The authors believe that the higher market value of goods that are protected by strong ownership rights spurs individuals to seek laws that will strengthen private-property rights. Furthermore, to the extent that private-property rights exist, the power of the civil government to control the uses of goods is thereby decreased. This, unfortunately, has led politicians and jurists to resist the spread of secured private-property rights.

There is no question that a society that honors the terms of the commandment against theft will eventually enjoy greater per capita wealth. Such a society rewards honest people with greater possessions. This is as it should be. A widespread hostility to theft, especially from the point of view of self-government (self-restraint), allows men to make more accurate decisions concerning what they want to buy, and therefore what they ought to produce in order to offer


17. Idem.
something in exchange for the items they want. Again, quoting Allen and Alchian: “The more expensive is protection against theft, the more common is thievery. Suppose that thievery of coats were relatively easy. People would be willing to pay only a lower price for coats. The lower market price of coats will understate the value of coats, for it will not include the value to the thief. If the thief were induced to rent or purchase a used coat, the price of coats would more correctly represent their value to society. It follows that the cheaper the policing costs, the greater the efficiency with which values of various uses or resources are revealed. The more likely something is to be stolen, the less of it that will be produced.”

When communities set up “neighborhood watches” to keep an eye on each other’s homes, and to call the police when something suspicious is going on, the value of property in the community is increased, or at least the value of the property on the streets where the neighbors are helping each other. By lowering the benefits to criminals, property owners increase the value of their goods.

A Critic Responds

When I referred to the passage by Allen and Alchian in my essay in Wealth and Poverty (1984), a collection of four Christian views (the book’s cover says) on economics, one of the three anti-market respondents was horrified. In the name of Jesus, he attacked the idea of the biblical sanction for privately owned property, as well as my defense of the economics of crime prevention, with the following line of argumentation: “The less thievery there is, the more the value of

18. Ibid., p. 239.

19. There were four views expressed by Christians.
private property increases and the less able the poor are to buy it. In capitalism, the more ‘moral’ a people are, the more the poor are oppressed.”20 He was not joking. He expected readers to take him seriously.

The culprit is capitalism, in Mr. Gish’s view. Capitalism hurts the poor, he insisted, even when the crime rate goes down. Less thievery means that the poor are exploited under capitalism. First, they are exploited by thieves under capitalism; then they are exploited by capitalists when the thieves go away. Heads, the poor lose; tails, they also lose. If there are any benefits accrued as a result of any reduction in theft, they accrue for the capitalist rich. If this argument is the best that Christian communalists and egalitarians can come up with in their ideological struggle against private ownership, then the intellectual battle is just about over.21 I cannot resist citing Oscar Wilde’s definition of a cynic: “a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.” This is Mr. Gish’s problem.22


21. This turned out to be the case within five years of the publication of this book in 1986. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and socialism fell into disrepute overnight among Western intellectuals. Socialism became passé.

22. I single out Mr. Gish, not because he was a serious economist or a serious social philosopher, but because his article and his criticisms of my position were printed in a book published by a company whose targeted market has always been college-educated American Protestant Christians. Within a year of its publication, senior officials with the company decided to suppress the book. The company pulled it off the market, despite good sales, and sold every copy to me for 25 cents each. I like to think that it was my theoretically uncompromising and rhetorically challenging remarks on the anti-market positions of the other three authors that were the cause of this suppression. In the mid-1980’s, in Ronald Reagan’s second term, when Protestant evangelicals had voted overwhelmingly for Reagan and against the idea of socialism and high marginal tax rates, anti-market opinions were
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What Mr. Gish did not understand is that thieves reduce the value of everyone’s property, both rich and poor, but especially those poor people who live in neighborhoods where crime is rampant. Mr. Gish’s comment revealed that he failed to understand the economic reasoning behind Allen and Alchian’s conclusion. It is not that prices necessarily go up when crime is reduced (although they may), thereby excluding the poor; it is that the value of goods goes up, including the value of property owned by the poor. The poor get richer, not poorer. Mr. Gish confused increases in the value of property with increases in the cost of living. He was so consumed by his hatred of capitalism that he could not understand a simple economic argument. If the poor now enjoy property that is worth more, why are they oppressed under capitalism? They aren’t, unless they are eaten up by envy, and hate to see the rich also get richer – hate it with such intensity that they would give up their own increases in order to tear down the rich. Envy is one of the primary motivations of socialists, as sociologist Helmut Schoeck argued in the mid-1960’s.23

The decrease in the value of property as a result of theft would also occur in a socialist economy. Official prices might not change – who knows what a socialist planning board might do to prices in response to crime? – but the value of goods would drop. This has nothing to do with the structure of a particular economy; it has everything to do with the effects of crime on people’s assessment of the costs of

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still de rigueur in Protestant evangelical intellectual circles. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the climate of opinion grudgingly turned around among secular humanists. Therefore, by 1995, it began to turn around in Protestant evangelical intellectual circles. There is an echo effect in Protestant evangelical intellectual circles, who take their cues from humanist intellectual circles.

holding goods. If criminals are raising the costs of holding goods, then the value of the goods falls. In other words, costs of ownership rise, so the value of the items owned drops. If I own an item that was worth five ounces of gold before the crime wave hit, but it now costs me three ounces of gold a year to store it or otherwise protect it, the net value of that item to me will drop in my calculations. I may be willing to sell it today for two ounces of gold, or even less. Its price has dropped only because its value to me and to potential buyers dropped first. This is so incredibly simple that only a professional capitalism-hater could miss it. Mr. Gish missed it.

If the crime wave stops, and it costs me only an ounce of silver to store it or otherwise defend it – the same storage fee that I paid before the crime wave hit – its value to me will rise. Now I may not be willing to sell it for under five ounces of gold. Others may offer me five ounces because they, too, see its increased net value to them. The crime wave is over. The price rises because the costs of ownership have fallen. Prices “return to normal,” meaning closer to those that prevailed before the crime wave, because value has “returned to normal.”

The wealth of the poor increases when crimes against property are reduced. The market value of the items poor people own also goes up. It may even go up more, since the poor may have been the targets of the criminals even more than the rich were. Burglars tend to live and work in neighborhoods where poor people live, not where rich people live. In any case, the cost of defending their goods, proportional to the market value of those goods, was probably far higher for the poor during the crime wave than the protection costs for the rich were, proportional to the value of their goods. The poor probably will experience a more rapid percentage increase in net worth when theft goes down. The poor suffered more when the crime wave hit, so they gain more when it is reduced. This is so incredibly simple that only a professional capitalism-hater could miss it. Mr. Gish missed it.
The increased value of private property in a society that prosecutes theft would also take place in response to preaching against theft, if hearers take seriously the sermons. Mr. Gish continually moralized against theft (theft by ruling elites) in the passage immediately preceding his outraged protest against capitalism. He blamed capitalism for raising the cost of living to poor people whenever theft is reduced. Implicitly, he was arguing that under socialism (or local communal ownership) reducing theft will not lead to higher prices.

Value and Price

Let us consider the effects of a wave of theft on market prices. If we understand what is going on in this scenario, we probably have a firm grasp of economic theory. It can serve as a good example. Under capitalism, any additional self-government and self-restraint against theft will tend initially to raise the market price of goods above that which prevailed prior to the wave of thefts. So will any cost-effective increases in the civil government’s war against thieves. Let us look at the sequence of events.

First, the wave of thefts begins. Assume that it is national in scope and horrendous. People are afraid to leave their homes. They reduce the number of shopping trips. They put more money in the bank, since banks are perceived to be safer against bank robbers than homes are against burglars. In other words, they decide to buy fewer stealable goods. Demand for consumer goods therefore drops.

On the other hand, the supply of available goods initially rises. Stolen goods that would not have been offered for sale by their owners at the older, higher prices, begin to enter the resale markets. These goods carry price discounts. Honest producers of goods must compete by lowering their prices. Production of new goods drops.
New goods producers begin to go into bankruptcy and start selling goods at huge discounts. Then, after they sell off inventories, some of them stop producing.

In short, prices drop because the value of goods has dropped. Why has the value of goods dropped? Because the costs of ownership have risen. If you raise costs, you should expect reduced demand. This is what we do see. The demand for consumer goods drops. This is especially true for poor people, who are more vulnerable to theft and violence in their communities. The value of their presently owned goods is drastically reduced because the costs of ownership for them have been drastically increased.

As I have already pointed out, Mr. Gish was not used to this sort of economic reasoning, so he resorted to his knee-jerk policy of criticizing capitalism for the evils of both increased crime and decreased crime. In good times and bad times, capitalism is evil. He was not alone in his hostility to capitalism in 1984. It was the characteristic feature of literati everywhere until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.  

Second, falling prices are not the end of the story. Prices subsequently start to rise, because buyers can no longer locate sellers of new goods. Too many sellers have gone out of business. The burglars hit them, too. The costs of production rose for them, since producers are owners, too. Furthermore, thieves find that owners have bought burglar alarms, locks, and guard dogs. The costs of being a burglar also rise, so there is less burglary. The availability of stolen goods drops. The initial discounts disappear. Stolen goods start to command higher prices. Fewer goods are bought and sold, but for those necessities that do remain on the shelves, their prices will be higher.

Buyers’ dollars will be chasing a smaller number of goods, so prices of these goods tend to rise. If the crime wave persists, prices of goods actually brought to market rise higher than they had been before, since fewer goods are available. Most people continue to be worse off as a result of the crime wave.

We need to ask ourselves: How are poor people benefited if prices are pushed initially lower by criminal behavior (reduced demand coupled with lower prices for stolen goods)? How are they benefited when the uncertainties associated with theft must be dealt with? What benefit is the high rate of theft in, say, New York City’s black ghetto, Harlem? I have visited apartments in Harlem, with their expensive doors and intricate locks. It is profitable for sellers of anti-burglary devices, but not for any other law-abiding citizen.

Prices of other consumer goods are initially lowered because of money that must be spent on locks, burglar alarms, and insurance. But they do not remain low. Buyers need to lure sellers into high-risk markets where theft is common. People in Harlem wind up having to pay far higher prices than in other areas of New York City because costs of doing business are high (you might get killed), and it is expensive to lure sellers into the area. Consumer choices are drastically limited; there are no supermarkets in Harlem; only small “mom and pop” stores that issue credit and know their customers. Harlem’s problem is not capitalism; its problem is that too many criminals and people with short-run perspectives live (and prey) there.25

What if the crime wave ends? We now come to phase three. There will still be an increase in prices, as buyers seek to lure back potential sellers. Initially, prices will rise, but they will not rise as high as they would have risen had the crime wave not come to an end. It is this

phase of the economic process that Mr. Gish singled out and criticized: the recovery phase. He blamed capitalism for high prices. But he ignored phase four.

Fourth, if the criminals are kept out of the crime business, the high prices being offered by buyers will lure manufacturers back into the markets. Manufacturers are given accurate signals about true consumer demand. As they target specific markets and their output increases, prices will again fall back closer to where they had been prior to the crime wave. Never forget: Producers need accurate signals concerning true consumer demand. This is what the free market gives them. Prices enable producers to assess more accurately the value in the marketplace of all scarce resources. They can then make better decisions about production.

This is what the critics of capitalism simply will not admit, namely, that producers respond to higher consumer prices by producing more goods and services to meet the new demand, unless the costs of production rise as fast or faster. If it becomes safer to own goods, and people want to buy additional goods, then prices may rise initially. But this is not the end of the story, except in books written by socialists and free market critics. The question is: What happens next? What happens next in a free market society is greater output of the newly demanded goods. This new production tends to lower consumer prices.

Socialism’s War Against Price Signals

We might ask Mr. Gish: What would be the result of similar self-restraint or civil government restraint against theft in a socialist society that had previously been hit with a crime wave? If government bureaucrats set most prices, and they keep prices fixed during
both the crime wave and the recovery phase, which is likely, then the ethics-induced increased value of consumer goods will not send a price signal to producers to produce more goods. Producers will therefore not respond rapidly to the new conditions of higher value for goods, because the bureaucrats hold down official (legal) prices.

True, citizens who no longer are victimized by thieves are benefited. Thus, there is a net social benefit in socialist societies, as in all societies, from a reduction in theft. But far from this crime reduction’s leading to an indirect benefit for the poor, it leads nowhere in particular in the official, State-controlled markets. The market value of goods rises in the black market, where prices more closely match true value to buyers and sellers, but not in the State-controlled markets. Only to the extent that poor people have greater skills in entering the black market will poor people be favored by the indirect economic effects of a reduction in theft.

In all likelihood, the poorest members of society will not be well-informed black marketeers. Thus, the reduction of theft by private individuals in a socialist economy tends to augment the flow of consumer goods flowing into an illegal market that is dominated by people with specialized skills in illegal bargaining. The primary beneficiaries are those people who trade in the illegal markets. This is the curse of all socialist economies. Those people who become dependent on the State to deliver the goods become the victims of bureaucratic incompetence, and those who ignore the official markets and who enter black markets become the winners. It is a good lesson in economics. (I am sure my critic’s answer would be that socialist governments ought to pass more laws against black markets.)

26. The economic ignorance that underlies the arguments of my critic is monumental. Yet such ignorance was representative of the published books and essays of “socially concerned,” Christian college-educated, seminary-trained social thinkers in the American and British evangelical community in the 1980’s.
Conclusion

As buyers, we want sellers to respond to our offers to buy goods and services. Yet as producers, we want to know what buyers are willing and able to pay for our goods and services. The better everyone’s knowledge of the markets he deals in, the fewer the resources necessary for advertising, negotiating, and guessing about the future. These “released” resources can then be devoted to producing goods and services to satisfy wants that would otherwise have gone unsatisfied. The lower our transaction costs, the more wealth we can devote to the purchase and sale of the items involved in the transactions.

One transaction cost is the defense of property against theft or fraud. God therefore steps in and offers us a “free good”: an inescapable system of punishment. To the extent that criminals and potential criminals believe that God really does punish criminal behavior, both on earth and in heaven, their costs of operation go up. When the price of something rises, other things being equal, less of it will be demanded. What if we can raise the “price” of crime? Less criminal behavior will be the result of a widespread belief in God’s judgments, both temporal and final. God raises the risks to thieves. When the commandment against theft is preached, and when both the preachers and the hearers believe in the God who has announced His warning against theft, then we can expect less crime and greater per capita wealth in that society. God’s criminal justice system is coherent, and it is also inescapable, so it truly is a free good – a gift from God that is a sign of His grace. This is one aspect of the grace of law.  

to increased wealth for those who respect His laws.

**Theft at the Ballot Box**

We have dealt so far primarily with the question of criminal behavior by private individuals or organized criminal societies. But the economic analysis that applies to theft by private individuals also applies to theft by the civil government. The commandment against theft does not read: “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote.” We need to have private property rights respected, not just by criminals, but also by individual citizens who find that they can extract wealth from others by means of State power. Furthermore, private property rights must be respected by profit-seeking businesses that would otherwise petition the State for economic assistance: tariffs, import quotas, below-market interest rate government loans, and so forth. To violate this principle is to call for the so-called “corporate State,” another form of the welfare State – fascism, monopoly capitalism, or whatever.28 Whenever such a system has been constructed, it

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has led to reduced productivity and an increase in bureaucracy. The politicians are simply not competent enough to plan for an entire economy.\textsuperscript{29} To promote such a system of State planning and protection of industry is an illegitimate use of the ballot box, meaning democratic pressure politics.

Property and Voting

Let us consider an example that has been debated from the Puritan revolution of the 1640’s until today: the property qualification for voting. At the Putney Debates of Cromwell’s New Model Army in 1647, Ireton, Cromwell’s son-in-law, debated Rainsborough, the representative of the democratic faction, the Levellers. The Levellers were not communists, but they were committed to a far wider franchise. (The communists in the English Revolution were the Diggers, who called themselves the “True Levellers.”)\textsuperscript{30}

Rainsborough argued that because all men are under the laws of a nation, they deserve a voice in the affairs of civil government. Ireton countered with a ringing defense of property rights. A man must have some stake in society, he said, meaning property to defend, if he is to be entrusted with the right to vote. Men without permanent interests


\textsuperscript{30} Christopher Hill, \textit{The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution} (New York: Viking, 1972), ch. 7.

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in the society – property, in other words – are too dangerous when handed the power of civil government. The property qualification is crucial to preserve society in a democratic order. “And if we shall go to take away this, we shall plainly go to take away all property and interest that any man hath either in land by inheritance, or in estate by possession, or in anything else. . . .”

Two centuries later, Karl Marx concluded much the same, except that he favored the abolition of the property qualification for voting, precisely because it would destroy private property: “. . . the state as a state abolishes private property (i.e., man decrees by political means the abolition of private property) when it abolishes the property qualification for electors and representatives. . . . Is not private property ideally abolished when the non-owner comes to legislate for the owner of property? The property qualification is the last political form in which property is recognized.”

His contemporary, the Whig historian and politician Lord Macaulay, offered a similar assessment.

Yet there is a major theoretical problem that Christian defenders of the property qualification for voting have chosen to overlook or downplay: defining citizenship apart from a Trinitarian confession of faith. Instead, they have generally defined citizenship in terms of a stake in society, and then have defined this stake as possessing some minimal value of property. In opposition to this argument, Rains-


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borough in 1647 argued that residence in a nation should establish a right of citizenship. The laws apply to all residents. Why should they not be able to have a say in who writes the laws and enforces them? More than a century later, a slogan of America’s revolutionaries was “No taxation without representation.” Sales taxes were extracted from every resident, yet the colonists had no votes in Parliament. This argument left confession of faith out of the debate. It made citizenship a function of economics. Yet the Bible places covenants above economics, for covenants are oath-bound under God.

No respectable political philosopher in the Protestant West today raises this issue: theological confession as the basis of citizenship. If civil government is a covenant established under God, then why should Christians ignore baptism and confession of faith as the dual foundation of citizenship? Modern theories of democracy and political pluralism deny the legitimacy of such a judicial foundation of citizenship, substituting other civil oaths and confessions for theological confession. But there is nothing in the Bible to support political pluralism and much that denies it.34

By insisting on the possession of property as a defining characteristic of citizenship, the Cromwellians undermined the holy commonwealth ideal, which they had fought a revolution to establish. In 1660, Charles II ascended to the throne and relegated the Puritans to second-class citizenship because of their failure to affirm allegiance to the Church of England, over which the king formally ruled. By 1700, theological unitarians and even pantheists – religious dissenters – who traced their political roots back to the Puritan revolution against Charles I, helped to establish Whig political theory, which

became Anglo-American Enlightenment political humanism. By 1750, the contractualism of Hobbes (1651) and Locke (1690) had replaced the older covenantalism in debates over political theory. The ideal of Christendom no longer commanded respect by the West’s intellectuals and opinion-shapers. Then came Rousseau’s version of the social contract in 1762: a theory of the sovereign General Will, represented solely by the nation-State, in which the intermediary institutions of Christendom lost all political legitimacy. The right wing of the Enlightenment (Scottish) and the left wing (French) were united in their opposition to the ideal of Christendom. Today, there is no well-developed political theory from an explicitly Trinitarian and self-consciously biblical point of view that deals with citizenship in terms of these categories: theological confession, church membership, taxation, and oaths of allegiance. Yet it has been two millennia since Jesus was born. Much work remains to be done.

Protection

All property is God’s. He has established rules for the exchange, transmission, and development of this property. Theft is explicitly prohibited. God’s law provides us with the case laws that enable us to define theft biblically. For example, it is not theft if a neighbor picks an apple from someone else’s tree and eats it (Deut. 23:24–


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Furthermore, it is theft if the owner of an agricultural property does not leave fallen fruit on the ground for gleaners (Deut. 24:19). The Bible is our standard of what constitutes theft, not Adam Smith or Karl Marx.

The civil government is required by God to serve as the protector of property. It must honor the laws of ownership that are set forth in the Bible. It should not prosecute a man who takes grain from his neighbor’s field. Christ and the disciples were not guilty of theft when they did so (Matt. 12:1). The civil government can legitimately compel a farm owner to respect the gleaning laws. In a biblical society, the threatened negative civil sanction would be the revocation of citizenship, based on a prior revocation of church membership for his defying the gleaning law. But the civil government cannot legitimately say which persons have to be allowed into the field to glean. The owner of the property has that responsibility, just as Boaz did (Ruth 2:3–12).

This view of theft and protection is not in conformity to either modern socialism or modern libertarianism. In the first system (socialism), the State collects the tithe for itself, and many times God’s tithe, to be used for purposes specified by bureaucratic and political bodies. In the second system (libertarianism), all coercion against private property is defined as theft, including taxation itself (in some libertarian systems). Nevertheless, the Bible’s standards


40. Perhaps the most systematic of the libertarian criticisms of all forms of taxation is Murray N. Rothbard’s book, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy* (Menlo Park, California: Institute for Humane Studies, 1970). It was reprinted as the final section of *Man, Economy, and State* (1962) by the Ludwig
are the valid ones, and the Bible is clear: *There is no absolute sovereignty in any person or institution.* Unquestionably, there are limits on the use of private property. But these limits are minimal. Given the biblical standards of theft, the civil government becomes a legitimate sovereign in the area of theft prevention and punishment – not the only institution, but one of them, and the one that has the lawful authority to impose economic sanctions against thieves.

Nobel-Prize winning economist R. H. Coase has stated emphatically: “A private-enterprise system cannot function properly unless property rights are created in resources, and, when this is done, someone wishing to use a resource has to pay the owner to obtain it.” 41 The defense of private ownership by the civil government against theft is, in and of itself, a foundation of capitalism. By defining the limits of ownership, and by defending property from coercive attack from violent men and fraudulent practices, a godly civil government establishes the basis of economic growth and prosperity.

One of the most important features of a private property social order is the reduction of uncertainty. The market rewards forecasters (entrepreneurs) for their successful attempts to meet future consumer demand at competitive prices. Here is the basis of the power of the consumers over the suppliers: the lure of profit. The profit-and-loss system is also the process through which less efficient (more wasteful) forecasters are steadily eliminated from the market, thereby increasing the stability of the market. Consumers can rely more

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readily on the free market for the future delivery of goods and services than they could dare to rely on a bureaucratic delivery system, with its guaranteed jobs for suppliers, its past-oriented rules, and its lack of risk-bearing. Uncertainty is reduced in society by the free, competitive market precisely because the market places such high rewards for overcoming uncertainty, namely, profits. The market’s flexibility provides consumers with future stability, since the mistakes of producers tend to cancel out, and the more successful producers strengthen their position in the market.

Defining Property Rights

If the free market order rests on property rights, then what exactly are they? As with all definitions, the human mind, not to mention language, is imperfect. An absolutely rigorous definition is probably impossible. But one reasonable attempt has been made by Harold Demsetz: “Crucially involved is the notion that individuals have control over the use to which scarce resources (including ideas) can be put, and that this right of control is saleable or transferable. A private property right system requires the prior consent of ‘owners’ before their property can be affected by others. The role of the body politic in this system is twofold. Firstly, the government or courts must help decide which individuals possess what property rights and, therefore, who has the power to claim that his rights are affected by others. Secondly, property rights so assigned must be protected by the police power of the state or the owners must be allowed to protect property rights themselves. Presumably the best mix of public and
private protection will depend on ethical and other considerations.\footnote{42} Unfortunately, the economics profession, in its self-professed moral neutrality, has not been able to come up with these ethical and other criteria, nor have economists shown exactly how economics would relate to such criteria.

Property, from this perspective, is basically a “bundle of rights.” Again, citing Demsetz: “When a transaction is concluded in the marketplace, two bundles of property rights are exchanged. A bundle of rights often attaches to a physical commodity or service, but it is the value of the rights that determines the value of what is exchanged.”\footnote{43} The control over such rights necessarily involves the right to exclude others from the value of the rights over time. It is here that the civil government must take special care. Rights are not absolute, but they should be sufficiently familiar to acting men that these men can make valid predictions concerning the future – the future actions of competitors, as well as of the civil government. The reduction of uncertainty is of paramount importance. As Cheung writes: “The transfer of property rights among individual owners through contracting in the marketplace requires that the rights be exclusive. An exclusive property right grants its owner a limited authority to make a decision on resource use so as to derive income therefrom. To define this limit requires measurement and enforcement. Any property is multidimensional and exclusivity is frequently a matter of degree. But without some enforced or policed exclusivity

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\item \footnote{43} Demsetz, “Toward a Theory of Property Rights,” \textit{American Economic Review} (1967); reprinted in Economics of Property Rights, p. 31.
\end{enumerate}
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to a right of action, the right to contract so as to exchange is absent.”

The civil government must protect property because it must protect property owners.

The Market for Knowledge and Uncertainty

The establishment of property rights is therefore fundamental in any system of voluntary exchange. Men rely on the division of labor to increase their economic output and therefore their income. Of critical importance is the exchange of information, including the voluntary exchange of uncertainty. Those who want to buy more uncertainty, and therefore open up to themselves the opportunity for greater profit, are enabled to do so by purchasing higher-risk property from those who are willing to settle for a more guaranteed return. Some people want bonds, others want stocks, while still others want to speculate in commodities. Farmers may prefer to lock in a price for their future crops, so as to concentrate their knowledge on raising more crops. Speculators who think they understand agricultural markets, even if they know very little about the actual mechanics (or organics) of farming, can contract with uncertainty-avoiding farmers


45. I employ Frank Knight’s distinction between risk and uncertainty. Risk is a statistically calculable class of future events, such as the deaths within a particular age group. Mortality tables used by life insurance firms are examples of statistical calculations of risk. In contrast, uncertainty is not subject to mathematical analysis in advance. Correctly forecasting uncertain future events – or at least events not deemed as uncertain by one’s competitors – is the source of all profits, Knight cogently argued. Frank H. Knight, Risk, Uncertainty and Profit (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1921] 1965)
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to guarantee them a specified future price for their crop. Those who want uncertainty can buy it; those who want to avoid it can sell it. This helps reduce the mistakes – forecasting mistakes – in those societies that allow voluntary transactions in the marketplace. But a society that does not take care to specify and enforce property rights cannot derive the full benefits of the market in reducing uncertainty. Costs of ownership remain needlessly high. Co-operation is reduced.

Man is not God. Man’s knowledge is not God’s exhaustive knowledge. Man must seek wisdom and knowledge as one of his tasks on earth (Prov. 1:1–7). He needs the division of labor in knowledge more than he needs the division of labor in any other field, since wisdom is the thing above all which we are told to pursue. The free market, more than any institutional arrangement in the history of man, facilitates the division of labor in knowledge. Men are forced to recognize that knowledge is never free of charge, and that other men put a high price on certain kinds of knowledge. This, predictably, tends to encourage increased production of the high-valued knowledge.

The free market increases men’s knowledge, but there must be open competition for knowledge, and there must be legal transferability of that knowledge. Competition assembles knowledge from many potential suppliers. The knowledge here is man’s knowledge of all the potential uses for a scarce resource, and all the contractual arrangements possible for implementing this knowledge. Cheung writes that the “transferability of property rights ensures that the most valuable knowledge will be utilized.”

When a society allows buyers of knowledge to bid against each other, and it also facilitates the sellers’ ability to transfer their resources, it thereby reduces the cost


47. Cheung, in Economics of Property Rights, p. 29.

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of enforcing the stipulated terms of contracts. How? Because competing parties stand by to offer or accept similar terms of exchange. If one participant tries to cheat, others will step in and make legitimate offers. Thus, concludes Cheung, “competition in the marketplace reduces the costs of finding and pursuing the most valuable option in which a resource may be contacted for production.”48 This, of course, reduces waste. People can buy what they want with fewer resources, since all resources tend to be allocated to those uses most highly demanded by consumers or their economic agents: entrepreneurs. Producers think they know what other people want to buy, and those consumers who want to buy finished products gain their influence over suppliers because the transactions are voluntary, and suppliers are seeking to make a profit. To the extent that the State restricts the profitability of voluntary exchange, buyers lose influence over suppliers, for the whole incentive structure is compromised. The State restricts the buyers’ use of “economic carrots.”

The words “mine” and “yours” are two of the most important words in any society. Biblical preaching has, over centuries, enabled men to appreciate the importance of these two words. When the differences between the two are honored in law, word, and deed, society benefits. Men can better co-operate with each other in peaceful transactions precisely because of the predictability provided by a social order which recognizes “mine” and “yours.” This facilitates the division of labor.

Demsetz has seen the importance of property rights from the perspective of social co-operation. “In the world of Robinson Crusoe property rights play no role. Property rights are an instrument of society and derive their significance from the fact that they help a man form those expectations which he can reasonably hold in his

dealings with others. These expectations find expression in the laws, customs, and mores of a society. An owner of property rights possesses the consent of fellow men to allow him to act in particular ways.  

Men can make contracts with each other, and enjoy the fruits of their decisions concerning the stewardship of God’s resources. To return to a now-familiar theme, *property rights reduce the zones of uncertainty in life.* Men see through a glass darkly. Anything that throws light on the subject is a benefit.

**Ownership as a Social Function**

What is not understood by many is that private ownership necessarily involves social responsibilities. There can be no escape from the responsibilities of ownership. God always links power and responsibility.

Consider a scarce resource. Being scarce, it commands a price. (A non-scarce resource is any resource for which demand does not exceed supply at zero price.) Therefore, the person who owns it possesses wealth. What will he do with this wealth? Will he use the asset (money, for example) to invest? This makes the wealth available for a period of time to someone else. Will he spend the money on a consumer good? Then he pays for it and thereby forfeits the income that he might have received had he invested the money. Will he give it away? Then he forfeits the use of the investment income or the psychic income that the consumer good would have produced.

Who establishes the price of the asset? Consumers do. A consumer is here defined as the *final buyer.* He does not purchase the good in order to make a profit by selling it to someone else. Consumers make

subjective evaluations of what any asset is worth, and their competitive bids in the marketplace establish the objective price of a particular asset.

Producers compete against producers to sell to consumers, who in turn compete against each other. Producers cannot sell assets at prices higher than consumers are willing and able to pay. Thus, consumers determine what is going to be produced. Entrepreneurs act as their middlemen, buying up producer goods, raw materials, labor, and other forms of capital, and using them over time to meet expected consumer demand. If they are successful in their guesses, they will reap profits. If they are incorrect, they will reap losses. But there is no escape from what free market economists call consumers’ sovereignty, at least not apart from the intervention of the civil government with some sort of coercive protection scheme. This sovereignty is delegated by God to property owners. Delegated sovereignty is the same as authority. It is the legitimate authority to make use of some asset.

This means that every person who owns an asset that commands a price must act as the agent of consumers (including himself), or pay the price of failing to serve their needs. If consumers want to see assets used in a particular way, and an asset owner refuses to sell, then he pays a price. He cannot ignore consumer demand at zero price to himself. Consumers or their economic agents (entrepreneurial middlemen) make bids for ownership, as revealed by a market price for the asset. Those owners who refuse to take the offered price thereby forfeit all the uses to which they might otherwise have put the

money. There is no escape from this required payment. The owner who says, “I’ll use it my way,” is saying, “I’ll pay for my decision.” He turns his back on the money or goods offered by consumers for his property.

Thus, ownership is a social function. Men must act as stewards on behalf of the consuming public, or else pay the price. There is no such thing as a free (gratuitous) lunch. There is also no such thing as cost-free ownership of scarce economic resources. The existence of free markets – institutional arrangements for open, competitive bidding – enables consumers to price all economic assets according to their subjective evaluations. Free markets produce objective bids (prices). These bids produce either profits or losses for entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs are not in charge of the bidding process. Consumers are, for they possess money: the most marketable asset. They own what specialized producers desire: money. Producers worry about having large inventories. Few consumers worry about possessing too large an inventory of money. Free markets aid consumers in establishing their will over producers. Producers are legally free agents, but they are not cost-free agents.

There are two ways to impose your will on another person: reward and penalty, the carrot and the stick. The stick relies on coercion. The coercion of legal adults is a covenantal monopoly of the civil government. Thus, consumers must rely on the carrot approach. “Do it my way,” they assert, “or suffer the consequences.” What are the consequences? Forfeited income.

The market is not some autonomous institution that thwarts the “little guy.” It is an institution that promotes the interests of every asset-owning participant. It provides consumers with the ultimate institutional carrot: a legal order that allows them to make competitive bids to the owners of the resources they want to buy. The market is a social institution that places daily inescapable burdens of owner-
ship on every resource owner.51 As Mises writes: “Ownership of the means of production is not a privilege, but a social liability. Capitalists and landowners are compelled to employ their property for the best possible satisfaction of the consumers. If they are slow and inept in the performance of their duties, they are penalized by losses. If they do not learn their lesson and do not reform their conduct of affairs, they lose their wealth. No investment is safe forever. He who does not use his property in serving the consumers in the most efficient way is doomed to failure. There is no room left for people who would like to enjoy their fortunes in idleness and thoughtlessness.”52 In a society in which the rights of private property are honored, men can make decisions concerning their assets that will influence future generations in a conscious, calculating way. Family capital is protected by the prohibition against theft. Men’s consideration of time perspective can then focus on the long-term prospects for their capital, just as Abraham’s vision did.

Which system of property management tends to be more concerned with the future, private ownership or communal ownership? Demsetz addresses this issue, and he concludes that private ownership tends to be far more future-oriented. By communal ownership, he means “a right which can be exercised by all members of the community.”53 He points to a phenomenon made famous by biologist Garrett Hardin, the


“tragedy of the commons,” although he does not use this terminology. “Suppose that land is communally owned. Every person has the right to hunt, till, or mine the land. This form of ownership fails to concentrate the cost associated with any person’s exercise of his communal right on that person. If a person seeks to maximize the value of his communal rights, he will tend to overhunt and overwork the land because some of the costs of his doing so are borne by others. The stock of game and the richness of the soil will be diminished too quickly.” People may agree to reduce the demands they are making, as individuals, on the land, but the costs of negotiating are high, and so are the costs of policing the agreement.

“If a single person owns the land,” says Demsetz, “he will attempt to maximize its present value by taking into account alternative future time streams of benefits and costs and selecting that one which he believes will maximize the present value of his privately owned rights. We all know that this means that he will attempt to take into account the supply-and-demand conditions that he thinks will exist after his death. It is very difficult to see how the existing communal owners can reach an agreement that takes account of these costs.”

Then Demsetz offers a stunning insight into the social function of an owner of a private property right: the owner as a broker between generations. “In effect, an owner of a private right to use land acts as a broker whose wealth depends on how well he takes into account the


55. Demsetz, in *Economics of Property Rights*, p. 38.

56. *Idem.*
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competing claims of the present and future. But with communal rights there is no broker, and the claims of the present generation will be given an uneconomically large weight in determining the intensity with which the land is worked. Future generations might desire to pay present generations enough to change the present intensity of land usage. But they have no living agent to place their claims on the market."57

By its very nature and time perspective, family capital is privately owned capital. Privately owned capital necessarily involves the defense of private property. The stewardship of resources should be supervised by the most intensely committed social unit, the family. It is not the only legitimate institution of ownership,58 but it is unquestionably the most universally recognized ownership institution historically, and it is the social unit to which God originally announced the dominion covenant. By establishing a tight (though imperfect) relationship between costs and benefits, private property rights encourage men to count the costs of their actions. The counting of costs is a biblical requirement (Luke 14:28–30).59 If a man overworks his soil, he or his heirs will pay the price. If his animals overgraze the land, he or his heirs will suffer reduced income later. He cannot pass on his costs so easily to those outside his family, which therefore encourages him to examine the effects, including long-run effects, of his present decisions. He seeks a profit – an excess of income over outgo – so he cannot safely ignore costs. He will waste fewer of

57. Ibid., pp. 38–39.

58. The corporation is another important institution for holding property, but corporate shares of ownership are held by heads of households primarily, or by agents of heads of households: banks, retirement funds, mutual funds, etc. Thus, these are delegated sovereignties.

59. North, Treasure and Dominion, ch. 35.
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God’s resources because of the profit incentive, compared to the waste involved in communal ownership or State ownership systems, where each man is offered direct incentives to waste the common asset while profiting personally from the immediate use of the asset. To avoid the tragedy of the commons, society must actively reinforce the laws and institutions of private property.

There can be commitment to the goals of other social units besides the family, but no institution commands the degree of loyalty that the family has commanded historically. When devising a system of incentives, we should stick with the Bible and “go with the winner,” which is the family. Family capital is private capital.

Communal Property and Nomads

Those within the Christian tradition who have been committed to socialism have pointed to the communal property of the Jerusalem church as an example to be followed by all Christians. Several comments are in order. First, communal property in the Jerusalem church was strictly voluntary (Acts 5:4).60 Second, property was shared in common (Acts 4:32), but for a reason: Christ’s prediction of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20–24). By selling fixed property, such as homes, Jerusalem’s church members made it easier to heed Christ’s warning and flee the city during the crisis. They could convert their fixed capital assets into mobile capital, thereby helping to preserve the value of their capital.61 This prophecy concerning


61. Ibid., ch. 3.
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Jerusalem was fulfilled in 69 and 70 A.D., when the Romans surrounded the city and starved out the inhabitants. The Christians fled to Pella, church legend has it, before the final siege of Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church abandoned private property temporarily, but there is no indication that communal property was regarded as morally binding. It was a temporary response to a particular set of circumstances: Christ’s prophecy and Rome’s tyranny. The early church in Jerusalem (and only in Jerusalem) prepared to flee by selling fixed property and pooling the funds. Members became, in effect, temporary nomads, for they intended to flee when the time came. As nomads, they adopted transportable property and more communal property ownership. There is no indication that this nomadic system of ownership was ever regarded as a policy for gentile congregations.

The nomad is not a builder of civilization. His geographical perspective is too short run. He comes and goes, never staying to establish roots, whether personal or agricultural. The nomadic family concerns itself primarily with transportable assets. Weapons and household utensils are prized, and nomadic law protects them. Both kinds of articles require raw materials, human ingenuity, and time to produce. But far less concern is placed on defining and policing property rights in land. Demsetz writes: “Property rights in land among such people would require costs for several years during which no sizable output is obtained. Since to provide for sustenance these people must move to a new land, a property right to be of value to them must be associated with a portable object. Among these people it is common to find property rights to the crops, which, after harvest, are portable, but

not to the land. The more advanced agriculturally based primitive societies are able to remain with particular land for longer periods, and here we generally observe property rights to the land as well as to the crops.”63

A godly society seeks to defend the property rights of ever-multiplying kinds of goods and services. An increasing market value of more and more formerly ignored goods is made possible by rising productivity. Civilization can be measured by an increase in the kinds of private property recognized and developed by members of a particular society. As societies advance, they are marked by this extension of protection to new products, new technologies, and new transactions. The division of labor increases.

**Human Rights and Property Rights**

One of the most successful political slogans of economic interventionists in the twentieth century was this one: “We’re in favor of human rights over property rights.” One of America’s most beloved Presidents, the feisty and extremely well-read Teddy Roosevelt, used a variation of this slogan in the early years of the twentieth century: “In every civilized society, property rights must be carefully safeguarded. Ordinarily and in the great majority of cases, human rights and property rights are fundamentally and in the long run, identical; but when it clearly appears that there is a real conflict between them, human rights must have the upper hand; for property belongs to man

63. Demsetz, in *Economics of Property Rights*, p. 37n.
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and not man to property.\textsuperscript{64}

Allen and Alchian’s analysis strikes at the heart of such a contrast: “Exclusivity of control constitutes a basic component of the private-property economic system. We emphasize that property rights are not rights of property, they are rights of people to [the] use of goods. In sum, two basic elements of private property are exclusivity of rights and voluntary transferability or exchangeability of rights. It is silly to speak of a contrast or conflict between human rights and property rights. Property rights are human rights to the use of economic goods.”\textsuperscript{65}

We can legitimately speak of a misuse of property by an individual. If my factory blows smoke on your house and wears off the paint, I have invaded your sphere of responsibility. I have attacked your property. I have assaulted your sense of justice. When men come to agree, through custom or formal law, that a specific space is to be protected and honored, another man cannot legitimately invade that space for his own personal profit, except with the consent of the owner. But this is not a case of “property rights vs. human rights”; it is a case of a conflict between human rights – a dispute between people concerning the lawful use of privately owned property.

Pollution and Economic Competition

There are inevitably problems to be settled in human society, areas that need more research, more understanding. Even theoretically, the


\textsuperscript{65} Alchian and Alien, \textit{University Economics}, p. 142.
defender of the free market has difficulties in defining property rights or an invasion of property rights. For example, free market defenders argue that when the State taxes one quarter of the income of a particular piece of property, it has in effect confiscated one quarter of that property.66 Consider, then, this problem (raised by Demsetz).67 If my factory blows smoke on your property, you expect restitution, or a cessation of smoke production, since it lowers the value of your property. Pollution-control equipment can be defended in terms of this view of property rights. However, if my factory is located a thousand miles away, or across the ocean, and my improvements in methods of production drive out of business a factory in your area, which happens to employ half the town, the market value of your home may drop even more than if my factory were spewing smoke into your neighborhood. Few defenders of the free market would insist that I owe restitution to anyone who has the value of his house wiped out in this manner. Yet the value of your house may be down 25%. Have I really confiscated 25% of your house? Is the argument which is levelled at the tax collector equally applicable to my distant factory? Competition, confiscation, and cooperation are sometimes very difficult concepts to distinguish – not always, or even usually, but sometimes.

The Bible provides us with an example of “spillover effects” and what to do about them. If a man starts a fire on his property, and the fire spreads to his neighbor’s property, the man who started the fire is responsible for compensating his neighbor for the latter’s losses.


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(Ex. 22:6). 68 Obviously, this invasion of property is physical, rather than merely competitive and economic in nature, and therefore the fire-starter is liable. The destruction of property in this instance is physical and immediate; the victim actually loses part of his crop. But what about noise pollution, where the man’s house is not burned, but its market value drops as a result of his neighbor’s noisy factory? This would seem to be covered by the case law on fire, since sound waves are physical phenomena, just as sparks are. But when the loss is exclusively economic, without physical invasion, the Bible is silent: There is no biblical law that would require the successful innovator to compensate those who lost money because of the introduction of new production techniques or new products. Alchian’s analysis would seem to apply: “Although private property rights protect private property from physical changes chosen by other people, no immunity is implied for the exchange value of one’s property.” 69

Is it fair, then, to equate the economic effects of the State’s collection of taxes and the industrialist’s pollution? The answer depends on the level of taxation. If the State attempts to extract taxes greater than 10% of income, thereby equating its sovereignty with God’s sovereignty (the tithe), then the answer is yes, the two should be equated.


69. Armen Alchian, “Some Economics of Property Rights,” Il Politico (1965); reprinted in Alchian, Economic Forces at Work (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Press, 1977), p. 131. His conclusion, however, that making pornographic pictures and selling them must be free from legal restraint follows only if we assume that there are (1) no absolute standards of morality, (2) no God, and (3) no social consequences for immoral behavior – in short, no consequences imposed on many members of society by God’s judgment. Most economists erroneously make all three assumptions. When we speak of the legitimacy of innovation, we must always have in mind this qualification: “. . . assuming the innovation or transaction is not singled out by the Bible as being defined by God as perverse, and also illegal.”
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Both forms of economic redistribution rest on illegitimate violence. The tax collector extracts money or goods from the citizen upon threat of imprisonment or outright confiscation of capital assets. Thus, when the State taxes, say, 50% of a present and future stream of income, the present capital value of the asset producing the stream of income is reduced by nearly 50%.\(^7\) Because some benefits may flow from the State’s laws, such as protection from violence or fraud, the economic loss is not necessarily 100% of the tax. The economic effect is almost the same as if the State had taken almost half the land, or almost half the shares of stock or bonds.\(^1\) This is destructive.

Taxation: Investment vs. Consumption

By confiscating up to 100% of a person’s income (in late twentieth-century England and Sweden, for example),\(^2\) the tax collectors

\(^7\) Meaning, “reduced from what it would otherwise have been.”

\(^1\) The economic effect is not precisely the same. It is generally easier for a special-interest group to get tax policies changed than it is for members of the group to get the State to return all the property that had been confiscated from each of them, especially if the confiscated property has been sold in the meantime to other private buyers, who will fight any such legislation. The longer the period after the confiscation, the more difficult it is to get the law changed. Thus, when the State confiscates 50% of the property’s income in the form of taxes, this probably does not produce a full 50% drop in the market value of the property, whereas a confiscation of 50% of the property does involve a loss of 50%, unless the new owner does something with the property that enhances the value of the contiguous property that the original owner still owns.

\(^2\) In 1975, British citizens in the highest tax brackets paid up to 83% of all “earned” income, and 98% of “unearned” (investment) income. The tax authorities actually assessed Mick Jagger, the leader of the Rolling Stones rock band, 101% of his income (since they have property taxes and capital taxes in addition to income taxes), but settled for 94%. He fled the country to become a resident of France, which had established far lower negotiable tax rates for rich immigrants.
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have wiped out billions of dollars worth of capital assets, and lowered the public’s willingness to invest more in productive capital. Money flows into other kinds of investments in a welfare State: goods that can be used without paying taxes on the psychic income received. These goods include expensive automobiles, beach homes, gold, jewelry, art objects, mistresses, and other forms of user-tax-free, user-satisfying capital.

The Wall Street Journal has provided a classic example of how the State’s existing tax policies discourage investment. Say that a very rich man wants to invest a million dollars. He takes the money and invests in a new business – 80% of which fail within the first five years. Let us say that he thinks the business will make him 10% on his money in the second year of operation, but nothing in the first year (a reasonable presumption). Let us also say that his estimations are rewarded. At the end of the second year, he has back $100,000 profit for his small corporation. Here is what happens to his corporation in New York City. “Of the hundred thousand dollars in profit, the city clears away roughly $5,700, leaving $94,300. The state clears away about 10 percent of that, leaving $84,870. The IRS, levying at progressive rates, snatches $38,000, leaving $46,870. Our good rich person then pays himself a dividend. Being rich, our man is of course in the highest personal income-tax brackets, and after paying 4.3 percent to the city ($2,015) has $44,855 left. The state clips him for 15 percent of that ($6,728) and leaves him $38,127. Uncle Sam

from high-tax countries. “Taxing the Talent Out of England,” U.S. News and World Report (Sept. 8, 1975). It was estimated in 1977 that as many as 100,000 British executives, middle managers, and entrepreneurs had left England to escape confiscatory taxation during the previous three years. Britain’s “revenue loss” was estimated to be a billion pounds in 1976 alone. Bruce Bartlett, “Taxes in Great Britain,” Libertarian Review (June 1981), p. 26. In the 1970’s, Sweden’s world-famous film director, Ingmar Bergman, emigrated when the tax authorities taxed him over 100% of his previous year’s income.
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‘nicks’ him for 70 percent of that, which is $26,689, leaving him with $11,438. Thus, on the investment of 1 million dollars in capital and two years of hard work in assembling the enterprise that is risky to begin with, this lucky fellow who turned a profit of $100,000 has $11,438 to spend. He has given up two years on his yacht to gain $5,719 in annual income.” 73 Now, it may not have been quite this bad. 74 But the point is clear, despite the slight exaggeration of the Wall Street Journal essay: The higher the tax level, the less that people are going to invest in risky, future-oriented, employment-producing capital assets.

Paul Craig Roberts has described a realistic decision facing a rich man in the late 1970’s: “Take the case of a person facing the 70 percent tax rate on investment income. He can choose to invest $50,000 at a 10 percent rate of return, which would bring him $5,000 per year of additional income before taxes. Or he can choose to spend $50,000 on a Rolls Royce. Since the after-tax value of $5,000 is only $1,500, he can enjoy a fine motor car by giving up only that amount. Britain’s 98% tax rate on ‘unearned’ (investment) income has reduced the cost of the Rolls in terms of foregone income to only $100 a year. The profusion of Roll Royces seen in England today is


74. Federal tax laws in the United States during that period allowed deductions from taxable income for taxes paid at the state and local level. Donald Regan, the Secretary of the Treasury under President Reagan, announced immediately after Reagan’s successful bid for a second term of office (November 1984) that the Treasury was proposing a new Federal tax rule which would deny the deductibility of local taxes from Federally taxable income.
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mistaken as a sign of prosperity.” The pre-1980 tax policies of England steadily wiped out the capital base of the nation – sacrificing future productivity for present luxury. Given the fact that a Rolls Royce generally appreciates with inflation, and also because the newly rich are always coming into the market, and given the income tax-deductibility of interest payments in the United States in 1985, the rich man could make more after-tax money by buying a Rolls on credit, driving it several years, and paying off the debt in depreciated money – and meanwhile enjoying a tax break on the interest payments to the bank that loaned him the money to buy the Rolls. The price of a Rolls appreciated from 1977, when Roberts wrote his essay, until the recession of 1981, four years later. This is present-oriented investing with a vengeance, and it is a direct, predictable result of envy-inspired confiscatory taxation rates. With tax rates at modern levels, and with theological rebellion loose in the land, we actually find that the systematic decadence of the rich – cocaine parties, sexual deviation, perverse art forms – can in fact be interpreted as a form of tax-free income. After all, pleasure as a result of spending is taxed only mildly (sales taxes), if at all. Better to spend now, says the present-oriented man, than to invest for the future. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we go broke, and can then apply for unemployment benefits and food stamps.

The modern welfare State has imposed tax burdens on the wage-earning, middle-class citizenry that are systematically decapitalizing the modern world. The envy-dominated legislatures and government-

75. Roberts, “The Economic Case for Kemp-Roth,” Wall Street Journal (August 1, 1978); cited in ibid., p. 173. Because of reductions in tax rates in the highest tax brackets in both nations since 1978, the example is somewhat exaggerated.

76. One of the most comprehensive reports on decadence in the United States appeared in the final issue of the now-defunct magazine, New Times (Jan. 8, 1979). The entire issue was devoted to the topic.
financed economic research centers are destroying the capital base of future generations. Economic growth throughout the West began to slow down, 1970–80, as a result of these tax policies. Capital was not being replaced. Investors all over the world were involved in housing speculation during the 1970’s, where there were direct benefits (living in a nicer home), and in the United States, at least, there were also major tax benefits (interest-payment deductions from taxable income, as well as depreciation benefits for investment homes, despite the appreciation in value of these investment homes).

This began to change in a remarkable three-year period: 1978–81. In 1978, Deng Xiao Ping reversed the communist economic policies in Mainland China, allowing farmers to own their own land. Agricultural output immediately soared. This policy was then transferred to the general economy, which launched the most rapid and comprehensive economic boom in human history, a boom matched only by India’s in the 1990’s, as a result of similar policy changes. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in Great Britain, and in 1981, Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as President of the United States. Thatcher and Reagan succeeded in getting tax reductions legislated, which led to economic booms in both nations.

The State vs. Human Rights

So, the answer to the original question – “Are taxes the equivalent of capital confiscation?” – is yes, they are. Taxes are no longer simply the means of supporting the civil government’s protection of private property, which enhances the value of capital by protecting it. Graduated taxation is envy-dominated, based on a theology of salvation by statist law. The State is a messianic institution in the modern world, and it is a destroyer of capital. The Moloch State consumes the economic future of its worshippers, and the economic future of its wor-
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shippers’ heirs. The State, like the polluting factory, is a coercive, capital-destroying agent in the economy. But the polluting factory may provide productive employment for local residents, and it provides the consumers with lower-priced goods (lower priced than if the factory had to pay for pollution-control equipment). The State, in contrast, employs only bureaucrats, and uses its funds generally to subsidize the improvident members of society (some of whom may be quite rich), ensnaring them in a web of promised benefits, and destroying their incentive to work for the benefit of consumers. The very poor also suffer a reduction of their opportunities to obtain the work skills they need to advance themselves in modern economic society. The confiscatory State is a far greater threat to property and freedom than some local factory which pollutes the air or water.

The modern State is a threat to human rights, for it is a threat to property rights. The modern State is a destroyer of human rights, for it is a destroyer of property rights. Guilt-ridden intellectuals, politicians, and sons of the rich have promoted an ideology of wealth redistribution that destroys capital and therefore destroys human aspirations. They have used the misleading slogan, “human rights above property rights,” to destroy both human rights and property rights.

77. By “improvident,” I mean “one who wastes his capital, or the capital entrusted to him by others.” This certainly applies to senior executives of major industrial companies that apply to the Federal government for financial aid, tariffs, and other stolen economic goods.

Conclusion

The eighth commandment parallels the third commandment, which establishes a property right to God’s name, a boundary that must be respected by men.

The biblical doctrine of ownership is a doctrine of stewardship. God’s property is to be carefully developed and improved by His stewards. The servants have chosen to ignore God, and they have also chosen to ignore His commandment against theft. Modern man has adopted a new theology, the ownership of property by the State. The State, as the sovereign owner, delegates to its servants the right to administer the property, but the State gets its cut, its tithe. The tithe principle is built into the creation; the only question is this: Who gets the tithe? The State is collecting its tithe. As Thomas Sowell has summarized it: “Win, and the State wins with you; lose, and you lose alone.” This is the rule for the rich and the middle class, in any case. The modern State is a thief. When Samuel warned the nation of Israel against selecting a king to rule over them, he tried to scare them by telling them that the king would extract a tithe of 10% (I Sam. 8:15–17). The greatest bureaucratic dynasty of the ancient world, Egypt, took 20% as its tithe (Gen. 47:26). There is no Western industrial State that extracts as little as Egypt took. In fact, in most instances, substituting a tax rate of one-fifth of a nation’s productivity would constitute a tax reduction of at least 50%.

Private property reduces uncertainty. It gives men an incentive to

79. Though the idea will horrify socialists and egalitarians, the best way to assess the value of an improvement of any property is to compare its price today with its price before the improvement was made. If someone spent a great deal of money to improve a property, but these improvements did not produce a market price greater than the money invested, then that invested wealth was probably misallocated. It might have been better spent elsewhere.
The Rights of Private Property

produce. It expands men’s time horizons to unborn generations. It encourages economic growth by enabling innovators and workers to capture the value of their increased productivity. It encourages thrift. Being familistic in nature, it promotes the central institution of economic dominion. It allows the transfer of information, the transfer of uncertainty, and the transfer of capital to those who are willing and able to bear the economic responsibilities of ownership. The protection of private property is one of the cornerstones of civilization. The civil government is to protect private property, not steal it.

Private property is basic to God’s program of dominion. It is crucial to the success of the Sinai strategy. The dominion covenant requires it. Thieves are not to be allowed to gain access to other men’s lawful tools of dominion. They are not to appropriate other men’s property except by voluntary contract. This includes thieves who use the ballot box as their weapon.

The rise of the messianic nation-State in the twentieth century threatened Western civilization. It is the greatest single danger today to the preservation and expansion of familistic capital. The envy-dominated ideologies of wealth distribution through coercion—Marxism, socialism, Keynesianism, and the “Social Gospel”—captured the minds of the intellectuals and political leaders of the twentieth century. While this outlook began to be reversed after 1980 and accelerated after 1991, the institutional legacy of the State interventionism rests on well-developed political constituencies, especially the elderly, who grew up in the era of the welfare State and came to rely on it for their retirement years.

The intellectual defenders of the ideal of the welfare State today are less confident than they and their predecessors were before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But faith in its replacement by the free market and voluntary charities is not yet widespread. Most voters remain convinced that the civil government can and therefore must protect them from major adversity. Until they change their
minds regarding the competence of the State to guarantee a society-wide safety net for personal incompetence or improvidence, the masses will continue to defend the legitimacy of the politics of plunder. They will continue to affirm the modification of this commandment: “Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote.”
THE VALUE OF A NAME

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor (Ex. 20:16).

The Sinai Strategy

Economics and the Ten Commandments

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they sought to “make a name” for themselves, i.e., to define themselves and their place in the universe apart from God’s revelation concerning (1) Himself, (2) the creation, and (3) His sustaining providence. God scattered them for their arrogance.²

Because the family’s name is so important in a godly commonwealth, the Bible provides laws regulating the family’s name and reputation. The preservation of a man’s name through children born to his widow and his brother was the basis of the Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–6).³ There was a law in the Hebrew commonwealth that penalized bastardy (Deut. 23:2). This law reinforced the general prohibition against sexual activity outside of marriage (Deut. 22:21). It was unlawful for a newly married man to bring an unsubstantiated charge of non-virginity against a daughter of Israel (Deut. 22:19).

A name in Old Testament times represented power – either magical power or ethics-based dominion power. Very early in the Genesis account, men of God began to call upon His name (Gen. 4:26). Abram, upon entering the land of Canaan, built an altar to God. He moved again, building a second altar unto God, “and called upon the name of the LORD” (Gen. 12:8b). This was in response to God’s original command to Abram to leave his country: “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2).⁴ God changed Abram’s name to Abraham – “father of nations” (Gen. 17:5) – and He changed Jacob’s name to Israel (Gen. 32:27–29): the major transition point in

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⁴ North, Dominion Covenant, ch. 16.
The Value of a Name

each of their lives. A new name emphasized the magnitude of each of these turning points.

In the New Testament, the name of Jesus Christ must be invoked to enter into salvation. Peter’s speech at Pentecost makes this clear. Citing Joel 2:32, Peter proclaimed: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Baptism is performed in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). Peter healed the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6). He attributed the man’s healing to his faith in Christ’s name (Acts 3:16). In a ringing affirmation of the centrality of Christ’s name, Peter announced: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). To invoke the name of one’s god is to invoke the power of that god. This is equally true concerning the God of the Bible.

When we are adopted into the family of God (John 1:12), we take on God’s family name, just as Israel was referred to by God as His son (Ex. 4:22). We are called by His name, even by the world. It was at Antioch, a pagan city, that the word “Christians” was first applied to the disciples of Christ (Acts 11:26). God honors His own name. The adoption by God of the sinner, who bears the name of Satan before his adoption, transfers to him a new family name. The confrontation between Christ and the Pharisees in John 8 focused on the claim of the Pharisees to be the sons of Abraham. Christ challenged them defiantly: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). We should not mistake the nature of Jesus’ accusation: He was calling them spiritual bastards, and bastards had no place in the congregational worship of Israel (Deut. 23:2). Like father, like son: Here was Jesus’ challenge to His enemies. The Pharisees, Christ
Chapter 9 . . . Exodus 20:16

affirmed, were claiming the name of Abraham illegitimately, for they themselves were illegitimate sons.

Character and Reputation

It should not be difficult for a Christian to understand the reason for the inclusion of the prohibition against false witness in the summary of God’s law that is provided by the Ten Commandments. Bearing false witness against an individual is the same as bearing false witness against his family name. It is bearing false witness against the man’s historical position in the plan of God. It misrepresents God’s plan for the ages. It strikes at the key institution, the family, for it misrepresents the individual’s family name. For example, when a new husband brought the accusation of non-virginity against his bride, he had to prove it in court. If he could not prove it, he had to pay a fine of one hundred shekels of silver – an immense sum – to her father, “because he hath brought up an evil name upon a daughter of Israel” (Deut. 22:19). The father’s reputation could be harmed by the bad reputation of his daughter, and so could the reputation of the covenant nation of Israel. This reputation was protected by law from false accusations.

In a godly social order, a man’s name is one of his most valuable assets. When we speak of “a man’s name,” we really mean his reputation. His reputation as an honest person, or as a competent workman, or whatever his calling may be, must be protected by law. To impugn his name is to impugn his character. A man’s character, for good or evil, must be respected. This was recognized by Shakespeare.

Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash;
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'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robbs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.  

The preservation of a man’s reputation is not a matter of being polite. Christ was hardly being polite to the Pharisees when he called them sons of someone other than Abraham, namely, the bastard sons of Satan. In fact, it is one sign of a godly social order that men recognize churls for what they are, and the sign of an unjust social order when they are not called what they are. Thus, Isaiah pointed to this aspect of a future reign of justice: “The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail” (Isa. 32: 5–6). The American slang expression, “calling a spade a spade,” reflects this concern for honest witness. It includes calling the churl a churl. A man’s reputation is to be protected, including his reputation for evil, if he is still evil. Anything else lends itself to “confidence games” by “con men.” We are asked to have confidence in someone who does not deserve it. The con man steals from the unwary by means of a false reputation. He cultivates this false reputation, even as the Pharisees of Christ’s day cultivated a false reputation. The so-called “polite culture” is a culture that is not guided by the law regarding false witness.

We forget that names were descriptive in Bible times. “Abram,” for instance, means “exalted father.” “Abraham” means “father of nations” or “father of a multitude.” This naming process worked

5. Othello, III:3.
negatively as well. The evil man in Judges 9:26 is named Gaal (“Loathsome”) the son of Ebed (“the slave”). It is unlikely that his parents gave him this name at his birth. Perhaps Samuel (or whoever wrote Judges) gave him that name for theological reasons. A similar social phenomenon was found in twentieth-century China. Steven Mosher’s fine book on the rural Chinese points this out.

Another result of life-long encounters on village paths is an effortlessly acquired and altogether exhaustive fund of knowledge of each fellow denizen’s finances and possessions, history and hopes, strengths and weaknesses, allies and enemies. One sign of this intimate communal familiarity lies in the revealing nicknames which Chinese everywhere assign to one another, and which I found to be uncannily accurate appraisals of a person’s appearance and character. The best are truly inspired sobriquets. One brigade [Communist] Party secretary surnamed Wang is known to everyone in his village as Toad Wang, which is precisely the image evoked by his squat body and flat, powerful head, as well as by a distasteful deviousness he is known for. Then there is Cherrystone Shen, a tightfisted peddler whom, as many of his neighbors have discovered, it is next to impossible to get the best of in a deal. Some handles are obvious choices, like Big Head Yan for a man whose head is unusually large and dome-like, or Wine Rice Su for a villager who is well known for his habit of scooping only a finger of steamed rice into his bowl and then filling it up to the brim with rice liquor. Others ring unpleasantly, even cruelly, to Western ears, for instance the nickname of one Sandhead brigade official who has a severe speech impediment. He is called Cripple Mouth Lin. But when I asked Comrade Lin, as I carefully addressed him, if his seemingly disparaging appellation had ever made him angry or uncomfortable, he was perplexed. “Why should it have?” he answered mildly. “After all, my mouth is crip-

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6. I am indebted to James Jordan for these examples.
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pled.” As he well knew, his nickname carried no hint of taunt or blame, but was simply the public recognition of the obvious fact of an infirmity. More generally, these names stem from the down-to-earth unpretentiousness of Chinese life, where people are seen – and identified – as what they are.  

Name-Brand Identification

When we recognize the link between reputation and performance, and where the civil magistrate enforces this link by penalizing the false witness, we can understand the economic importance of brand names. Very early in man’s history, this link between name and workmanship was established. For example, the two craftsmen who helped supervise the construction of God’s tent, the Tabernacle, Aholiab (“a father’s tent”) and Bezaleel (“the shadow of God”), are mentioned repeatedly in Exodus 31–38 as master craftsmen. They had reputations for competence. God specially called Bezaleel, filling him with His own spirit – in wisdom, understanding, knowledge, “and in all manner of workmanship” – that he might perform this important task in Israel’s history (Ex. 31:1–5). Throughout the history of Israel, their names were associated with fine craftsmanship.

When a craftsman knows that people recognize his work, or at least his name, he has a direct economic incentive to maintain this tradition. It takes great skill and possibly many years of struggle in the competitive marketplace for a craftsman or a producer to develop positive name-identification among his potential clientele. People learn, over many years in some instances, that a particular individual produces quality products that can be relied upon to deliver long-term

service. It may take years for buyers to discover this about a man’s products, since it takes time to test them in actual use. Buyers invest time and effort and money in their search for bargains. Gathering and evaluating this information is expensive. Mistakes are easy to make. The “school of hard knocks” can be a high-tuition institution for slow learners. Thus, when a product line becomes recognized as a reliable, valuable one, the producer has an incentive not to tamper with quality, since he is now the recipient of consumer loyalty for his products. The recognition and acceptance given to his products by the buying public is an important capital asset. Like any capital asset, its value can plummet if the buyers begin to change their assessments. He has an incentive to keep them from changing their buying habits.

This is not to say that name-brand identification cannot be used for short-term gains at the expense of long-term gains. We are all familiar with this scenario: A firm that has developed a reputation for producing high quality goods is taken over by an outside company. The new managers decide to reduce costs by cutting the quality of inputs. The public may not initially recognize that quality debasement is going on. It takes time and experience to convince buyers that such a change in policy has been made by top management. They may conclude that their recent bad experience with a particular product is not representative of the product line in general, since the firm has such a respected name. They may not trust their own judgment. But eventually, buyers learn that the old reliability is no longer available. At that point, they may choose to switch loyalties, or remain buyers only by inducements such as price reductions by the seller. The firm can obtain short-term profits – an excess of revenues over costs – by reducing quality, but only by risking the loss of the positive name identification that the firm previously enjoyed. In other words, this sort of short-run profit comes through a form of capital depletion.
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Specialization and Marketing

In ancient history, a family that enjoyed economic surpluses (meaning an excess of production over actual expenditures or consumption) was in a position to seek buyers for its products or services. The family could begin to increase its output by specializing. Specialization increases the division of labor, and hence it increases output per unit of resource input. As the buying public began to differentiate one product or service from competing products or services, specialized sellers could begin to invest greater quantities of capital in the enterprise. These family businesses could be more confident of selling into a stable market, since product or service loyalty among buyers was beginning to develop. The high costs to consumers of shopping around, of searching for alternative product or service substitutes, make name-brand identification a convenient economic shorthand. This is as true today as it was in the ancient world.

As certain families, especially those engaged in craft production, found ways of differentiating their products from those of their competitors, they could convert this recognition in the marketplace into money or bartered goods. Perhaps a family head possessed a unique skill or special knowledge of marketing. Others may have become known for their sense of honor. These family traditions became capital assets. The family name became an early form of family capital. This was especially true among artists. With greater name identification, consumers found it less expensive to identify desirable products. This helped to extend market transactions, for consumers could make more purchases because of the savings that resulted from the better information to consumers as a result of name-brand identification.
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This analysis is a form of “hypothetical history.” We cannot find ancient family budget records that say, “Today, we saved 10% of our monthly budget because we reduced our search costs.” We know that certain craftsmen gained reputations for excellence. We then analyze this fact from the point of view of economics. We know that people want to reduce their costs of searching for bargains. We know that in the Hebrew commonwealth, the preservation of the family name was of paramount importance. Such a concern always has economic implications. We can conclude that buyers understood that producers would want to maintain their names’ good reputations. Thus, buyers could adopt the “short cut” of substituting the producer’s name for an involved testing of the product or an expensive search for information.

The wider the positive reputation of a seller, the wider is his market. When a product’s reputation is high, additional marketing expenditures may be reduced without reducing sales. This makes international trade less expensive, just as it makes domestic trade less expensive. In foreign trade, a reputation for quality counts for even more than it does in local trade, since foreigners may have great difficulty in returning a defective product to the producer for repair or a refund. The local buyer may find it relatively inexpensive to confront the seller directly, since his transportation costs are low. Foreigners, especially in the ancient world, were not the beneficiaries of many of the advantages that domestic buyers possess. They were not citizens of the country where the producer lived. In the ancient world, this made it almost impossible for foreign buyers to gain justice in another nation’s legal system, since foreigners had no legal rights, not being part of the civic religion. Thus, the reputation of the producer, or the importer-trader, was important in establishing foreign markets for the products of a nation’s citizens.

We can readily understand that a close relationship between moral-
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...it and the family name, between a sense of craftsmanship and the family name, or between both morality and craftsmanship and an identifying mark on the product, must have made it easier for a nation to gain an international reputation. Foreigners would learn of the high quality products produced by the citizens of some foreign culture. The reputation of that nation would be enhanced. This was true of Israel’s laws:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people (Deut. 4:5–6).^8

What is true of a law-order is also true for products. When consumers can more readily identify products that satisfy them, the efficiency of the market is greatly enhanced. The division of labor is limited by the extent of the market, Adam Smith wrote in Chapter 3 of Wealth of Nations (1776), and by increasing name-brand identification, producers thereby contribute to extending the market. Men become familiar with buying in the marketplace, which is important in the transition between a primitive society, with its low division of labor, to a modern society. Brand names transmit knowledge in an effective, rapid, and summary fashion, and knowledge is what the Bible commends again and again. Brands help consumers to economize on knowledge, which is the most important and valuable of all...

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Another neglected aspect of brand names is that a brand name makes possible scientific testing by independent research organizations. Brands establish an identifiable subclass of goods (a particular product line), which can then be compared scientifically by means of random selection from this and other competing products in that same class. The performance of a randomly selected product from an identifiable company can be compared with the performance of other randomly selected products that are produced by competitors. The results of these tests may be purchased by consumers. This helps consumers to make cost-effective decisions about which products to purchase.

If potential competitors were allowed to adopt identical identifying marks of successful products, including even the name of the competitor’s firm, the consumer would find his ability to make cost-effective choices dramatically reduced, and the successful producer would be robbed of a capital asset, namely, his position in the market as a recognizable seller of desirable, familiar products. The costs of knowledge would rise. The consumer would be poorer, because his knowledge of name-brand product lines, gathered over months or years of reading or comparing brands, would be wiped out. The

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protection of a name by the civil government is basic to the efficient functioning of a free market society.

The fusion of identifiable product lines with free pricing (open competition) made possible modern economic life. By speeding up consumers’ decision-making – by lowering the costs of making decisions, in other words – name-brand identification has increased per capita wealth. Consumers not only can make more rapid decisions about buying, as a result of their past experience, but advertising also reduces the time and trouble associated with bargaining. The wider the market for information, the narrower the zones of ignorance on the part of buyers and sellers. The buyer knows more concerning the comparative offers of other sellers, while the seller knows more about the offers of competing buyers. Well-publicized prices for specific brands therefore reduce the need for “hard bargaining” between the buyer and seller – bargaining that all too often involves lying, cheating, misrepresentation, and special advantages to one party in the transaction over the other (an advantage based on better knowledge concerning market alternatives). ¹⁰

Slander and Theft

The prohibition against bearing false witness is theocentric. Men are to give an honest account of God, God’s work, and God’s plan for

¹⁰ Hard bargaining is not innately evil, but it is fraught with ethical dangers. Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 18. By reducing the need for hard bargaining – itself essentially an exercise in competitive knowledge, buyer vs. seller (although force of will is also important) – the wide knowledge of economic alternatives conveyed by a free market pricing system helps reduce men’s temptations in economic affairs. Reducing the cost of knowledge reduces conflicts.
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history. The commandment requires men to adhere to the God-interpreted facts of history. The existence of this theocentric commandment against distorting the truth concerning God has created a unique property right: the right to a name. A man is entitled to his good name. Slander is therefore a form of theft. The civil government has an obligation to defend the right of an individual to use a particular name, both personal and corporate, both familial and institutional. The civil government must also defend that name against false witnesses. In doing so, the civil authorities thereby reduce consumers’ search costs, for the property right to a name, trademark, or other identifying mark encourages men to build up their capital by establishing good reputations for themselves. This helps to increase the sale of quality products, or price-competitive products, and it also reduces search costs for the consumers. Buyers can make decisions more effectively (less wastefully) because of the availability of brand names.

The prohibition against an evil report should remind us of the proclivity of rebellious men to listen to evil, false reports, and then to spread such reports to others. The spread of lies within a rebellious, envious culture is far easier (less costly) than the spread of the truth. Men who are in rebellion against God have a vested interest in falsehood about God (Rom. 1:18–22)\textsuperscript{11} and therefore also about their fellow man. There is greater demand for false rumors than there is for the truth. Men delight in twisting the revelation of God concerning Himself and His creation. There are too many volunteer agents (gossips), and the market for false rumors is wider and more easily accessible than the market for truth, with its greater precision and its comparative lack of rebellion-filled excitement. False rumors are like

mistresses: more exciting initially than wives, but more deadly. This is why Proverbs compares false knowledge with harlotry (Prov. 7:6–23), and compares wisdom with the honest woman crying in the streets, ignored by the inhabitants of the city (Prov. 1:20–33).

Because men are evil, the transmission of false reports against morally upright citizens is subsidized. This subsidy by the ungodly – their preference for falsehood – reduces the per capita wealth of a society, for decisions made in terms of false information are far less likely to produce beneficial results at the lowest possible costs.

Advertising

Advertising is not well understood by social commentators. There has been a great deal of criticism aimed at advertising in general and the advertising industry in particular. Many sorts of economic evils are laid at the door of advertising, especially the creation of new wants – wants that become “needs” in the minds of the masses. This is an odd criticism, coming as it does from educated people. What was the university, or the inventor’s laboratory, other than a means of creating hitherto unappreciated opportunities (“wants”) for those who had not previously considered them? How can we imagine the opera-

tion of the famed institution, “the marketplace of ideas,” apart from men’s quest for better arguments, more effective presentations, and improved communications? Advertising is grounded in the right of free speech. It is also grounded in the right to one’s name, which is a capital asset whose market value is enhanced by advertising.

**Property Rights in a Name**

Christian commentators have failed to recognize the biblical foundation of advertising. *All advertising rests on the commandment that prohibits false witness.* This commandment, as we have seen, establishes a situation analogous to *a property right in a man’s name.* This name can become a means of transmitting information to consumers. The name “Rembrandt” on a painting conveys certain information concerning the quality of the painting. The name “Coca-Cola” conveys information concerning the taste of a soft drink. When the company changed the drink’s formula and name to “New Coke” in 1985, it suffered immediate losses. It was pressured by consumers to reintroduce the discontinued drink within three months: “Classic Coke.”

Advertising’s critics object to any misuse of this property right. There are many failings of the advertising industry that are singled out. But are they really significant? Here are some of the typical complaints. “The industry creates unnecessary desires for consumer goods in the minds of the public.” (In other words, advertising does convey knowledge of opportunities or benefits that potential purchasers might otherwise have overlooked.) “The industry manipulates the buyers.” (The same way that these same advertising firms manipulate voters who elect politicians who will establish national policies, not just sell car wax. Should we therefore abolish free speech?) “Buyers are helpless to resist these manipulations.” (Just as the buyers must
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be helpless to decide for themselves the better political candidate. Should we therefore abolish free speech?) “The industry sells dreams, not reality, sizzle rather than steak.” (What else do national political party platforms sell except dreams, and how close to subsequent reality are the pre-election promises of politicians? Should we therefore abolish free speech?) “Advertising misleads buyers continually.” (Apparently, the competition of rival advertising presentations cannot offset such misleading information.) “Advertising reduces human freedom to act rationally.” (Multiple opportunities apparently are bad for human freedom.)

The reality of advertising is simple enough: As with any tool of motivation and communication, it can be misused, fraudulently used, tastelessly used, and illegally used. When a company promises something tangible (as distinguished from dreams and fantasies that no one believes logically), and then fails to deliver, the advertiser has violated the prohibition against false witness. He has promised that which cannot be delivered as promised. He has said that a particular brand offers a certain set of benefits, and it offers no such benefits. That is fraud, and it is illegal. Victims can sue in court. Prosecuting attorneys can bring charges in the name of the victims.

The point should be clear: Any property right, or human skill, or tool can be misused. What is more important is to decide who will have the right to use the tool or technique, under what circumstances, under what penalties, and most important of all, who will decide what is legitimate? No one has stated the problems more intelligently than Thomas Sowell: “The broad sweep of knowledge needed for decision making is brought to bear through various systems of coordination of the scattered fragmentary information possessed by individuals in organizations. . . . The most basic decision is who makes the decision, under what constraints, and subject to what feedback mechanisms. This is fundamentally different from the approach which seeks better decisions by replacing ‘the bad guys’ with ‘the good guys’ – that is,
by relying on differential rectitude and differential ingenuity rather than on a structure of incentives geared to the normal range of human propensities." 13 In other words, two issues – the carrot and the stick, and who has the authority to establish when to use the carrot or the stick – are far more important issues than the appointment of hoped-for moral giants to positions of high authority. How to coordinate knowledge? How to determine which facts are the economically relevant facts? How to devise an incentive system to encourage people to seek the proper facts and use this knowledge efficiently in order to satisfy consumer demand? These are the relevant questions.

Motivation

Advertising provides a means of communicating information in an effective, motivating way. Let me offer an example from my own business. When I first began publishing my bi-weekly economic newsletter, Remnant Review, I wrote a promotion letter that was mailed to a specially targeted audience that was familiar with my name and my previous economic work. I received sufficient subscription income to pay for the mailing, and even show a profit. This same letter was reprinted (at zero cost to me) in a local newspaper with a circulation of over 100,000 – 50 times larger than the select group I mailed to originally. Total response: zero. Name-identification made much of the difference. 14 Because some people knew who I was, they


14. Another difference: People do not expect to be asked to buy something when they read what appears to be an information article. They read ads in order to be sold. Thus, the mental switch from “information mode” to “buying mode” is not automatic. It is an expensive switch to make, unless the ad has been specifically designed to activate this switching process.
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were willing to risk their money and subscribe. I communicated in an effective way to one group, but not to the other. *Motivation and name-identification are closely linked.*

What about pictures of rugged cowboys (one might say “worn-out cowboys”) that sell cigarettes? Marlboro used “Marlboro Man” (1955–62) and then “Marlboro Country” (western theme: 1963–) ads for five decades to gain and retain a large share of the world’s cigarette market. Consider what went before. From the late nineteenth century until 1954, Marlboro catered to women. In 1954, the cigarette featured a red filter tip. The company dropped this marketing strategy in 1954. The second approach, begun in 1955, was a resounding success. By 1971, the Marlboro brand was number-one in the world, up from 1% in the United States in 1954. Was either advertising approach innately immoral (setting aside the question of whether cigarettes as such are somehow immoral)? Has the public been misled in the latter case, but not in the former? Or are buyers somehow pleased to smoke “he-man” cigarettes rather than “she-woman” cigarettes? They were unwilling to buy red filter tipped cigarettes that attempted to sell to women. But did red filter tips convey “true” information about femininity? Was the early Marlboro cigarette more a women’s cigarette than a man’s? Or were the advertisers simply trying to position the cigarette in the market by a subtle (or not too subtle) appeal to the buyers’ imaginations?

Is it wrong to give a consumer a sense of belonging to a “special breed” of men, even when nobody believes it? Why do buyers return, year after year, to the companies that offer them illusions – harmless illusions in themselves – that buyers respond to? What possible benefit would the consumer or the seller derive from an endless series of

15. Two of the Marlboro Country models, who really were cowboys, died of lung cancer in the early 1990’s. [http://www.snopes.com/radiotv/tv/marlboro.htm](http://www.snopes.com/radiotv/tv/marlboro.htm)
ads that announce: “This product is basically the same as all the others, but we want you to buy ours, since we like our present employment opportunities”? How exciting would that be, even though most of us know that such a disclaimer is essentially true, and that free market competition keeps most of the products within any given price range basically comparable (though not identical)?

This point cannot be avoided in marketing: The competitive structure that provides incentives for one company to improve a product, and for others to follow this lead, is heavily dependent on advertising to create the desire to buy in the minds of the readers or viewers. The advertising system, so widely criticized, is itself one foundation of the competitive system that makes “miracles” available to the public at competitive prices. The “evils of advertising,” meaning effective, motivating advertising, are absolutely fundamental to free market sales. The voluntarism that lies at the heart of the market makes necessary the conveying of information concerning new opportunities in effective packaging. Sellers cannot force buyers to buy.\(^\text{16}\)

Write a newspaper column about a new book, unless it is a book review in a major publication that caters to the book-buying public, and few sales will result. Design an ad written around an extract from this review, and run the ad in the same newspaper or magazine in which the review originally ran, and sales could be considerable. Why the difference? Critics of advertising ignore the obvious: People read ads with minds open to motivation. They seldom read newspaper columns in such a way.

\(^{16}\) The ability of consumers to resist the persuasion of advertisers is admired by Galbraith; “The power to influence the individual consumer is not, of course, plenary. It operates within limits of cost. . . . That the power to manage the individual consumer is imperfect must be emphasized.” Galbraith, Economics and the Public Purpose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 138. The title of the chapter, however, tells the story: “Persuasion and Power.”
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Then there is the filtering process of the mind. People unconsciously screen out vastly more data than they notice, let alone absorb, or even less often, act upon. Habit screens out new opportunities. So do many other mental processes that we do not understand yet. Some way to “punch through” the mental veil of indifference must be found. This is what advertising is all about. It is not economically sufficient merely to inform people concerning opportunities; advertising must motivate them to act. We are not hypothetical Greek rationalists, who always do the right thing whenever we have sufficient knowledge. We are not saved by knowledge, nor are we exclusively (or even mainly) motivated by sheer intellectual awareness. We are motivated by other aspects of human personality: fear, greed, joy, hope, love, humor, imagination, respect, and the desire to be the first person on the block to own one. We are motivated by altruism, too, but you will receive far more donations to “save the children” if you include a picture of a waif and include a brief description of the waif’s plight. People respond to real-life situations or perceived real-life situations. They respond to emotions, to empathy, to the concrete – not to the abstract. They are not so ready to respond to statistical summaries of disaster-laden foreign nations. They want stories and photographs.

The Bible is the model of effective persuasion. It is not a book of systematic theology. It is a book of stories and practical letters. We read Bible stories to our children. Catechisms are extensions of these stories. The stories of Cain and Abel, Moses and Pharaoh, David and Goliath: These are God’s tools of persuasion.

The Non-Primacy of the Intellect

A favorite myth of intellectuals, the primacy of the intellect, is
seldom taken seriously by advertisers, because advertisers know that human beings are multifaceted creatures, not just austere, pristine intellects. If you want to help the real-life victims of disasters, and you need money to do this, then you had better be prepared to abandon the doctrine of the primacy of the intellect. You must use advertising techniques that have been successful in selling soap, as well as selling political candidates, if you want to communicate your program to the over-saturated, numbed potential donor. Jerry Huntsinger, one of the most successful direct-mail fund-raisers in the world, says that once the recipient opens the envelope (and it is not easy to get him to open it), he will put it down or throw it away if you have not caught his interest within five seconds. This brief attention span is the statistical reality of direct-mail fund-raising appeals, and no repetitive chanting of the primacy of the intellect can overcome this discovery of the intellect, namely, the statistical results of direct-mail appeals for funds.

Thus, to judge the legitimacy of advertising strictly in terms of the myth of the primacy of the intellect, is to misjudge the validity of advertising. If some statistically significant (meaning revenue-generating) portion of the buying public is responding to a “manipulative” advertising campaign, the proper response is not to call the State in to ban the campaign, but rather to allow the predictable free-market response, namely, for other sellers to enter the market with a similar “manipulative” campaign. Just as the answer to a “manipulative” prosecuting attorney’s presentation is an equally “manipulative” defense attorney’s presentation, so the answer for “manipulative” advertising is open entry to a competing advertising campaign. The important issue is not the presence of supposedly manipulative elements in advertising, but rather the open entry of competitors into the marketplace. The only known alternative is a statist nightmare of regulatory activities by entrenched, monopolistic bureaucrats. This price is too
Behavioral Economics

Economists are great believers in the final authority of the intellect. The economist’s conception of the model known as economic man, the rational calculator, is at the heart of modern economics. Yet that model is beginning to unravel. When the first edition of this book appeared, that was not true, but in the 1990’s, the model began to be challenged by a new school of thought within the profession, called behavioral economics.

Psychologists at long last began to penetrate the thinking of a handful of economists. They began to conduct experiments that undermined a few economists’ confidence in men’s commitment to their own rational self-interest. Here, I must invoke the only known law of sociology: “Some do. Some don’t.” Economists disagree with psychologists, who reciprocate. Also, members of each group do not agree with members of their group. But, as of 2006, some psychologists argue that the brain is divided into the limbic and paralimbic systems, which deal with emotions, and the analytic system, which is centered in the frontal and parietal cortexes. The analytic system handles the rules of whatever environment a person finds himself in. It is future-oriented and rules-oriented. The limbic system is present-oriented. In other words, here is scientific physiological evidence of the ancient rational-irrational dualism.

There are experiments by psychologists that do point to physiological causes of this dualism. Certain decisions are accompanied by brain activity that can be monitored through brain scanning techniques, such as magnetic resonance imagining (MRI). Research sub-
jects are offered a choice: $20 now or $23 in a month. Some will take $20 now. Limbic system activity is visible on-screen. But if the choice is between $20 in two weeks and $23 in a month, hardly anyone chooses $20. The limbic system ceases to influence the decision, since both choices are in the future. Those experiments that are economics-oriented have led to a branch of economics called neuroeconomics.¹⁷

Economists are now discovering that such emotions as vengeance, envy, and the fear of betrayal influence decision-making. In repeated experiments, one of two players is given money to divide between both players. Player A makes an offer to divide the money. If player B accepts the offer, each player gets what he has agreed to. If player B rejects the offer, neither player gets any money. In thousands of trials, with different stakes, the results are predictable: Player B will reject any offer lower than 30%. The A players sense this, and so they usually offer 40% to 50%. Here is the kicker. If player B believes that a computer has made the offer, he is likely to accept less than 30%.¹⁸ Yet traditional economic theory says that a rational person will accept anything rather than receive nothing. “You can’t beat something with nothing.” Yet where envy or resentment at being offered an “unfair” offer is concerned, people do prefer nothing to something. This is real-world economics. This is acting man, not economic man.

Behavioral economists have discovered that the ways in which offers are presented, not simply the net economic return, influence people’s choices. They are just beginning to accept the reality that advertisers have known for a century: People respond to emotion. A South African bank ran tests of a series of offers to previous borrowers. The bank offered lower-interest loans. But the bank tested to

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see what motivated borrowers. It found that by including a photo of a bank employee in the offer, more people took out a loan, even at a rate of interest higher than that offered to people whose offer did not include a photo. If the photo was of a woman, men were willing to borrow at five percentage points higher. This information has stunned economists. 19 It did not stun me. I have written too many direct-response ads.

One of the major economists in the field of behavioral economics is Harvard University’s Sendhil Mullainathan. He comments on what advertisers and Austrian School economists have always known.

We tend to think people are driven by purposeful choices. We think big things drive big behaviors: if people don’t go to school, we think they don’t like school. Instead, most behaviors are driven by the moment. They aren’t purposeful, thought-out choices. That’s an illusion we have about others. Policymakers think that if they get the abstractions right, that will drive behavior in the desired direction. But the world happens in real time. We can talk abstractions of risk and return, but when the person is physically checking off the box on that investment form, all the things going on at that moment will disproportionately influence the decision they make. That’s the temptation element – in real time, the moment can be very tempting. The main thing is to define what is in your mind at the moment of choice. 20

He defines “purposeful” as “thought-out choices.” He still has not escaped from the mythology of the primacy of the intellect. His economic analysis has not incorporated purpose as non-financial. His economic theory is only beginning to comprehend man as a decision-

19. Ibid., p. 57.
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maker who is not an analytical calculator devoid of emotion and sin.

He and his colleague Andrei Shleifer have written a detailed study of financial advertising. They discovered that the ads paralleled the state of the stock market. The advertisers did not try to educate investors; they designed their ads to match the present opinions of the targeted audience. Any advertiser could have told the professors that no one can afford to finance an ad campaign that runs counter to the targeted audience’s beliefs.

The two economists recognize that persuasion and rhetoric are linked. They admit in the abstract of their article: “Persuasion is a fundamental part of social activity, yet it is rarely studied by economists.” The traditional theoretical model discusses advertising as the presentation of objectively verifiable information. The behavioral model sees persuasion as matching the audience’s existing beliefs. Rhetoric is central, meaning symbolism and emotion. Economists have not grasped what I recognized in 1992: The tripartite biblical hermeneutic of grammatical-historical, theological, and symbolical corresponds to the medieval trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. These three factors are at the heart of the direct-response advertising industry. An ad must have a powerful offer that appeals to the buyer’s self-interest: grammar. It must offer proof: logic. It must appeal to the emotions: rhetoric. To understand mankind, we must move beyond the myth of the primacy of the intellect.


22. Dorothy Sayers’ article, “The Lost Tools of Learning” (1947), called for a restoration of the trivium, which she argued corresponds to a child’s mental development: childhood, puberty, and early adulthood. Few people know that she was a professional advertiser, not just a writer of mystery novels.
Imputation and Value

To name something is to define it. To define it is to impute meaning to it, to assess its relevance and role in a larger scheme of things. To impute meaning is to evaluate something objectively external in terms of coherent, internally self-consistent objective standards. There must be an objective relationship between historical events and fixed ethical or value-based standards. There must also be a way to discover and then assess this relationship. This is the meaning of imputation. The entire process of imputation is inherently subjective. A person does the naming-assessing-imputing.

Modern economic theory rests self-consciously on the concept of imputed value. This was not always the case. Following Adam Smith, classical economists explained the relationship between value and price in terms of objective value, either a labor theory of value or a cost-of-production theory of value. Adam Smith taught both, although both cannot be true. We can call this the realist concept of value. Value is explained in terms of something real that goes into a product. The theory could not explain the value of a waterfall. The theory left out all of nature, which is God’s creation. Has nature no value? The Physiocrats, contemporaries of Smith, explained value in terms of land. Then what of man’s labor? Is it worth nothing?

In contrast to the realists were the nominalists – as always in human philosophy. Three men offered a subjective theory of value, independently and at the same time (1871–73): William Stanley Jevons of England, Carl Menger of Austria, and Léon Walras of Switzerland. They argued that men subjectively impute value to consumer goods. Men’s competitive bidding against one another establishes objective prices. Thus, the basis of economic value is subjective. The basis of price is supply and demand. Value and price are related by the process of imputation.
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The practical problem for subjective value theory was not recognized until the 1930’s. If value is completely subjective, then there is no objective standard – no measure – that applies to all mankind. There is no scientific way to compare one person’s value scale with another person’s. There is no way for economists, as scientists, to make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. This implication of subjective value theory was first developed by Lionel Robbins, who had been greatly influenced by Ludwig von Mises, who in turn was an Austrian economist in the tradition of Menger. Robbins came up with this argument in response to the argument by A. C. Pigou that a case can be made for the graduated income tax on this basis: The value of an extra unit of income is less for a millionaire than for a poor person. There is a gain in total social utility when the State takes away a large portion of rich man’s money and gives it to poor people. This concept is the foundation of welfare economics, which Pigou had pioneered. Robbins argued in 1932 that this argument has no epistemological validity. There is no way to measure objectively the value of a unit of income for anyone, let alone cross comparisons among people.23 Had Robbins chosen to extend this idea, he could have challenged the very concept of an objective unit of income. If a dollar is the unit of income, its subjective value to an individual is not objectively measurable, because each penny’s worth of value is subjective, and it is slightly though immeasurably less valuable than the previous penny’s worth. And so on, ad infinitum.

To counter Robbins, Roy Harrod, editor of The Economic Journal, argued that if Robbins’ theory were true, then it would be scientifically impossible for economists to defend or criticize any economic policy in terms of its expected or retrospective social benefits

and costs. It would impossible to make scientifically valid cost-benefit analyses. This would destroy the entire field of applied economics, Harrod said. Robbins admitted in 1938 that Harrod was correct, yet he also affirmed his own faith in the possibility of rendering sound advice to the government. This was a complete retreat from his original opinion. Although he lived for decades after this exchange, he never explained why this retreat is epistemologically valid in terms of subjective value theory. He also did not explain why Pigou’s argument is incorrect, given his retreat. On the other hand, Harrod did not explain how his view of the “economist as advisor” can be defended scientifically if subjective value theory is true, which all schools of economic theory except for Marxism affirm is true. Most economists remain unaware of this problem. They do not propose a resolution.  

This debate within the guild of the economists is merely the application of the realist-nominalist antinomy in all human thought, a radical and (so far) unreconciled contradiction. Reason, which is said by philosophers to be common to mankind, has not yet led philosophers to discover some universal and logically undeniable common epistemological ground between the sadist and his victim. There is no way to measure – to evaluate scientifically – the quantity of pleasure. So, there is no way to ascertain the quantity of pleasure received by a person who gets pleasure by inflicting pain on someone else, compared to the quantity of displeasure of the victim who has this pain inflicted on him. This being the case, is the civil government therefore logically incapable of defending laws against sadism and violence? Scientifically, the answer is yes, if we define science in terms of nominalism, i.e., autonomous men’s individual understanding of

the truth. There is no way to explain how autonomous individuals who disagree over these elusive first principles can draw accurate conclusions about the wisdom or illegitimacy of any social policy.

On the other hand, if we turn to realism as the basis of a solution to the philosophical problem of corporate incoherence because of individual autonomy, we find that there is no rational way to explain how individuals can discover the objective ethical or utilitarian principles by which the measurement or evaluation of any corporate policy can be made. These objective principles are said to exist, but what is missing is the metaphysical connection between them and the world of flux. What is also missing is a universal methodology for ascertaining these fixed principles.

This is why philosophers, social philosophers, and political philosophers have debated endlessly over the problem of the one and the many. So far, neither the ontological nor the epistemological existence of the corporate one has been reconciled with either the ontological or epistemological existence of the autonomous many. Cornelius Van Til spent his career arguing that no reconciliation is possible, given the assumption of each person’s autonomy from God.

Covenantalism: The Biblical Solution

The biblical solution to this continuing epistemological impasse is theocentric: the ability of a Trinitarian God to impute value to His creation subjectively, an imputation based on His objective handiwork as the Creator and providential Sustainer of the creation. There is no confusion for God. There are no gaps in His understanding. His

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evaluation is both authoritative and comprehensive.

Christian economic theory solves the antinomy of objective value (realism) and subjective value (nominalism) by affirming covenantalism. A totally sovereign God (point one) created the world out of nothing (point two) and then placed it under law (point three). He then assessed the value of His work (point four). He has sustained the universe providentially (point five).

Man is made in the image of God. God delegates (point two) limited sovereignty to man as a steward over the creation. The individual therefore can make judgments by subjectively applying (point four) God’s objective value scale (point three) to the objective affairs of men, including economics. Because the work of the law is written on all men’s hearts (Rom. 2:14–15), men can make accurate preliminary evaluations of social utility.26

Value is both individualistic and subjective. Men act in terms of their own value scales and preferences. Their actions are objective. God can and will evaluate these actions in terms of His own standards. “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:35–37).

Ethical decision-making necessarily begins within a framework of individual responsibility before God. Jesus said that which is defiling in life is that which is subjective and internal, not that which is objective and external. “And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in

her penury hath cast in all the living that she had” (Luke 21:1–4).28
What God can do *originally*, men who are made in His image can do *subordinately*. God holds each person responsible for evaluating the world in terms of what He has revealed to men objectively in His Word, the Bible, and also what He has revealed to them subjectively in their hearts. God also holds entire societies responsible. There is corporate responsibility as well as individual responsibility, which was the message of the prophets and Jesus. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” (Luke 13:34).

Apart from the doctrines of the Trinity (one/many) and the doctrine of man as the image of God, the antinomy between the one and the many will persist. The imputation of value is based on objective standards of evaluation: the law of God, which is both objective (*spoken by God*) and subjective (*spoken by God*). God’s law can and does correspond to objective reality, yet it is perceived subjectively. There is objective value, yet it is perceived subjectively. This applies to social theory in general and economic theory in particular. The Bible teaches *methodological covenantalism*, not methodological individualism (the many) or methodological holism (the one). *Covenantalism is the Bible’s alternative to both realism and nominalism.*

For post-1870 humanistic economic theory, the doctrine of individual subjective imputation is epistemologically central. Christian economics moves the epistemological center to creation. The Creator imputes value subjectively according to His objective law and His objective handiwork. He created the universe day by day, and then imputed value to what He had accomplished at the end of each day. Then He evaluated all that He had done at the end of the sixth day.
“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Gen. 1:31). Men must do the same in their covenantal-judicial capacity as responsible agents of God. Men impute value because God imputes value. Men impute subjectively because God imputes subjectively. Men also impute objectively because God’s handiwork is objective. This is the reconciliation of objective and subjective value theory. It is grounded in the activities of God.

Conclusion

The free market social order is the product historically of Christian preaching and Christian institutions. By fostering respect for the family name, Christianity reaffirmed the Hebrew tradition of respect for truth. This created an atmosphere highly favorable to advertising, because *producers are permitted to capture the capital value of a good reputation*. Advertising in turn extended information to a much wider market. The costs of decision-making dropped, the market expanded, and the division of labor increased, thereby lowering the costs of production.

*Information costs are inescapable.* Men are not omniscient. The Bible warns men against the sin of presumption, the sin of seeking to be God. A godly society recognizes that information is not a free (gratuitous) good. It recognizes the need for establishing institutions that enhance the spread of *accurate, motivating, and self-correcting knowledge*. The West overcame this cost barrier more effectively than any society in history, because the West honored the laws protecting property, including the property right in one’s name or company mark. The transmission of more accurate information through advertising, independent testing, and brand-name recognition has created
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the modern marketplace, with its relative lack of “hard bargaining” between buyers and sellers.

The free market transfers the competitive bargaining process to a far more fair and beneficial system: buyers vs. buyers, and sellers vs. sellers. The better the participants’ knowledge of market alternatives, the less benefit one bargainer (buyer or seller) has over the other (seller or buyer). Better information protects the weaker party in any economic exchange. The face-to-face hard bargaining that characterizes the Middle Eastern bazaar or other trading areas takes too much time to conduct transactions, and it puts too great a premium on monopolistic psychological manipulation. The average buyer or seller is protected by a broadly based (“impersonal”) free market, with its highly developed systems for transmitting accurate knowledge concerning available economic alternatives.

A man’s reputation must be protected, for good or evil, whether in a court of law or in the court of public opinion. Whether he is righteous or evil, efficient or incompetent, his reputation should reflect his true condition.

The jury, the church, and the free market are all institutions that render judgment. They are required by God to render righteous, accurate judgment. Rendering judgment is basic to the ninth commandment, and parallels the fourth commandment’s sabbatical day of judgment by God. Evil men seek continuity not by establishing a righteous family name but instead by means of crime and false testimony. The result is a lack of rest for any society which refuses to judge men by God’s standard. Where there is no true judgment, there can be no rest – none for the wicked, but more to the point, none for the societies that refuse to punish the wicked.

29. On the proper and improper use of the word “impersonal” as it relates to the operations of the free market, see North, Dominion Covenant, pp. 9–11.
COVETOUSNESS AND CONFLICT

Thou shall not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour’s (Ex. 20:17).

The theocentric issue of this law is God’s ownership of the creation and His lawful delegation of ownership to individuals and organizations. As the cosmic Owner, He establishes the terms governing ownership. This is one of them.

As the tenth commandment, it is the fifth in the second pair of classifications of the Ten Commandments: kingly mode. It therefore has to do with inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant model. Any undermining of a man’s capital base threatens the inheritance of his heirs. A successful theft of any part of this inheritance reduces the effect of compounding over time. Theft is a way for covenant-breakers to thwart the effect of the inter-generational expansion of capital under the authority of covenant-keepers. It is an attack on this principle: “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).

The sanctions of point four of the biblical covenant model are translated into kingdom results through inheritance. So, in the battle in history between the two kingdoms, the compounding of a covenant-keeper’s capital base is a means of dominion for God’s kingdom. Any attempt to thwart this expansion should be regarded as hindering God’s kingdom for the sake of Satan’s kingdom.

Covetousness as Uncontrolled Lusting

Covetousness, biblically speaking, refers to an illicit craving of another person’s possession, including his station in life. It can also involve the actual theft of someone else’s property, either by force or by fraud. Achen, a thief who stole what belonged to God’s temple, explained his actions.

When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it (Joshua 7:21).

The prophet Micah explained why God was angry at Israel.

And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage (Micah 2:2).

There is a problem in dealing with the biblical concept of covetousness. The tenth commandment groups together several forms of coveted property: a neighbor’s wife, manservant, maidservant, and work animals. The problem here is trade. Why would men come together and trade if they were not desirous of purchasing each other’s goods? Not every exchange is preceded by an announcement, “goods for sale.” Sometimes men see an item that belongs to another, and they approach the potential seller to offer an exchange. Obviously, when men accept someone’s offer to buy, they are acknowledging that they prefer to own the goods being offered by someone else. They were not committed to permanent ownership of their goods.
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The sale of a wife is obviously illegal. A man is not permitted by God to lust after another man’s wife. No exchange here is legitimate. But why should the same prohibition restrict the exchange of, say, gold for work animals? Why should it be immoral to offer to buy the services of work animals on a permanent basis? True, the manservant or maidservant may be permanently associated with a particular family. The permanent slave in the Old Testament voluntarily decided to undergo the pierced ear ritual (the shedding of blood) in order to become part of a family (Deut. 15:16–17). He was unsalable. But other servants could be sold. Why, then, the prohibition against coveting these others? Bargains are made constantly, including the sale of Esau’s birthright, which Jacob unquestionably desired.

So, what sense can we make of the commandment? A passage in Micah throws light on the usage of the Hebrew word for coveting. Covetousness involves uncontrolled lusting, a desire that can be satisfied only by possessing the other man’s property. It is the kind of lusting that is involved in adultery, where the desire cannot legitimately be fulfilled, yet it persists. It is a desire that results in lawlessness when it is not thwarted, a desire that will not take “no” for an answer. “Woe unto them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage” (Mic. 2:1–2). It is the kind of desire that resulted in Ahab’s unlawful confiscation of Naboth’s


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vineyard (I Ki. 21). The man with power uses that power, despite the protection given to the original owner by the biblical laws regarding property.

The prohibition against covetousness therefore does not deal primarily with envy, meaning envy in the sense of resentment against the success of others. The covetous person really is intent upon obtaining the other man’s property. Covetousness, in the biblical view, is an illicit form of jealousy. The attack against the other man’s property is not motivated by a desire only to tear down his property, but to confiscate it.

The covetous person resents his own station in life. Someone else possesses what he wants. He is dissatisfied with the role he is playing in God’s plan. Paul condemns this resentment against one’s station in life (I Cor. 7:21–22). One person desires another’s good looks, prestige, or worldly possessions. He feels thwarted by his own limitations, and therefore thwarted by his environment. God has thwarted his personal development, the covetous man is asserting. The Bible teaches that the other person is working out his salvation (Phil. 2:2) or damnation before God. His property must be respected. Nevertheless, the covetous man thinks that he can appropriate for himself the fruits of the other man’s labor, as if those fruits were unrelated to that man’s personal responsibility before God as a steward.

Downward Social Mobility

Another aspect of this jealousy is overlooked by most commenta-

tors. Covetousness can also be directed downward, toward those who have fewer goods and therefore fewer responsibilities. This can be seen in the social phenomenon known as the drop-out mentality. In the late 1960’s, for example, the sons and daughters of the middle classes and the wealthy were on the road, all over the Western world. They hitchhiked, as if they were poor. They adopted the dress codes of poor people, wearing the faded blue denim jeans of field hands. They would even bleach their new, dark blue jeans, to give them an instant fade. Blue jeans became so associated with Western culture that they commanded a high price – a black market price – in Iron Curtain nations, especially the Soviet Union. Young people adopted the life style of nomads – unwashed drifters who refuse to face the responsibilities of dominion. Those with wealth and responsible callings became “primitive,” in an attempt to escape the burdens associated with economic stewardship. They wanted others to take the risks and bear the responsibilities.

The Bible prohibits men from escaping lawful callings, unless they are upgrading their responsibilities. A slave is authorized to take his freedom, if and when it is voluntarily offered by his master, either free of charge or by sale (I Cor. 7:21). The idea is to extend God’s rule into every area of life, and men are not to turn their backs on this task simply because a particular calling looks as though it would involve too much responsibility. It is important for each person to evaluate his own capabilities accurately, and then to match these

5. The original blue jeans were sold by the Levi Strauss Company during the gold rush days in California in the 1850’s. Hence the almost generic name, “Levis.” The pants were marketed as being especially durable, a desirable feature in the opinion of gold miners.

6. The 1970’s brought a fusion of symbols: “designer” jeans. These were blue denim jeans that bore the name of famous rich people or famous designers, and brought three or four times the price of a pair of normal blue jeans.
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Capabilities with his calling before God – his highest, most productive calling. God calls men to be imitators of His son, Jesus Christ, to conform themselves to Christ’s image (I Cor. 15:49). They are to work out the salvation that God gives them, and they are to do this with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). This kind of steady improvement involves upward mobility: spiritual improvement above all, but also economic and social mobility. The individual may not see himself advancing economically, but over generations, the spiritual heirs of a man will advance economically. The wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just (Prov. 13:22). Upward mobility must be in terms of God’s calling – service to God – and not simply in terms of amassing wealth (I Tim. 6:6–10). We are to imitate godly examples (I Cor. 11:1), but we are not to worry about “keeping up with the Joneses” in a purely material sense.

**Political Covetousness**

The commandment against covetousness refers to an individual who looks longingly at his neighbor’s property. The beginning of covetousness is clearly the human heart (James 3:14–16). Men want goods that they have neither earned nor inherited. Their relationships with their neighbors cannot possibly be in conformity to God’s law when such feelings are present in their hearts. The fact that one man possesses goods that are confiscatable in the eyes of his neighbor will disrupt their relationship. The possessor will be seen by the covetous

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man as an illegitimate owner, someone who has no right, under God, to maintain control over his possessions.

The commandment has implications beyond the local neighborhood. *When covetousness becomes widespread, the next step is political coercion.* The very usage of the words, “to covet,” implies violence. The covetous man will not limit his attempt to gain control of another man’s property to an offer to purchase. Like Ahab, who was determined to gain control of Naboth’s vineyard when Naboth refused to sell, the covetous man seeks to coerce his neighbor. When this cannot be done with the connivance of the police – outright oppression or theft – then he seeks to gain control of the civil government. Covetous men can join forces and encourage the civil government to adopt policies of wealth redistribution. The *monopoly of legal violence* that is possessed by the civil government can then be turned against property owners. Those within the civil government can gain control over people’s assets. They can then use them personally, or inside a government bureau, or distribute them to political special-interest groups. Political covetousness is a manifestation of *unrestrained desire* and the *threat of violence.* When the civil government becomes an instrument of covetousness, its monopoly of violence increases the danger of theft. A new commandment is adopted: “Thou shalt not covet, except by majority vote.” What private citizen can effectively defend his property against unjust magistrates? Naboth died in his attempt to keep that which was his by law – God’s law.

The misuse of the civil government in this way is doubly evil. First, it violates the principle of responsible stewardship. Second, it misuses the office of magistrate. *The spread of covetousness cannot be restrained by the magistrate when the structure of civil government is deeply influenced by political covetousness.* The old warning against putting the foxes in charge of the chicken coop is accurate. When the State becomes the agent of widespread covetousness, the
whole society is threatened. Waves of power struggles ensue, for each special-interest group recognizes that it must gain control of the primary agency of wealth redistribution. The more power that is offered to the controllers by means of statist coercive mechanisms, the more ferocious is the struggle to gain access to the seats of power. Central planning rewards ruthlessness. F. A. Hayek has spoken plainly concerning the awful implications of unlimited State power: *The worst get on top*. These two paragraphs are among the most important in the history of political theory. He describes the motivation of those who implement socialist central economic planning.

But while for the mass of the citizens of the totalitarian state it is often unselfish devotion to an ideal, although one that is repellent to us, which makes them approve and even perform such deeds, this cannot be pleaded for those who guide its policy. To be a useful assistant in the running of a totalitarian state, it is not enough that a man should be prepared to accept specious justification of vile deeds; he must himself be prepared actively to break every moral rule he has ever known if this seems necessary to achieve the end set for him. Since it is the supreme leader who alone determines the ends, his instruments must have no moral convictions of their own. They must, above all, be unreservedly committed to the person of the leader; but next to this the most important thing is that they should be completely unprincipled and literally capable of everything. They must have no ideals of their own which they want to realize; no ideas about right or wrong which might interfere with the intentions of the leader. There is thus in the positions of power little to attract those who hold moral beliefs of the kind which in the past have guided the European peoples, little which could compensate for the distastefulness of many of the particular tasks, and little opportunity to gratify any more idealistic desires, to recompense for the undeniable risk, the sacrifice of most of the pleasures of private life and of personal
independence which the posts of great responsibility involve. The only tastes which are satisfied are the taste for power as such and the pleasure of being obeyed and of being part of a well-functioning and immensely powerful machine to which everything else must give way.

Yet while there is little that is likely to induce men who are good by our standards to aspire to leading positions in the totalitarian machine, and much to deter them, there will be special opportunities for the ruthless and unscrupulous. There will be jobs to be done about the badness of which taken by themselves nobody has any doubt, but which have to be executed with the same expertness and efficiency as any others. And as there will be need for actions which are bad in themselves, and which all those still influenced by traditional morals will be reluctant to perform, the readiness to do bad things becomes a part to promotion and power. The positions in a totalitarian society in which it is necessary to practice cruelty and intimidation, deliberate deception and spying, are numerous. Neither the Gestapo nor the administration of a concentration camp, neither the Ministry of Propaganda nor the S.A. or S.S. (or their Italian or Russian counterparts), are suitable places for the exercise of humanitarian feelings. Yet it is through positions like these that the road to the highest positions in the totalitarian state leads.⁹

Hayek’s book was intended to demonstrate how totalitarian societies develop out of the attempt by socialist planners to mold the economy into a centrally directed framework. He argued that in socialist theory, nothing must deviate from the central economic plan, since human freedom will thwart any such plan. Thus, the power to redistribute wealth in accordance to some preconceived central plan

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eventually destroys human freedom and therefore thwarts personal responsibility to act as a steward under God. Covetousness, when legislated, becomes a major foundation of totalitarianism.

Hayek’s little book evoked outraged cries of “foul!” from statist intellectuals when it first appeared in 1944. Herbert Finer’s *Road to Reaction* (1948) is perhaps the best example. But, year by year, decade by decade, *The Road to Serfdom* has grown in stature, until it is now considered a classic. It stays in print. From the beginning, it served as the financial backbone of the University of Chicago Press’ paperback division. In contrast, almost no one remembers Herbert Finer. In the mid-1980’s, four decades after the *Road to Serfdom* appeared, and a decade after Hayek won the Nobel Prize in economics, academic opinion leaders began to catch up with the wisdom of the average book buyer, who made *Road to Serfdom* a best-seller in 1944. (It even appeared in the *Reader’s Digest* in 1945 as a condensed book.) After the fall of the Soviet Union (1991), Hayek’s position became part of the conventional wisdom. He died in 1992.

**Beyond the Tithe**

The civil government is to be restrained by biblical law. The warning of Samuel against the establishment of a human kingship stands as a classic statement of what earthly kingdoms involve. The king will draft sons to serve in his armed forces. He will conscript daughters to serve as cooks and confectioners. He will confiscate the best agricultural land. He will impose a tithe on the flocks. In short, the king will collect a tithe for himself (I Sam. 8:11–19). The Hebrew State, Samuel promised, will be such a burden on them that they will

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10. By then, they both taught at the University of Chicago.
cry out to God to deliver them, but He will not do it (v. 18). By denying God and His law-order, the Hebrews placed themselves under the sovereignty of man, and this sovereignty was centralized in the civil government. It is an ungodly State that demands tax payments as large as ten percent, God’s tithe, let alone a State that requires more than God’s tithe. Such a State has elevated itself to the position of a god. It is a false god. It is demonic.

Civil governments ever since World War I have found that a “mere ten percent” is not sufficient to finance massive programs of domestic and international wealth redistribution. Virtually all modern Western civil governments impose taxes of over 40% – national, regional, and local – which is twice that imposed by the tyrannical bureaucracy of Egypt (Gen. 47:23–24). The allocations for welfare programs – wealth redistribution – are at least double the combined allocations for national defense and the law enforcement system. What we saw in the twentieth century was the creation of a universal system of legislated covetousness. Biblical law was ignored, even as Christians have ignored the principle of the tithe.11 Steadily, political freedoms were removed. The after-tax income of the citizenry has been reduced systematically, leaving men with fewer resources to use in stewardship programs of voluntary charity. The civil government has steadily supplanted churches and voluntary associations as the primary agent of charity – a compulsory charity which is in fact a form of State-operated serfdom. The difference is this: The non-working servants (welfare recipients) are controlled by the State,12 and the working servants who support them are also controlled by the State.


**Covetousness and Conflict**

Massive, unrelenting political covetousness has led to universal enslavement.

**Social Co-operation**

When men do not trust their neighbors, it becomes expensive for them to co-operate in projects that would otherwise be mutually beneficial to them. They hesitate to share their goals, feelings, and economic expectations with each other. After all, if a man is known to be economically successful in a covetous society, he faces the threat of theft, either by individuals or bureaucrats. He faces the hostility of his associates. He faces others on a regular basis who are determined to confiscate what he has. The obvious response is to conceal one’s success from others. But this also means concealing one’s economic expectations. *Planning becomes clothed in secrecy*. The planning agency of the family limits its goals. Disputes between families increase, since families cannot easily co-operate under such circumstances. The future is a topic of discussion only in vague terms, except in the privacy of family economic planning councils. The social division of labor is thwarted, and the future-orientation of communities is drastically reduced, since men refuse to discuss plans openly.¹³

Bible commentators are conspicuously vague about the precise meaning of covetousness. They link it with theft, especially Ahab’s

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¹³ What Schoeck writes concerning envy applies equally well to legislated covetousness: “Ubiquitous envy, fear of it and those who harbour it, cuts off such people from any kind of communal action directed towards the future. Every man is for himself, every man is thrown back upon his own resources. All striving, all preparation and planning for the future can be undertaken only by socially fragmented, secretive beings.” *Helmut Schoeck, Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*, translated by Michael Glenny and Betty Ross (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1966] 1970), p. 50.
theft of Naboth’s vineyard. They link it with envy in the sense of resentment. But one insight that Charles Hodge offered, which was followed by Herman Hoeksema, is this: Above all, covetousness is *discontent with one’s position in life*. Hodge wrote: “Thou shalt not inordinately desire what thou hast not; and especially what belongs to thy neighbor. It includes the positive command to be contented with the allotments of Providence; and the negative injunction not to repine, or complain on account of the dealings of God with us, or to envy the lot or possessions of others.” Hodge did not have in mind any otherworldly or mystical rejection of property. As he said in the next section: “The command to be contented does not imply indifference, and it does not enjoin slothfulness. A cheerful and contented disposition is perfectly compatible with a due appreciation of the good things of this world, and diligence in the use of all proper means to improve our condition in life.” He cited Philippians 4:11: “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” He could have continued quoting Paul’s words: “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:12–13). *Any external condition is acceptable to the man who is content with his present role in God’s plan for the ages.* But owning little is usually the condition against which men rebel. Paul is clear on this point: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (I Tim. 6:6–8). The rich have many temptations (I Tim. 6:9–14).
Covetousness and Conflict

10).\textsuperscript{15} Hodge saw the other aspect of covetousness: envy. Again, I think this aspect is overemphasized in explaining this verse, although the fact that commentators have focused on it in the past testifies to the historical importance of Christian preaching against envy, even though in the context of the tenth commandment it is not completely appropriate. Hodge’s words show that he fully understood the meaning of envy as resentment, and that he distinguished this aspect of envy from covetousness as the desire to confiscate another man’s property for one’s own use. “The second form of evil condemned by this commandment is envy. This is something more than an inordinate desire of unpossessed good. It includes regret that others should have what we do not enjoy; a feeling of hatred and malignity towards those more favoured than ourselves; and a desire to deprive them of their advantages. This is a real cancer of the soul; producing torture and eating out all right feelings. There are, of course, all degrees of this sin, from the secret satisfaction experienced at the misfortunes of others, or the unexpressed desire that evil may assail them or that they may be reduced to the same level with ourselves, to the Satanic hatred of the happy because of their happiness, and the determination, if possible, to render them miserable. There is more of this dreadful spirit in the human heart than we are willing to acknowledge. Montesquieu says that every man has a secret satisfaction in the misfortunes even of his dearest friends. As envy is the antithesis of love, it is of all sins that most opposed to the nature of God, and more effectually than any other excludes us from his fellowship.”\textsuperscript{16} It is clear that Hodge regarded envy as the most dangerous of all the sins. \textit{It was this kind of preaching, generation after generation, that made possible...}
the economic development of the Protestant West. It was the absence of such preaching in the twentieth century that damaged the economic institutions of Western capitalism – the source of the West’s productivity.

Hoeksema also identified covetousness as discontent. “The sin of covetousness is the desire to possess anything apart from God, against His will; anything that he does not give me and that evidently He does not want me to have. . . . If the sin of covetousness could be rooted out of society, most of our economic problems would be solved. Covetousness is the root of all the sinful unrest in society. The same is true of international life and relationships; if the sin of covetousness were not so deeply rooted in the heart of the depraved man, most wars, if not all, would be eliminated. Take covetousness away, and there would be no reason for men to fly at one another’s throats, and you could hardly conceive of the possibility of war. . . . Positively, this means, of course, that the tenth commandment enjoins us to be content with what we have. Christian contentment is perfect satisfaction with what one has, for the sake of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and that, too, in the midst of a corrupt and covetous world.”

Hoeksema was correct: Discontent is the heart of sin’s problem, beginning with Satan’s discontent with God’s sovereignty. Discontent is an aspect of all sin, for if men were contented with righteousness and the fruits of righteousness, they would not rebel against God. Covetousness is a specific form of discontent: the desire to possess another’s goods at all cost, including the other man’s loss. As Matthew Poole, the Puritan commentator, wrote in the seventeenth century: Covetousness is the “inward and deliberate purpose and desire of a deceitful or violent taking away of another man’s goods; but this

is forbidden in the eighth commandment.”\textsuperscript{18} Theft is forbidden; covetousness is the \textit{inward desire} that leads to theft or fraud. It is the evil desire that overwhelms the law’s restraint on the sinner, the desire to have another man’s property, whether or not the other man benefits from the transaction. Voluntary exchange offers the other man an opportunity. He may not have known of the opportunity. He may not have known of a person’s willingness to part with some resource in order to obtain what he, the owner, possesses. It is not immoral to offer another person an opportunity, unless the opportunity is innately immoral (such as offering to buy his wife’s favors). \textit{Covetousness is the lawless desire to take the other man’s property, whether or not he finds the transaction beneficial.} When covetousness is common, men lose faith in their neighbors, in the social and political structure that protects private property, and in the benefits offered by the division of labor. Covetousness threatens the very fabric of society.

The tenth commandment was given to us so that we might enjoy the fruits of \textit{social peace and social co-operation}. This is equally true of the earlier commandments. The law-order of the Bible is a means of \textit{reducing conflict} and \textit{extending the division of labor}. Greater efficiency becomes possible through the division of labor. Whatever contributes to social peace thereby tends to increase per capita productivity, and therefore per capita income. People have an economic incentive to co-operate. The Bible’s prohibition against covetousness increases social co-operation by reducing its costs. In other words, more co-operation is demanded because its price drops. One of the social institutions that results from such a prohibition is the free market. It, too, is an institution that furthers social co-operation.

Chapter 10 . . . Exodus 20:17

It is significant that the prohibition against covetousness begins with the mind of man. There is no means of enforcing any civil law against thoughts, but God's law applies to men's thoughts. Because the very concept of covetousness involves the threat of violence and oppression, the *outworkings of covetousness* can be controlled by civil law, assuming the civil government has not been corrupted by a philosophy of universal legislated covetousness. The costs of policing the visible manifestations of covetousness are high. By focusing on the hearts of men, the Bible reduces the costs of law enforcement.

Men are to be taught from an early age that covetousness is a sin against God. These instruction costs are to be borne initially by the family (Deut. 6:7). By making men aware of God's hostility to covetousness, teachers of biblical law reduce the need for heavy taxation, either for law enforcement against visible, coercive oppressors, or for programs of legislated covetousness, i.e., “social welfare” programs. By helping to increase the social division of labor, the *internalization of the law against covetousness* helps to increase per capita output, also reducing thereby the proportion of income going to support law enforcement. The society is blessed in two ways: reduced crime, including the crime of statist wealth redistribution programs, and increased output per capita. *Men wind up with more wealth after taxes. They increase their opportunities for responsible action before God and men.*

The Modern Welfare State

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Covetousness and Conflict

The twentieth century, after the outbreak of World War I, abandoned the tenth commandment. Divorce and remarriage of the sinful partner became common events. Men today covet their neighbors’ wives. They covet their neighbors’ goods. (Coveting a man’s goods is certainly less of a threat to the integrity of his family unit than the coveting of his wife.) The rise of massive taxation, including the inflation tax, has led to the spread of covetous political programs. The graduated income tax, with its increasingly burdensome rates of taxation for those with higher income, has been proclaimed in the name of social justice, even Christian social justice. Nevertheless, the combination of graduated income taxation, the psychology of debt, and the control of money by the State and its licensed agents, the banks, has led to ruinous taxation of the middle classes. Men are tempted to vote for more wealth redistribution programs, and then they are tempted to pay for them by means of monetary inflation. This enables both individuals and the State to repay loans with depreciated money. “A little inflation” seems to be beneficial in the early years, since it fosters an economic boom. It involves the destruction of the creditors’ interests, but who cares about creditors? Yet most middle-class citizens are creditors. When they vote, they

20. John C. Bennett, who taught ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and who served as president of that institution, writes concerning needed social reforms: “The third reform is changes in the tax system that would close loopholes for the rich and in many ways bring about a more equal distribution of wealth. The adoption of the idea of a progressive income tax was in itself an early breakthrough of great importance.” Bennett, The Radical Imperative: From Theology to Social Ethics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 153.


may not fully understand this, failing to grasp its implications for their economic futures, but they are creditors nonetheless. They hold *paper certificates of ownership for future payments of paper money*. They extend mortgages to home buyers, they invest in pension programs, they buy cash-value life insurance, and they buy annuities. Worst of all, at least before the public catches on, they own long-term bonds, especially government bonds. The economist, Franz Pick, called government bonds “certificates of guaranteed confiscation.” The result is the *universal expropriation* of these classes of investors when mass inflation strikes. Everyone is pushed into higher income levels, which means that people are forced to pay a higher percentage of their nominal (meaning their paper money-denominated) incomes to the State. The result of these three features of economic life – graduated income taxes, universal debt, and fiat money – is the eventual destruction of the middle class. Yet it has been the middle class (and the parents and grandparents of the late twentieth century’s middle class) that voted for these programs of legislated covetousness. They set a trap for the rich, but inflation subsequently made them nominally rich. God will not be mocked.

**Christian Socialism**

Christians who will look back on the twentieth century will someday marvel at the unwillingness of Christian intellectuals to challenge the economic policies of the welfare State. Worse: Christian intellectuals all too often defended such policies, or even called for an expan-
**Covetousness and Conflict**

Future generations will not understand why programs of legislated covetousness were not decried as violations of the tenth commandment. They will be astounded to learn that spiritual leaders in every nation not only approved of such policies, but actively sought to have them enacted into law. The ethics of anti-biblical humanism permeated the thinking of twentieth-century Christians, so that the opposition to compulsory wealth redistribution programs generally did not come from Christian leaders, but has come from humanists who were defenders of nineteenth-century economic liberalism – a perspective that itself was a secularized and Darwinian version of biblical social ethics.

What has been called “the climate of opinion” in any given era is a powerful social force. This is why it is imperative that Christians develop and preach a systematically biblical social program. Because Christians have neglected this critically important task, the secularists have taken the lead in setting the climate of social opinion. This climate of opinion has subsequently influenced the thinking of Christian intellectual leaders. The dominant conclusions of the god of humanism, autonomous mankind, have become the standards for Christian thinkers and policy-makers.

Not all Christian scholars are socialists, of course, but it is a widely held opinion that any social and economic framework is

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acceptable to Christians. Those Christians who believe that any economic framework is acceptable (except one based explicitly on biblical law, of course), just so long as Christians have the right to preach the gospel of personal salvation, are faced with a problem: By what standard can a Christian legitimately conclude that all economic frameworks are acceptable to Christ? Furthermore, if any and all social and economic frameworks are legitimate before God, then in what way can the preaching of the gospel influence the social institutions of the day? How can these institutions be reformed? And if they do not need reform, how is it that rebellious, sinful men have succeeded in creating social institutions that are not in need of reconstruction? How, in short, can Christians avoid constructing a social order on the shifting sands of warring humanist philosophies, special-interest groups, power-seekers, and contradictory social and political programs? Is the Bible irrelevant to social institutions?

**Conclusion**

*Social peace is a major goal of biblical law* – the social peace demanded by the prophet Isaiah: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). *The juridical foundation of such peace is biblical law.* The Ten Commandments serve as the basis of long-term, God-blessed social peace.

One important aspect of biblical social peace is the absence of covetousness – in the hearts of men, in the relationships between neighbors, and in the legislation of civil governments. A covetous person’s discontent with his station in life makes it impossible for him to have personal peace. This lack of personal peace spreads to society as a whole when covetousness becomes universalized through
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the political process. Where political covetousness reigns, there can be no social peace. There also cannot be personal freedom.

The covetous person disrupts social peace, just as the satanic magician and thief do. The sinner covets that which he has not lawfully earned or lawfully inherited. Nevertheless, he wants the other man’s patrimony or inheritance. He may not steal it outright, but he lusts after it.

The tenth commandment is framed in terms of neighboring families. It implies that peace must begin at home. The peace-breaker begins locally. The covetous man wants the other person’s house, wife, and goods. He cannot lawfully have all of these, and even the goods must be bargained for. The jubilee year in Israel guaranteed that the house would eventually return to the lawful family heirs (Lev. 25), and the law against adultery protected every wife. The eighth commandment protected men’s goods, although goods could be exchanged. The lawful heirs inherited. The tenth commandment therefore parallels the fifth, which is also concerned with the question of legitimacy and inheritance, although the seventh and eighth commandments also add their force to the tenth.

The dominion covenant requires men to obey God’s laws of inheritance. To gain social peace, these laws must be honored. The lack of social peace in the modern world testifies to the unwillingness of men, as mandated through covenantal institutions, to respect God’s laws of inheritance. The modern world has institutionalized covetousness politically.
CONCLUSION

Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 18:5).

The Ten Commandments set forth God’s laws of life. They do not provide life, but they set forth the standards of life. This is why Jesus Christ came to earth to fulfill the terms of the law (Matt. 5:17–19). Without His willingness and ability to obey these laws, in time and on earth, God would not have granted eternal life, or even temporary earthly life, to any law-breaker. Jesus Christ’s perfect obedience in history is the foundation of God’s common grace to the world.

These ten laws were presented to the Israelites by God in the form of a covenant treaty. Men inescapably live in terms of covenants: either before God or before Satan, and always with each other. Thus, these laws of life are necessarily covenantal laws, both social and personal, both general and particular. What are the covenantal goals of God’s laws of life in society? Social peace and economic blessings: “peace and prosperity.” There is no other way to interpret Deuteronomy 28:1–14: The list of external and internal blessings is comprehensive. Furthermore, the list of cursings is long and threatening:

Deuteronomy 28:15–68. What we need to understand is that God’s Bible-revealed law-order is intended to create conditions leading to peace, harmony, and wealth.

The Ten Commandments also lay down the religious, legal, and economic foundations that are necessary for the creation and long-term maintenance of a free market economy. In other words, obeying the basic principles of the Ten Commandments is both necessary and sufficient for the creation of a capitalist economy. Humanistic free market economists reject the first assertion – “necessary” – since they want a free market without God, while “Christian” socialist theologians reject the second – sufficient – since they want God without a free market.

Whenever the Ten Commandments are enforced by all agencies of human government, men will gain freedom. Economic freedom of contract and freedom from excessive taxation and bureaucratic interference produce that social order that we call the market society. This is why the Christian West was the first society to create national and regional economies called capitalistic. This is why long-term economic growth came originally only in the West, and then in those nations that have traded with the West and have imitated some of its institutional and legal arrangements. But if the goal of the Bible is social peace under God’s covenants, and if the free market economy has been not only the logical result of the Ten Commandments but also the historic product of Christianity, then a controversial conclusion follows: Biblical social order and free market capitalism are a “package deal.” Societies cannot attain the kind of long-term, compounding expansion that is required by the dominion covenant without the social, moral, and legal foundations that are established by law in the Ten Commandments. Humanistic free market economists refuse to believe this, and so do “Christian” socialists.
Conclusion

The Ten Commandments and Capitalism

The Ten Commandments as a unified whole offer mankind the moral basis of a progressive society. I am not arguing that it is only the eighth commandment, with its prohibition against theft, that sets forth such a view of private ownership. The Ten Commandments have provided mankind with the deeply theological faith that has produced Western prosperity.

God as sovereign over the creation
Faith in the healing power of God’s law
Personal stewardship before God and other men
Legal responsibility for one’s actions
Faith in permanent laws
Faith in economic cause and effect
Faith in ethical power over magical power
Faith in work rather than luck
Faith in the productiveness of rest

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Faith in the covenantal family (family name)\textsuperscript{14}
Optimism concerning the future (linear history)\textsuperscript{15}
The possibility of compound economic growth\textsuperscript{16}
Defense of the private ownership of both the means of production and
the fruits of production\textsuperscript{17}
Future-orientation\textsuperscript{18}
The sanctity of covenants and the analogous and derivative legitimacy
of contracts\textsuperscript{19}
Social co-operation through private contracts\textsuperscript{20}
The illegitimacy of covetousness and envy\textsuperscript{21}
The legitimacy of civil government as a monopolistic agent of law
enforcement, but not wealth redistribution\textsuperscript{22}
Penalties against slander as theft\textsuperscript{23}
Salvation by grace, not law (or legislation)\textsuperscript{24}

When we compare these premises with the underlying premises

\textsuperscript{14} Pages 113–16, 149–53, 202–3, 218–21, 226.
\textsuperscript{15} Pages 59, 108–17.
\textsuperscript{16} Pages 59–60, 62–65, 72–73, 121–23, 125, 153–54
\textsuperscript{17} Pages 148–217, 267.
\textsuperscript{18} Pages 72–73, 142–43.
\textsuperscript{19} Pages 85–92.
\textsuperscript{20} Pages 158–61, 194–96, 272–74.
\textsuperscript{21} Pages 253–74.
\textsuperscript{22} Pages 123–28, 186–90, 210–15, 258–63, 269–73.
\textsuperscript{23} Pages 221–22, 230–32.
\textsuperscript{24} Pages 21, 33, 214.
Conclusion

of backward societies, we find almost a perfect reverse image. The society of Satan also has first principles. A list of the major “tenets of backwardness” is provided by P. T. Bauer, a specialist in developmental economics, and a devout Roman Catholic. He does so in one long sentence.

Examples of significant attitudes, beliefs and modes of conduct unfavourable to material progress include lack of interest in material advance, combined with resignation in the face of poverty; lack of initiative, self-reliance and a sense of personal responsibility for the economic future of oneself and one’s family; high leisure preference, together with a lassitude often found in tropical climates; relatively high prestige of passive or contemplative life compared to active life; the prestige of mysticism and of renunciation of the world compared to acquisition and achievement; acceptance of a preordained, unchanging and unchangeable universe; emphasis on performance of duties and acceptance of obligations, rather than on achievement of results, or assertion or even a recognition of personal rights; lack of sustained curiosity, experimentation and interest in change; belief in the efficacy of supernatural and occult forces and of their influence over one’s destiny; insistence on the unity of the organic universe, and on the need to live with nature rather than conquer it or harness it to man’s needs, an attitude of which reluctance to take animal life is a corollary; belief in personal reincarnation, which reduces the significance of effort in the course of the present life; recognized status of beggary, together with a lack of stigma in the acceptance of charity; opposition to women’s work outside the household.  

I have not seen a single sentence that more comprehensively des-

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Conclusion

cribes the mental outlook of primitivism, whether in Africa or the sociology department of an American university.

Haters of the West

When I cited this passage in an essay defending free market capitalism,26 “radical Christian” Art Gish was outraged: “It troubles me then that North expresses an elitist, if not racist, view that Western values are superior to Third World values, that the Third World is poor because of its ignorance. This is not only arrogant; it is also un-biblical.”27 This, of course, is a total misrepresentation of my views. I do not believe that ignorance is the Third World’s problem. The Third World’s problems are religious: moral perversity, a long history of demonism, and outright paganism – including especially socialistic paganism (post-1960). But I can well understand why Mr. Gish is troubled by my analysis; he himself has adopted the “more-poverty-per-capita program” of the Third World and zero-growth pagans.


27. Art Gish, “A Decentralist Response,” ibid., p. 78. I ask: Was Moses arrogant and unbiblical when he instructed the Israelites to kill every Canaanite in the land (Deut. 7:2; 20:16–17)? Was he an “elitist” or (horror of horrors) a racist? No; he was a God-fearing man who sought to obey God, who commanded the Israelites to kill them all. This sounds like a “superior attitude” to me. Of course, Christians have been given no comparable military commandment in New Testament times, but I am trying to deal with the attitude of superiority – a superiority based on our possession of the law of God. This attitude is something Christians must have when dealing with all pagans. God has given us the tools of dominion.
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When he is confronted with the economic curses that God has poured out on such pagans, he is troubled. (He should be terrified.)

Having criticized my arrogance – and when it comes to pagan societies and pagan world views, there is no question about it: I am arrogant about the superiority of Christianity – Mr. Gish then gets to the point: “I wonder why North quotes Bauer’s long list of attitudes which are opposed to capitalistic development. He seems unaware of the extent to which Jesus and the biblical prophets stand condemned by that list. I wish North could see the demonic and destructive nature of Western values... I am shocked that North would suggest that we go to the Third World and preach ‘the culture of the West.’ I thought we were to preach Jesus and him crucified. Or is capitalistic affluence the same as the way of the cross? Apparently, North believes thrift, education, development and responsibility will save. I don’t. I believe the biblical vision stands in fundamental opposition to ‘the culture of the West’.”

Mr. Gish is certainly forthright. He is unafraid of aligning himself with the culture of the Third World. He is not neutral in the slightest. He hates Western civilization. He recognizes that the West was originally the civilization of capitalism, and that large sections of it are still capitalistic, and therefore he hates it. He refuses to admit that the culture of the West, prior to its secularization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was the product of Christianity. He also refuses to admit that the poverty of the Third World is the product of its anti-Christian background. In an orgy of guilt, he calls us to adopt the poverty-stricken life style of Third World paganism in the name of Jesus.

It is remarkable that self-styled “radical Christians” are surprised to learn that God hates ethical rebellion, and that He brings earthly
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judgments against pagan societies. The God of the Bible sends ethical rebels to the eternal miseries of the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). What is earthly poverty, sickness, and political oppression compared to eternal damnation? It makes me wonder if these “radical Christian” critics of capitalism and the West believe in a God who sends people to eternal fire. Of what concern is poverty for a few decades compared with perpetual fiery torment? The God of the Bible is the God of incomparable negative sanctions. Why should any Christian imagine that God owes covenant-breaking mankind wealth rather than poverty?

Embittered by Guilt

Mr. Gish’s problem is the problem that he shares with a whole generation of Western intellectuals: too much reliance on endless criticism and too much guilt. This attitude is beginning to paralyze the West. Revel’s comments are on target: “Not only do democracies today blame themselves for sins they have not committed, but they have formed a habit of judging themselves by ideals so inaccessible that the defendants are automatically guilty. It follows that a civilization that feels guilty for everything it is and does and thinks will lack the energy and conviction to defend itself when its existence is threatened. Drilling into a civilization that it deserves defending only if it can incarnate absolute justice is tantamount to urging that it let itself die or be enslaved.”29 This guilt-induced self-flagellation is made even easier for humanism-influenced “radical Christians.” By failing to understand and rest upon the doctrines of definitive sanctification

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and progressive sanctification, they have become guilt-ridden and impotent. Definitive sanctification teaches that Jesus’ perfect moral life is imputed to His followers at the point of their conversion. Progressive sanctification teaches that regenerate people are required by God to work out their salvation with fear and trembling in terms of biblical law, even though they are imperfect in and of themselves. Their imperfect work is accounted righteous because of their definitive sanctification. It builds up over time, until the day of final judgment and final sanctification.\textsuperscript{30}

But “radical Christians” do not understand these doctrines. They are visibly overwhelmed with guilt concerning their own ineffectiveness and the supposed ineffectiveness of “Christianity” in not putting a stop to the “moral evil” of capitalism. They have also been overwhelmed by the seeming impossibility of godly dominion. After all, we live in a sinful world. We are sinful. So how can we – pitiful, guilt-ridden worms that we are – take dominion? Aren’t we sinful perpetrators of injustice? Aren’t we the sinful religious accomplices of the evil elite which rules (and profits from) the greedy and corrupt capitalist system? Oh, let us escape to the communal farm, where the morally polluted efficiency of mass-producing, price-competitive industrialism is kept out of our sight (even though we benefit from it 24 hours a day)! Oh, let us refuse to fight in wars to defend our miserable freedoms, even if a foreign nation should invade.\textsuperscript{31} Oh, let us be delivered from this corrupt and capitalist world! Oh, oh, oh!


\textsuperscript{31} This was the pacifist recommendation of Ron Sider and Richard Taylor with respect to Russian Communism, even though, as they admitted, “hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions might die” as a result of nonviolent resistance. Ronald J. Sider and Richard K. Taylor, \textit{Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope} (Downers Grove, Illinois; InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 281.
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Above all, they crave escape. This is why they are progressively impotent. This is why their movement is doomed intellectually and doomed historically. These people will be bypassed, either by dominion-oriented Christians or power-oriented humanists, but they will be by-passed. They will not determine any civil government’s policy. They will be able only to wring their hands on the sidelines of life, telling everyone how guilty they feel and how guilty we ought to feel for not joining them on the sidelines. At most, they will cheer on the statist politicians every time the latter try to pass a tax increase for the higher income brackets. This is the politics aptly described by Rushdoony as the politics of guilt and pity. 32

Capitalism’s Critics Within the Church

There were two major intellectual movements within twentieth-century Christianity that were utterly hostile to capitalism: the Social Gospel movement and the “radical Christianity” or “liberation theology” movement. The first was prominent from the late nineteenth century through the 1950’s. The second group came into prominence in the late 1960’s and especially in the 1970’s. (Art Gish is a representative of the second group.) Both groups hate capitalism with all their hearts – not just the secular version of nineteenth- and twentieth-century capitalism, but every manifestation of capitalism in history. They hate the premises of capitalism. Yet these premises are essentially biblical, derived from the Ten Commandments. Thus, the critics of “capitalism in general are inescapably also haters of the law of God. This is my conclusion, based on long years of study, both of the

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economics of the Bible and the published manifestos of the Christian socialists.

With the failure of socialist economies to “deliver the goods,” the underlying religious presuppositions of capitalism’s critics – including the “secular” critics – have become clearer. In the nineteenth century, capitalism’s critics heralded socialism as the next stage in the economic progress of mankind. Capitalism was more efficient and productive than ancient slavery or medieval feudalism, Marx and others readily admitted, but they believed that socialism would escalate the rate of progress and per capita wealth. That vision is now dead, outside of Western universities; it lies buried in the ashes of the socialist experiments of the twentieth century.

The promoters of secular evolutionary socialism were confident people. They believed that they would eventually be victorious. The Social Gospel movement picked up this humanistic optimism. It was therefore future-oriented and optimistic. Its members confronted capitalism as if they were in the vanguard of the next stage of human history. They believed in the State, and they sought to transfer power to the State, especially national government. They saw themselves as social revolutionaries – nice, well-meaning, well-fed, humanitarian, and above all risk-free revolutionaries of the sanctuary. The sanctuary was just that for them: a place of refuge. But it was to serve as headquarters for a co-ordinated program (they hoped) of coercive social transformation.

A good example of this satanic misuse of the sanctuary is provided by Nathaniel Weyl, in a footnote in his book on Karl Marx. In the 1940’s, he reports, “when I was the leader of the radical move-

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ment on the Columbia University campus, I was invited to become an honorary member of the Atheists’ Club at adjacent Union Theological Seminary. I asked rather naively how an honorable man could accept an appointment to the ministry if he didn’t believe in God. The reply was that the pulpit provided a captive audience, a position of authority and a regular salary – all most useful to socialist and Communist propagandists. I declined the invitation. “34 This is the humanists’ strategy that I have called “capturing the robes.” 35

I wrote the following in the 1986 first edition of this book:

That older optimistic socialism, both secular and “Christian,” is pretty well gone today. Its optimism was drained by the experiences of power. The European socialist economies are becoming basket cases.

In 1988, Soviet Premier Gorbachev admitted publicly that the Soviet Union was economically bankrupt. He went begging in foreign banking and government circles for more aid. In 1989, the Berlin Wall went down. The Soviet Union’s Eastern European satellites broke free and publicly abandoned Marxism. In 1991, the Soviet Union committed suicide and ceased to exist.

In the United States, the hard realities of the Presidency of Lyndon Johnson – he was crass, calculating, coercive, and above all, unstylish – removed much of the political liberals’ hope in the older faith. Furthermore, the rise of alternative theologies undermined the older theological liberalism: politically pessimistic (Reinhold) Niebuhrism, non-rational Barthianism, and New Age transcendentalism.

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The spiritual odyssey of Harvard theology professor Harvey Cox is representative, though somewhat flamboyant: from outright secular humanism (old liberal-style rationalism) to irrationalism to liberation theology. Cox was the leading theological weather vane of the decade, 1965–75, and every four years, he switched positions.

In place of the old secular socialism has arisen a new critique of capitalism. Capitalism is evil, we are now informed by the critics, because it is too growth-oriented. Economic growth is a liability. More than this: Economic growth is a sin. We find the “simple life style” people advocating on principle a reduced division of labor and lower per capita income, especially for rich nations – that is, the nations in which guilty readers can afford to buy mass-produced, low-cost paperback diatribes and monthly magazines.

Paralleling the transformation of the secular socialists, the church has produced “radical Christianity,” sometimes known as “liberation theology.” In some senses, these are two different movements. The latter movement tends to be more Marxist; the former is more likely to be made up of Anabaptist pacifists. Sometimes their memberships overlap. The more hard-core liberation theologians tend to be Roman Catholic. The radical Christians are usually Protestants: neo-evangelicals, sometimes Reformed (seminary professors and younger seminary graduates), and especially Anabaptists.

We find so-called radical Christians (who are openly the spiritual


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heirs of the radical Anabaptist sects of the sixteenth century) espous- ing the “small is beautiful” philosophy of “neo-Gandhian” E. F. Schumacher, author of *Buddhist Economics*, as well as *Small Is Beau- tiful*. Schumacher’s recommended economic system is consistent with his religious presuppositions. The “radical Christians” are either in- consistent with theirs (Christianity), or else they are consistent with their true presuppositions (anti-Christianity), but dishonest in reveal- ing publicly their true commitment. In any case, what the critics of capitalism – all the critics of capitalism – hate is the thought of a literal, comprehensive application of the Ten Commandments in society.

A Two-Gods Theology

These “radical Christians” are invariably implicit defenders of some version of the “two-gods” theory that Marcion and other early church heretics promoted. They contrast the views of Jesus with the views of Moses. *They hate Old Testament law with a passion.* They argue that there is some fundamental dualism between the Old Testa- ment and the New Testament. They reject the Old Testament and proclaim the New Testament – a New Testament that is now conven- iently stripped of its Old Testament foundations. (In this sense, they are not significantly different from modern pietists, dispensationalists, and conservative antinomians, who also assume a radical dualism between the Old and New Testaments.) Then, in the name of this “pure and undefiled” New Testament, they attack anyone who dares to appeal to passages in the Old Testament that sanction private ownership and individual responsibility. The Old Testament, it seems, is only to be used when you are looking for passages that support modern socialist revolutionism or modern pacifism. In credibly, some
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“radical Christians” support both. “Why is it that conservative Christians have such difficulty with the New Testament?” asks Mr. Gish. “They either ignore it, as North does, or try to explain it away.” My relevant but incomplete response would be to throw back this contrast: Why do “radical Christians” have such difficulty with the Old Testament? Why do they ignore it, as Mr. Gish does, or try to explain it away?

But the significant answer to Mr. Gish’s rhetorical questions is to point out that the difference between Jesus and Moses was a difference in historical circumstances: Moses was waiting for the younger generation of Israelites to become a military force (so hated by the “radical Christians”). He was waiting to invade Canaan militarily. God had instructed Moses to exterminate the Canaanites and establish Israel’s kingdom in the long-promised territory. In contrast, Jesus established a new set of tactics, because the Holy Spirit would come at last and lead God’s people out of the narrow geographical confines of Palestine and into confrontation – religious confrontation, not military confrontation – with the world.

Jesus, like Moses, was preparing His people for a fight. It is a fight that involves self-discipline. As was true in Moses’ day, it involves multiple covenantal organizations: church, state, and family. Initially, Jesus called on poor men to begin the fight. But Jesus has always called His followers, whether rich or poor, to victory. He has called them to exercise dominion in terms of His Father’s law. This long-term strategy of dominion has never changed. Redeemed mankind’s fulfillment of the dominion covenant is supposed to produce a unique society, simultaneously a garden and a city. This new civilization will operate in terms of God’s law, by means of God’s grace.

The possibility of such a society is rejected by “radical Chris-

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tians.” The hatred of God’s law by “radical Christians” – from the late medieval peasant and artisan rebellions\(^9\) to the Evangelicals for Social Action – is so total that they assert as forever binding the low-output Christian lifestyle of rural Israel in A.D. 30. But this has never been the Bible’s perpetually normative social order. What Jesus was talking about was precisely what Moses was also talking about: a strategy of long-term dominion – in economics, in politics, in law, in public health, and everything else. This strategy remains the same throughout history. There was a shift in both tactics and geography with the coming of the church, but not a change in strategy. What Jesus was offering was comprehensive redemption.\(^{40}\)

The Social Gospel’s advocates saw correctly that Jesus was a revolutionary, in the sense that He offered a program for comprehensive social change. He did exactly that. But they incorrectly modeled His revolution along the lines of the Fabian socialist movement in Britain.\(^{41}\) They argued that Jesus was an advocate of economic growth and development, as well as an advocate of external progress. Yet when we read the words of Jesus, we find that He did not discuss


\(^{41}\) On Fabianism, see Margaret Patricia McCarren, *Fabianism in the Political Life of Britain, 1919–1931* (Chicago: Heritage Foundation, 1954); Rose L. Martin, *Fabian Freeway: High Road to Socialism in the U.S.A., 1884–1966* (Boston: Western Islands, 1966), which was based on the voluminous research in McCarran’s unpublished manuscript, *The Fabian Transmission Belt.*
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such issues. It was Moses, not Jesus, who proclaimed economic growth as an ideal for society. Only to the extent that Jesus implicitly retained the worldview of the Mosaic law that such a program of economic development can be associated with His ministry. The Social Gospel theologians wanted nothing to do with the Mosaic law. So, they interpreted Jesus’ ministry to fit their model of evolutionary socialism.

The failure of socialist policies to produce economic progress has necessitated a change in strategy for the advocates of statist social change. Today, the spiritual heirs of the Social Gospel movement – radical Christians – are calling for the same old sectarian Anabaptist revolutions: either some version of common-ownership communalism down on the farm, or else the expansion of power of the State to redistribute wealth by compulsion. What makes their present appeal unique in our day is that both scenarios are defended by a call for this revolution in the name of a vision of poverty, which is the one thing that socialism always produces in abundance. They defend their vision in the name of the simple life style – a life style without a high division of labor, mass production, price competition, computers, automobiles, jet planes, and similar high-technology tools of dominion.

Richard K. Taylor, who co-authored the InterVarsity Press book with Ronald Sider on why we should disarm the United States of all weapons, unilaterally if necessary, wrote an article in the other side (July-Aug. 1974), a journal of radical Christianity, entitled, the imperative of economic de-development. (The editors at the other side did

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not use capital letters in the old days.) Taylor concluded: “It is imperative that we de-develop the American economy, while encouraging the growth of the poorer nations economies to a level of ecologically sound adequacy, in which basic needs for food, clothing, housing, and medical care are met.” Question: Who will decide for Third World national leaders precisely what ecologically sound adequacy is? Who will tell them, “Stop, you’ve had enough!” when they reach these predetermined levels? Who will determine just how much State-enforced de-development America needs? Over whose dead body? Here is a proposal guaranteed to produce social war, endless envy and resentment, and perpetual confrontations. In short, here is a proposal that will make Satan proud of his success in turning men’s eyes away from the Ten Commandments.

“When I get to dreaming about this,” Taylor says, “I see Christians leading a movement of tremendous significance. I see Billy Graham walking from one crusade to another rather than flying in a jet. I see him cutting his wardrobe to one suit, and hear him preaching on Mark 10:23 and I Timothy 6:7–10. I see the church going back to the Gospel ideal of humble poverty.” What I see is a bunch of well-fed, pampered, and tenured social utopians out in a field during the day, trying to feed themselves without tools, and spending the evening writing their economic manifesto on papyrus with their goose quills and ink. Radical Christianity is anything but a movement of tremendous significance. It is a temporary phenomenon of guilt-ridden, public school-educated, socialism-peddling, suicidal, retreatist poverts.43 They are self-consciously advocates of zero-growth impotence. As a movement, they will undoubtedly achieve their goal. They are going nowhere, for they are low-capital nomads without a known

43. Povert (“PAHvurt), noun: “A person who promotes poverty as a way of life for everyone, but with everyone else starting first.” The term was coined by Louis Bulkeley.
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destination. The radical Christianity of the neo-Anabaptists is a classic contemporary manifestation of escapist religion.\(^{44}\) They propose programs that inescapably produce social conflict, but always in the name of social peace and social justice. They propose programs that lead inescapably to cultural impotence, but always in the name of relevance and importance. If they had any serious economic ideas or any likelihood of becoming influential leaders politically or even intellectually, we would call them wolves in sheep’s clothing. They are goats in sheep’s clothing.

These radical Christians serve the political left in the same capacity that the old fundamentalists\(^{45}\) and pietists long served the humanist establishment: as dogmatists of social impotence. They are as hostile to the Christian reconstructionists’ vision of capitalist Christianity as the old fundamentalists were hostile to the Social Gospel’s vision of socialist Christianity. Both groups come up with the same answer: The Bible offers no economic blueprints. They are equally incorrect.

The Ten Commandments and Western Development

The Ten Commandments provide a strategy. I call it the Sinai strategy. It is neither a power strategy nor an escape strategy. It is a dominion strategy. It is a strategy for not staying poor, either individually or socially. It is a strategy that was first delivered by God to a


\(^{45}\) North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers?*, ch. 4: “Fundamentalism: Old and New.”
rabbles of ex-slaves who were about to begin a 40-year wandering in a wilderness, precisely because they rejected God’s strategy of worldwide dominion. It is a strategy based on *covenantal subordination under God*, both personally and corporately, and calls for *dominion over creation*, both personally and corporately. A radical theologian of the “old liberalism,” John C. Raines, has recognized this impulse in John Calvin: “Calvin understood the Christian life not as ‘a vessel filled with God’ but as an active ‘tool and instrument’ of the Divine initiative. But this is precisely our point. Active toward the world, the Christian knows himself as utterly passive and obedient toward God, whose Will it is his sole task to discover and obey.”

Unlike Raines, Christians find God’s will in the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments, wherever respected, have produced remarkable economic growth and social progress. This includes the much-maligned Middle Ages. The medieval era was a period of remarkable technological change and economic growth. The earlier transitional period (400 A.D. to 1100 A.D.) to the late medieval era (1100 A.D. to 1500 A.D.) has been labeled the “Dark Ages” ever since humanist Renaissance (“rebirth”) scholars invented the phrase. The period came as a result of the collapse of Roman civilization. It was a period of economic growth, though irregular. Economic historian Robert Latouche says that it is incorrect to assume that the Christian world had contracted by comparison to the ancient world, because we always look at the Mediterranean world of Augustus and compare it to northern Europe eight hundred years later. The point is,

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northern Europe improved its economic position under Christianity compared with what it had been in classical times. He also notes that one of the elements fostering stagnation was pessimistic millennialism: “By continuing to prophesy that the end of the world was approaching, it created an atmosphere of indifference to the natural and physical sciences which promoted worldly well-being and happiness, and which in the tenth century were still suspected of being inspired by the devil.” He might have added the negative effects of this shortened time perspective on capital accumulation. Such a time perspective raises interest rates by heavily discounting the future.

Furthermore, the progress of medieval civilization was not limited to economics and technology. The Papal Revolution of 1076–1150 created the legal foundations of Western civilization. In that same period, Christians invented the university. A great revival of learning took place after the year 1100. The triumphs in architecture, most notably the great cathedrals but also the castle fortresses, are not denied by anyone.

The coming of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century transformed European thought and culture, politics and economics. Max Weber’s thesis, that the Protestant ethic led to the civilization-wide extension of a spirit of capitalism and entrepreneurship, is cor-

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49. Ibid., p. 304.


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erosion process.\textsuperscript{56} When Christians lose faith in five essential biblical doctrines – the sovereignty of God, the self-sufficiency of the infallible Bible, the Bible-revealed law of God, the predictable corporate sanctions of God in history, and the victory of God’s people in time and on earth – they find themselves nearly defenseless (intellectually, institutionally, and culturally) against their rivals in every area of life.\textsuperscript{57} When Christians refuse to take the offensive, they become like the Israelites of Moses’ generation: nomads without an earthly future.

The Restoration of Biblical Law

How should Christians begin to take the offensive? By means of biblical law. In other words, we must put to good use the grace of God, which has been shown to us in Christ. \textit{We are to live by grace in terms of biblical law.} We judge ourselves by our fruits, and we judge our fruits in terms of their conformity to God’s law. The Ten Commandments are the starting point today, just as they were in 1450 B.C., and just as they have been at all points in between. What I have tried to demonstrate in this book is that in the field of economics, there is no doubt: The Ten Commandments still apply. More than this: Without the principles laid down by the Ten Commandments, there is no hope for the economic future of man.

A God-blessed economic future is a future based on personal self-government under God, as evaluated by each individual (self-evaluation) and others (market evaluation) in terms of God’s revealed law.

\textsuperscript{56} Christianity and Civilization, 1 (1982): “The Failure of the American Baptist Culture.” Published by the Geneva Divinity School, Tyler, Texas.

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Economic justice, like economic progress, is not based on the reign of the king, the politician, or the bureaucrat. Above all, it is familialistic responsibility which is the dominant force in economic life. Economic progress ultimately requires future-orientation and faith in a providential world of cosmic personalism – faith in the existence of economic order, faith in economic cause and effect. It was this confidence which created the Western economy, and only this faith can sustain it.

Humanism is losing its self-confidence, and is doomed. The question is this: Is humanism doomed historically? The Bible teaches that it is doomed historically, for Satan is doomed historically, despite the familiar eschatological teachings of the “pessimillennialists.” His defeat at Calvary definitively established his defeat in history. Nevertheless, history requires action. To establish the visible cultural manifestation of Christ’s historic triumph, Christians must first learn the truth of an old political slogan: “You can’t beat something with nothing.” Humanism’s visible failures today will not automatically lead to some sort of Christian “victory by default.” There is no Christian “kingdom by default.” Christians cannot win by default, because men are born into Satan’s kingdom (original sin). Sinners must be actively pursued – by God’s Holy Spirit and by those who bring the gospel message. If Christians were passive in terms of personal evangelism, Satan’s kingdom would remain unchecked and unchallenged. The same is true of cultural evangelism by Christians: no activism – no victory. Once Adam sinned, had Christ’s death not atoned for man’s sin, Satan could have remained passive and have been historically victorious. Satan would have won by default, had it not been for Calvary. Christ’s activism conquered Satan; analogously, Christians’ activism will conquer Satan’s troops, both human and angelic. Ethics, not power, is the critical factor. Biblical law, not State power or magical power, is decisive.

What I am arguing is simple: There are no civilizational vacuums.
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There are no tie scores in the competition to build an external kingdom, whether Satan’s or God’s. Unless Christianity positively wins, Satan positively wins. Christianity, if it is not accompanied by a program of comprehensive Christian reconstruction, cannot triumph historically. “You can’t build something with nothing.” There should be no doubt in any orthodox Christian’s mind that in the field of economics, the basis of such reconstruction is faith in, and obedience to, the Ten Commandments.
Appendix A

THE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS
OF THE SABBATH

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of
rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath
day, he shall surely be put to death (Ex. 31:15).

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be
to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever
doeth work therein shall be put to death (Ex. 35:2).

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth
every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind
(Rom. 14:5).

I see no way to avoid interpreting the Old Testament sabbath in
terms of the explanatory case-law provided in Exodus 31:15 and
Exodus 35:2. If we take these words at face value – and I see no way
not to and still remain faithful to the text – then we must come to
grips with the rigorous nature of the Old Testament sabbath. There
were almost certainly exceptions to this universal prohibition against
work, such as milking cows (in effect, giving rest to them) or serving
as a law-enforcement officer, but the universal condemnation of
working at one’s occupation on the sabbath bore the strongest of all
sanctions: the death penalty.

I also see no way to avoid interpreting the New Testament Lord’s
day in terms of Paul’s injunction that every man should make up his
own mind concerning the equality of, or special nature of, any
particular day. More than this: If Paul’s words are not to be inter-
interpreted as referring to the sabbath (along with other Hebrew days of celebration or fasting), then the death penalty still has to be imposed by the civil government on anyone who fails to observe the New Testament Lord’s day as identical to the Old Testament sabbath.

Our explanation of how the sabbath functioned in Israel, and how it should (or should not) be observed today, must be governed by the words of Exodus 31:15 and Exodus 35:2. In short, if we argue that the death penalty is no longer to be imposed on people who work on the Lord’s day, as I do, then we must present a case that the requirements of the Old Testament sabbath have been fulfilled by Christ and are now annulled, and that God has substituted new rules to govern the Lord’s day, which is what I attempt to do in this appendix. On the other hand, if someone denies that there has been a fundamental break between the Old Testament sabbath and the New Testament Lord’s day, then he must demonstrate exegetically how it can be that the God-ordained civil penalty has been abolished, but the moral and even ecclesiastical requirements concerning the observation of the Lord’s day have remained essentially the same.

Why did God regard a violation of His sabbath as a capital crime? We have seen the answer in Chapter 4: Violating the sabbath involves a denial of the mandatory nature of rest for mankind. Such a violation involves the implicit assertion of man’s autonomy. Such an assertion brings spiritual and eternal death. But why did God wait until after the exodus to announce that working on the sabbath is a capital crime? Probably because He wanted Israel first to understand what it meant to live under the domination of a self-proclaimed god-man who did not allow God’s people to rest. In the recapitulation of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, God gave them a different reason for honoring the sabbath: They had been in bondage to Egypt, and God had delivered them from this bondage (Deut. 5:15). He brought death to Egypt’s firstborn; He would do the same to them if they failed to honor His covenant with them.

A key question then has to be considered: Why in New Testament
The Economic Implications of the Sabbath

times has the church never advocated such a harsh penalty? I hope to answer this question at the end of this appendix. The fundamental answer is that there has been a shift in the locus of sovereignty for sabbath enforcement: from civil government and ecclesiastical government to self-government (the individual conscience).

We have come at last to the really difficult issues, the issues of applied theology. We must consider these preliminary issues:

I. What was the Old Testament Sabbath?
   A. What were men supposed to do on the O.T. sabbath?
   B. What were the economic implications of the Mosaic sabbath, especially with respect to the division of labor?

II. Is the New Testament Lord’s day essentially the same as the O.T. sabbath?
   A. Is there N.T. evidence of a shift: sabbath to Lord’s day?
   B. Is the Lord’s day legally enforceable by the State today, as it was in the Old Testament?
   C. What are the economic implications of the Lord’s day, especially with respect to the division of labor?

Once we have a general idea of the answers to these questions, we can go on to other issues, such as the Old Testament’s rescheduling of the Passover, and the possibility of rescheduling the New Testament Lord’s day for people employed in unique occupations; the priestly exemptions from sabbath observance and their relationship to rescheduled worship in New Testament times; sabbath enforcement and the creation of a one-world State; proper leisure activities in New Testament times; and several other topics. But first, we need to understand better both the Old Testament sabbath and the New Testament’s doctrine of the Lord’s day.
Appendix A

I. Old Testament Sabbath

The Bible gives us almost no information about the activities of faithful Hebrews on the sabbath. We know something about what people did not do, but nothing for certain concerning what they did do, except on special sabbaths like the Passover, the day of atonement, and so forth.

The experience with the manna in the wilderness, before the law was given in a completed form to Moses, indicates that there was to be no cooking in Israel on the sabbath. The cakes made from the manna were to be cooked the day before the sabbath (Ex. 16:23). After Israel arrived in Canaan, this anti-cooking law may have been relaxed. The Bible does not say.

They were not to engage in commercial activity (Neh. 13:15–18). We know that evil men did not appreciate the sabbath, because they wanted to cheat buyers seven days a week (Amos 8:5). The man who gathered sticks on the sabbath was executed at God’s explicit command (Num. 15:32–36). There is certainly the possibility that a stick-gatherer might be gathering sticks as a commercial venture. Jeremiah warned the people:

Thus said the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their
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princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bring sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the Lord. But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched (Jer. 17:21–27).

Kindling a fire on the sabbath was forbidden (Ex. 35:3). If this law was disobeyed, God promised to kindle a fire in the gates of the city, meaning the seat of judgment. The gates, as the place of entry into the city, would be destroyed. The city would fall to a conqueror. God was serious about their not starting fires on the sabbath. His promised judgment – fire in the gates – reflected His rigorous standards in this regard.

A. What Were They Supposed to Do?

But what, specifically, were men required to do on the sabbath? They may have celebrated together at some form of formal worship service. The “holy convocations” described in Leviticus 23:3 may have constituted weekly sabbath worship services, although it is not clear that these services were conducted outside the home. “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:3). Israel’s various seasonal feasts (holy convocations) are subsequently described in Leviticus 23,
and these were unquestionably public feasts. Thus, it can be argued that the local Levitical priests who resided in each community called the weekly convocations together in some sort of public meeting place. But this is not absolutely clear from the text, and the specific details of these public worship services are nowhere described in the Old Testament.

A. T. Lincoln has fairly described our present state of knowledge concerning the celebration of the Hebrew sabbath in Old Testament times: “The sabbath was not a day of total inactivity but was meant to provide rest and refreshment from the regular work of the six other days. It is true that this rest provided opportunity for devotion to the worship of God, that the Sabbath was called a ‘holy convocation’ (Lev. 23:2–3), that an additional burnt offering was required on every Sabbath (Num. 28:9,10), and that since it was done from obedience to God the resting itself could be considered an act of worship, but cultic worship was not a major focus of the Sabbath institution for Israel as this is reflected in the Old Testament.” This is my concern: to discern the major focus of the Old Testament sabbath. It was rest, not worship.

The Hebrews were supposed to delight themselves in God. In the oft-quoted words of Isaiah: “If thou turn thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and thou shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking [thine own] words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of

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the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa. 58:13–14). They were to acknowledge the God-centered nature of creation.

What did it mean, “doing thy pleasure”? We are not told, except in reference to commercial activities and the common household chores of cooking, gathering sticks, and carrying burdens in and out. Idle talk was forbidden. But what kind of talk, specifically, constituted idle talk, “speaking [thine own] words”? We are not told. As far as the written record indicates, neither were the Israelites.

The law said nothing about the legality, or even propriety, of the following activities: napping in the afternoon, walking in a garden (park), listening to music, going for a (non-commercial) swim, floating in a small boat, and having sexual relations with one’s spouse. In short, there are no guidelines in the law concerning the limits of recreation and the beginning of work or “thy pleasure.”

Recreation (Re-Creation)

When we think back to the garden of Eden, we are confronted with the obvious possibility of a walk through the garden, God’s gift to man. This is a form of recreation. To forbid recreation in post-Edenic times seems ludicrous, yet certain problems arise as soon as we admit the legitimacy of recreation but deny the legitimacy of commercial activity.

Consider the rich man. He owns a large garden, a lake, and a boat. He chooses to spend his day of rest walking through his garden, going for a swim, and sailing. Has he broken God’s law? Then consider the poor man. He owns no garden, but he has access to a nearby profit-seeking park. (In this book, I choose to avoid the question of the morality of tax-supported public parks. It is a relevant question, however.) There is a profit-seeking lake or swimming pool nearby. A
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firm will rent him a boat on Sunday afternoon. If the ban against profit-seeking activities includes recreation activities, then the poor man is limited. He cannot afford to buy the tools of recreation, yet he is also prohibited from renting them.

Christians cannot escape this problem. We must ask ourselves at least five questions. First, must we ban recreation on the Lord’s day for all people, rich and poor, in order to avoid economic discrimination? Second, must we ban the poor or middle-class citizens from the delights of publicly provided recreation? Third, must we ban rentals of recreation services and implements on the day of rest? Fourth, must we see to it that the State confiscates funds through coercion in order to create “free” recreation services for the poor and middle-class citizens? Fifth, may we look upon sabbatical recreation capital of the rich man as a legitimate covenantal blessing that poorer men do not enjoy, and should not enjoy until God showers similar economic blessings on them?

There is also a sixth possibility. What if the rich invite the poor in to enjoy their wealth? What if the rich donate money to the church, or some other private charity, in order to create recreation facilities? This could be regarded as a weekly version of the “tithe of celebration” (Deut. 14:26–29). Rich men could celebrate the sabbath by inviting all men in to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Charity-supported agencies might offer access to gardens, lakes, and so forth. Labor is donated: lifeguards, physicians, police protection, lost children booths, and so forth. Instead of profit-seeking labor, we find works of mercy.

In a predominantly rural society, most people could enjoy the sight of their fields. They could go for a stroll in the “garden.” In an urban

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society, people can go for a stroll to view front lawns. They can visit friends for a chat. But then we are back to another bothersome question: What constitutes idle talk? Talk about families? Talk about sports events? Talk about politics? Talk about the stock market? We are not told. Conscience must be our guide. But conscience is difficult to put into concrete legislative proposals. In fact, it is because men have not universally defined “idle talk,” that they resort to the language of conscience or circumstance.

If we take the Old Testament legislation seriously, we are faced with a conclusion that tends to alienate the guilt-manipulated and socialism-influenced Christian: The rich were allowed to enjoy recreation activities that were legally prohibited to the poor, who were not allowed to lease or rent such recreation implements or opportunities on the sabbath. It might be argued that the law allowed a man to buy a “seven days a week” ticket to recreation opportunities, but if someone had to collect tickets on the sabbath, or in some way monitor his profit-seeking operation on the sabbath, then any judge who understood basic economics would have shut down the operation as a sham, an attempt to escape the clear-cut prohibition on commercial activities on the sabbath. It paid to be rich on the sabbath. (Of course, it normally pays to be rich on the other six days of the week, too.)

Carrying burdens in and out of doors was illegal (Jer. 17:22). Profit-seeking work was illegal. But leisure is a consumer good. It must be paid for by forfeited income – income that is not earned during the leisure period. Leisure could be “stored up” in effect. It was legitimate to enjoy leisure on the sabbath, but only that kind of leisure which could be “stored up” in the form of capital goods: private gardens, private lakes, and so forth. This was clearly a subsidy to the rich.
“Works of Mercy” in a Rural Society

Israel was a rural society. Certain daily chores are works of necessity on a farm, such as milking and caring for the animals. But what was done with the milk? Was it thrown away? Was it saved only for other animals? Was it given to the poor? If it was sold at a profit, then milking constituted profit-seeking activity, i.e., engaging in trade. Such sabbath violations would have been difficult to detect.

What about the use of such sabbath-produced milk by the family? This is an important question. If personal family use of the economic output of sabbatical “acts of mercy” (to the cows) is legitimate, then the definition of what constitutes profit-seeking must be narrowed. Engaging in commercial trade would be prohibited, but engaging in intra-household trade would not; one family member milks the cow, another cooks the food, another washes the dishes, and so forth. From the point of view of human action – exchanging one set of conditions for another set – the intra-family exchange seems to be equally profit-seeking, but perhaps not from the point of view of Old Testament sabbath legislation. The milk could be sold the next day. Wouldn’t this constitute a violation of the sabbath? It certainly appears that way. But to consume the milk directly thereby increases the family’s consumption as surely as the income gained from the sale of the milk would increase it. What is the economic difference, in terms of family income? More to the point, what is the biblical difference, in terms of the specific application of the law of the sabbath?

The strict sabbatarian would have to argue that the milk should be given away. Such a person is a defender of what Lewis Bulkeley has called “the marathon sabbath.” But is it the sabbath that God required of His Old Testament saints, let alone His New Testament saints? Unquestionably, the Old Testament did not prohibit output of effort as such; cows deserved to be milked, as an act of mercy, an act of
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giving rest (Ex. 23:12). But what about income that was the byproduct (i.e., unintended product) of such merciful labor? Should it have been given to the poor, or to household animals, but kept away from human family members? Or is giving food to one’s own family itself an act of mercy?

If giving milk to one’s own family or domestic animals is an act of mercy, then it is an act of mercy that has unintended economic consequences, namely, an increase of consumption that is not paid for by increased output (more milking) or more thrift (reduced consumption) during the days preceding the sabbath. Feeding one’s family or animals with milk produced by sabbath milking would then be understood as being fundamentally different from gathering sticks for a fire on the sabbath, for sticks had to be gathered during the workweek and stored up for use on the sabbath. But wouldn’t this “anti-stick-gathering” requirement have applied equally to milking, even though milk in this instance was a byproduct of acts of mercy? A strict sabbatarian would clearly have to insist that milk that is produced as a byproduct of an act of mercy be given to the poor, or spilled on the ground, or fed to farm animals, in order to make certain that such merciful work remained exclusively merciful and not an excuse for profit-seeking (cost-reducing) sabbath violations.

Thomas Gouge a contemporary of Owen and Baxter in seventeenth-century England, praised as shining examples three Christian physicians who refused payment for Sunday labor.3 I ask: Should the civil government make it illegal for people to receive payment for emergency services? And if it does, won’t this reduce the number of emergency services offered, and thereby render it more dangerous to suffer an emergency on Sundays? This is the question of full pay for

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“normal” works of mercy or necessity performed by professionals, including people who are paid by the civil government: police, firemen, military forces, etc. Should those who perform such services on the sabbath be paid for that day’s work? Christ defended the right of a man to pull a beast of burden out of a ditch, but does this imply that individuals can legitimately operate “beast-retrieval” companies at a profit on the sabbath? These are questions that strict sabbatarians should eventually deal with. They never do.

B. The Division of Labor in Rural Israel

Modern mass production, with its capital-intensive mechanization, is characterized by a high division of labor. Until the late-nineteenth century, agricultural societies were characterized by a comparatively low division of labor. In such societies, production is initially for the family unit. Surplus goods can be traded or sold, but there is not much surplus. Men work primarily for home consumption.

The workweek is scheduled in terms of the needs of the family. Wives can bake extra loaves on the day before the sabbath without disrupting normal production and distribution patterns. Husbands can cut extra wood for the fire on any day of the week. In ancient Israel, people structured their workweek’s rhythm in terms of the sabbath. This did not involve a major interruption of supplies of needed goods and services. Where men are not continually serving each other through production for a market, but where they serve themselves and their families directly through labor, it is far easier to restructure the workweek to honor special feast days or sabbaths. A rural family can schedule its activities to include a day of rest.

In a rural society, it is also far easier to identify commercial activities, because there are fewer of them than in a modern, mass-produc-
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It is therefore easier to identify sabbath violations. A face-to-face society that is dominated by family and tribal ties offers men the opportunity to observe the daily affairs of their neighbors. While families might have hidden certain kinds of indoor commercial labor, it would have been difficult in ancient Israel to conceal agricultural labor in the fields.

Another important aspect of rural societies is the relative absence of 24-hour-a-day capital equipment, whether public or private. Power generation, telecommunications, repair services, hospitals, and similar services became commonplace in rural areas in the twentieth century, and then only in industrial societies, or in urban areas of industrializing societies. The continuing dependence of urban society on such services stands in stark contrast to the traditional rural community, which has a lower division of labor, and which is far more self-sufficient. The interruption of “vital services” in a modern city could bring paralysis and breakdown. In a traditional rural community, such an interruption could not take place, because such vital services are not normally available. In other words, services that are vital to a modern urban community are not vital in a traditional rural society. Only in modern rural societies that are fully integrated into urban society through the market and shared public utilities would such services be regarded as vital. The seasonal and even weekly economic rhythm of a traditional rural society is far different from a modern industrial society. Traditional rural societies are not characterized by an extensive, even life-sustaining, division of labor.

The economy of Israel was not highly integrated. In the cities, civil rulers were influenced heavily by the Levites. Profit-seeking activities on the sabbath would have been difficult in cities whose civil rulers were highly influenced by sabbath law-enforcing priests. The cities of ancient Israel did not become dependent on a market order characterized by a high division of labor. I am arguing that God’s sabbath requirements necessarily prohibited the creation of such an interde-
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*pendent society.* It is my contention that the annulment of the Old Testament sabbath laws by Jesus Christ was a necessary (though not sufficient) precursor to modern civilization.

If strict sabbatarians believe that I am incorrect in this conclusion, then they have an obligation to show how the authorities today would be able to differentiate between what constitutes an illegitimate sabbath violation and one that is acceptable. It should be clear that the enforcement of strict sabbath legislation in a traditional agricultural society will produce economic effects far different from those produced by such enforcement in a modern industrial economy. Because the effects are different, shouldn’t the penalties be different? But the Old Testament did not offer any alternative penalties. It required execution of all sabbath violators – no “ifs, ands, or buts.”

Did the Mosaic law implicitly allow the authorities to redefine a sabbath violation in terms of social settings? Did an act of sabbatical defiance in a rural society become acceptable behavior in an urban setting because of its differing economic effects? Is an act that seems to be visibly (physiologically) the same, but that produces different consequences in different environments, really the same act? Or is it different? And if the act is different, should it be redefined, even though physiologically it is the same act?

If the Mosaic law did implicitly allow the authorities to redefine sabbath violations as non-violations, according to differing economic effects, then what are the distinguishing criteria that officials, whether ecclesiastical or civil, should adopt in order to determine which acts are legitimate, under which circumstances, and where? On the other hand, if the Mosaic law never did permit such redefinitions of a sabbath violation – and I do not believe that it did – then how could the Old Testament economy (meaning the Old Testament system as well as the Old Testament economic order) ever have progressed into the modern industrial West? (For more detailed arguments along these lines, see below: “Mass Production and International Trade.”)
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II. New Testament Lord’s Day

The various New Testament accounts of Christ’s activities on the Hebrew sabbath provide us with evidence concerning the true nature of the Old Testament sabbath. Works of healing were basic to that sabbath, not as exceptional acts, but as acts that were integral to sabbath observance. Christ healed the withered hand of one man on the sabbath (Matt. 12:10–13). He also healed the crippled man who had been waiting for healing near the pool of Bethesda. Again, this was on the sabbath (John 5:1–17). He replied to those Jews who were critical of His action: “My father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). They were to give rest. His general principle was this: “The son of man is Lord even of the sabbath” (Matt. 12:8). Again, “It is lawful to do well on the sabbath days” (Matt. 12:12b). (The King James English conveys the wrong message here. The Greek word is better translated to “do good,” not “do well.”

What is meant by Christ’s use of the word “work” in John 5:17? Work as a charitable service is in view, not work in one’s profit-seeking vocation. The Old Testament sabbath was a break from the ordinary routine of profit-seeking labor. Those activities associated with a man’s income-producing occupation were to be avoided.

Blameless Profanation

Nevertheless, there were exceptions to this rule. The obvious Old

Testament exception was the routine labor of a priest. Christ replied to His critics: “Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless” (Matt. 12:5). We are not told specifically which activities of the priests profaned the sabbath. They had to sacrifice two yearling lambs every sabbath, along with meal and drink offerings. Also, they had to maintain continual burnt offerings (Num. 28:9–10). Jesus said that they actually profaned the sabbath. This is a strong word to use. It could also be translated “desecrate.” They violated the requirements of the sabbath in the temple itself. Nevertheless, they were held blameless before God. The importance of their labor in the sight of God made them blameless. They were following a higher command. They were offering the blood sacrifices that were required by God to cover the sins of His people.

The context of Jesus’ remarks on the profaning of the sabbath is important. He and His disciples had been criticized for having walked through fields on the sabbath, plucking grain to eat. This was not theft, according to Old Testament law; neighbors had legal access to a handful of the fruit of the ground (Deut. 23:24–25). Jesus was not criticized for having picked the grain. He was criticized for having taken it on the sabbath (Matt. 12:1–2).

What was Christ’s answer? He pointed to David’s taking of the showbread from the temple on the sabbath (Matt. 12:3–4). Here was a far more culpable act, for it was not lawful for David or his followers to eat the showbread, because it was reserved for the priests.

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(v. 4). The priest himself had suggested that David take the hallowed bread (I Sam. 21:21–24). Yet God commanded that this showbread be set before Him at all times (Ex. 25:30; Num. 4:7). But the needs of men were more important in this instance, a fact recognized by the priest. On the one hand, the priest had to offer sacrifices. On the other hand, David had to flee from the wrath of Saul. Both requirements were cases of necessity. But the priest told David to eat the showbread. How, then, could the priests of Jesus’ day legitimately criticize Him?

Jesus’ healing of the man with the withered hand was a work of mercy. Traditional Christian sabbatarianism has always made exceptions of these two works, necessity and mercy. But necessity and mercy impose even greater pressures on men’s actions than merely offering exceptions to the sabbath requirement against labor. Necessity and mercy require positive action. This is acknowledged by the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), a pro-sabbatarian document, which forbids men to think “about their worldly employments and recreations,” and requires them to take up “the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.”

The priests of the Old Testament profaned the sabbath, yet they were blameless. The office of priest, coupled with a mandatory assignment from God, permitted the profaning of the sabbath. Indeed, it required it. Yet David was not a priest, nor were his men. This points to the truth of Christ’s words, that the “Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day” (Matt. 12:8). In His incarnation, as the son of man, Christ ruled the sabbath. The account in Mark is even clearer: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (2:27–28). When human life and health are at stake, the sabbath may be

8. Westminster Confession of Faith, XXI: VIII.
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profaned without blame. It must be profaned. When an assignment by God to a priest is in question, the sabbath may be profaned without blame. Again, it must be profaned. But then we face some very difficult questions: How can we tell when human health and life are at stake? Who is the true priest? What is a God-given assignment?

A. Transformation: The Lord’s Day

In the New Testament, the first day of the week is called the Lord’s day (Rev. 1:10), but it is never called the sabbath. Unquestionably, there was a shift from the seventh day of the week to the first. The evidence also points to a shift from sundown-to-sundown celebration to a sunrise-to-sunrise celebration.9 These are very important changes. They involve a radical break with the Hebrew sabbath. F. N. Lee, in his defense of the New Testament sabbath, argues explicitly that the entire system of Mosaic sabbaths and holy days was abolished by Christ. He cites Paul’s epistle to the Colossians: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [days]” (2:16). (The last word, “days,” was added by the King James translators; it should read simply, “sabbaths.”) Lee concludes:

Now these ceremonial sabbaths, listed in Leviticus 23 together with the Israelite Sinaitic weekly sabbath, are all called “feasts” of holy convocation or “holy days”; and all involve the keeping of a “sabbath” day or a “day of holy convocation” on which “no servile work is to be done,” or a “day of solemn rest.” They were all a shadow of the things to come, namely the benefits of the New Testament in Christ; and they were all blotted out and nailed to His

9. See Appendix B.
cross. . . . So Paul means exactly what he says. It is useless to argue (as S.D. Adventists do) that St. Paul here means the ceremonial sabbaths by his words “or the sabbath (days),” for St. Paul has just a few words beforehand (in the very same verse) dealt with such ceremonial sabbaths under the blanket term “holy day” – the same term (heortai) used in the Septuagint of Lev. 23 to refer to all the (Sinaitic) sabbaths – both the ceremonial sabbaths and the “weekly” sabbath of Israel, Lev. 23:2–3. . . . If it is argued that Paul means (only) the ceremonial sabbaths in Col. 2:16 where he refers to “the sabbath day(s),” then which days is he referring to under the blanket term “holy days” just mentioned previously in the very same verse? The two can hardly be synonymous, for Paul would then be repeating himself, saying in effect: “Let no man therefore judge you . . . in respect of a ceremonial sabbath or a new moon or a ceremonial sabbath,” when the latter phrase would simply be idle repetition. 10

Lee argues that the day of rest, or sabbath, is part of God’s moral law, and therefore it is still in effect. But the Old Testament sabbath is gone. In other words, the theological justification for switching to the first day of the week is that the older sabbath is absolutely abolished, and a new one is morally binding. There was a total break at Calvary with the Mosaic law’s sabbath.

There seems to be no exegetical way to escape Lee’s treatment of Colossians 2:16. Paul was not speaking of ceremonial sabbaths, but the Mosaic sabbath. It is gone forever. The fact that the church celebrates a new day should testify to this theological fact. But then a crucial question has to be answered: How much of the Mosaic legislation has been abolished along with the day of the week and the hours of the day? A clean break has been established with respect to the day of the week. On what basis, then, can the church recommend that the

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Old Testament sabbath law be enforced by the civil government? The testimony of almost 2,000 years of church history provides at least a partial answer: The church has not committed itself to a full-scale revival of the Mosaic sabbath legislation.

The principle of interpretation that is supposed to govern Christian orthodoxy is that Christ came to establish, confirm, and declare the Old Testament law. Only if we find an explicit abandonment of an Old Testament law in the New Testament, because of the historic fulfillment of the Old Testament shadow, can we legitimately abandon a detail of the Mosaic law. But modern Christians reject this principle of interpretation, so they tend to make things up as they go along. Sometimes they just go along, not bothering to make things up.

In the case of the Mosaic sabbath, Paul provides us with full justification for just this sort of abandonment. We no longer enforce the Mosaic provisions, because the Mosaic sabbath ended at Calvary. We have a new day of rest, and we dare not arbitrarily select some of the Old Testament sabbath definitions, restraints, and legal sanctions without taking them all. But we have no exegetical grounds for taking them all, since the very change in the day of celebration, not to mention Paul’s explicit teaching regarding the locus of responsibility for enforcement (the conscience), testifies to the break with the past.

The biblical account of what constitutes a week unquestionably establishes as definitive six days of work and a day of rest or feasting. God’s originally creative week was a six-one pattern, while Adam’s subordinately re-creative week was supposed to be a one-six pattern. Adam’s rebellion led to a curse: God’s imposition on man of a God-imitating six-one pattern, with rest to come only at the end of man’s week.

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Jesus Christ, by redeeming His people, annulled the six-one pattern of the cursed week. He did not restore the original (pre-Fall) pattern of one-six, because He changed the day on which the Lord’s day is celebrated to the day after the Hebrew sabbath – what Christian commentators for at least 1,800 years have called the eighth day. Therefore, He established a one-six-one pattern – rest, work, and judgment. This judgment comes on the day of the Lord, the archetypal Lord’s day. This is why the Lord’s day is celebrated in New Testament times on the day following the Hebrews’ seventh-day sabbath. It points to the final judgment and the inauguration of a new week, the full manifestation of the New Heaven and the New Earth. The first day of redeemed man’s week is now the eighth day after the initiation of God’s work, not the seventh day after. It represents a re-creation, a new week that re-establishes a one-six pattern, but that also implies the one-six-one pattern as a herald of the total regeneration and re-creation of all things. The shift to the eighth day testifies to Christ’s new creation.

Conscience: The New Locus of Enforcement

Paul was concerned with the souls and consciences of his readers. The Colossians passage mentions meat, drink, holy days, and sabbaths. Paul was doing his best to convince his readers that there had been a definitive break from Old Testament law with respect to these four features of Hebrew life. He knew that Judaizers were criticizing the Christian Hebrews for their abandonment of these external tests of faith, and he did not want his readers to feel guilty. No one could legitimately judge them with respect to these four issues. No one could turn to the Mosaic law and confront them with the Mosaic rules, instructions, and regulations regarding meat, drink, holy days,
and sabbaths. This did not mean that the old rules had been evil. It meant that the Judaizers had no right to criticize Christians for no longer adhering to the old forms. New applications of the Old Testament’s general principles in these four areas are now binding in New Testament times.

Paul repeated this teaching to the church at Rome. In Romans 14, Paul covers much the same ground. Those who are weak in the faith are not to be distressed by rigid theological criticism. Paul observes that there are debates within the churches concerning the proper foods and the proper holy days. Judgment of each other should not go on in these areas of disputation. Men must decide for themselves which foods to eat or which days to celebrate.

For one believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another.
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any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way (Rom. 14:2–13). 12

The Lord’s day, the first day of the week, has been set apart by Christ for His church as a day of worship, fellowship, and communion. This, above all, is the church’s testimony to the day of rest. Members are required to attend a worship service with their fellow believers. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is . . .” (Heb. 10:24–25a). We must not forsake other members. We are to help each other.

Some members may view all days the same. So be it. Good men have taken this position historically. Zwingli was one of them. 13 But Zwingli attended church on Sunday, because he would not forsake the brethren. The pattern of one day in seven for rest from one’s normal labors is formalized in the worship services themselves. We need not badger each other about the specifics of Old Testament law regarding the Lord’s day, Paul said, because no one should judge another on this matter. Participation in the required church service or fellowship, which has been on the first day of the week ever since the day of Christ’s resurrection, is sufficient testimony.

Worship: A New Testament Emphasis

Perhaps strict sabbatarians are unwilling to take Paul’s words at


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face value. Yet the ironic aspect of strict sabbatarianism is this: Without the definitive break with the Mosaic sabbath, the sabbatarian’s emphasis on Sunday worship reduces his case’s biblical support. How can the sabbatarian consistently argue for full continuity of the Lord’s day with the Old Testament sabbath, when the Old Testament sabbath was primarily a day of rest rather than a day of worship? The New Testament Lord’s day focuses on the worship requirements, not the rest requirements.

The Old Testament sabbath was primarily a day of rest, of cessation from profit-seeking labor. Sabbath worship, if it is mentioned at all, is only mentioned indirectly (Lev. 23:3). There were no prohibitions against recreation. There were only prohibitions against labor. The modern sabbatarian’s emphasis on the Lord’s day primarily as a day of worship must be drawn from a handful of references in the New Testament that show that the church met on resurrection day to worship. It is possible to make a case against doing “thy pleasure” on the sabbath by appealing to the Old Testament, but it is not possible to make a case for the Lord’s day as a day primarily devoted to worship by appealing to the Old Testament.

To define the sabbath primarily in terms of corporate worship, rather than primarily as a day on which no commercial trade is permitted, raises some exceedingly difficult questions for strict sabbatarians. First, if honoring the first day of the week requires that sabbath violations be prohibited by civil law, then the law is being enforced on all people in a particular society. If this is what the New Testament requires, then any sabbath-enforcing society is thereby admitted to be covenanted under God. This is an inescapable relationship: State-enforced sabbath laws and the existence of a covenant. There are many defenders of various sabbath laws today who categorically deny that any New Testament society is ever covenanted under God in the way Mosaic Israel was – a viewpoint not shared by seventeenth-century Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians. This is especially true in
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the American South, where “blue laws” that prohibit certain businesses from operating on Sunday, or that prohibit certain products from being sold in supermarkets on Sunday, are voted into law time after time by covenant-denying Southern Baptists, Methodists, and Church of Christ members. I cannot explain this; I only report it.

Second, there is the problem of the Lord’s day as primarily a day of worship. If the Old Testament’s sabbath-enforcing civil law is still binding in New Testament times, and if the Lord’s day is understood as predominantly a day of worship (as the Westminster Confession and most Calvinistic pastors assert), then the civil magistrate ought to enforce compulsory worship on all members of a (covenanted) society upon threat of death.

The New England Puritans went at least part of the way down this path. They legislated compulsory worship, and they banished sabbath violators from Massachusetts and Connecticut in the early years. Even this half-hearted attempt to imitate the Old Testament only lasted a few years. There were more and more church absentees, until by the middle of the seventeenth century, the churches of New England could not have held the whole population, had everyone decided to visit on some Sunday morning. Eventually, “blue laws” replaced the threat of banishment for failure to attend church in New England.

Modern sabbatarians have refused to become consistent. They do not pressure the civil government to establish a death penalty for

14. Carl Bridenbaugh writes: “A consideration of the number and seating capacities of village meeting houses and churches demonstrates the sheer physical impossibility of crowding the entire village populations into their houses of worship. At no time after 1650 does it seem possible for the churches of Boston to have contained anywhere near a majority of the inhabitants; in 1690 little more than a quarter of them could have attended church simultaneously had they been so disposed.” Bridenbaugh, Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625–1725 (New York: Capricorn, [1938] 1964), p. 106.
Lord’s day desecrations, and they certainly avoid the obvious conclusion concerning the Lord’s day as a day of worship, namely, compulsory church attendance, enforced by the civil government.

The New Testament Church’s Celebration

What Paul was asserting should be clear to anyone who reads Romans 14. Not only do those outside the church have varying opinions concerning a day of rest, or special holidays; even those inside the church have varying opinions. We see in the twenty-first century that the same situation still exists. The debates went on during the Protestant Reformation, too. The Old Testament sabbath laws were absolute in the sanction involved – the death penalty – and they were negative in effect. They told men what not to do, one day in seven. The New Testament’s emphasis shifted on the day of resurrection. The first day of the week is now a day of communion between God and His church. It involves a positive, loving corporate celebration. It involves preaching (Acts 20:7–12), singing (Matt. 26:30; Col. 3:16), praying (1 Cor. 14:15), and a communion feast (1 Cor. 11).

The testimony of the church is that there is indeed a very special day of celebration, of feasting and sharing the blessings of salvation. If the early church in first-century Israel had wanted rest more than the experience of true communion, it would have met for communion on the Hebrew sabbath, because the Roman authorities acknowledged the right of the priests to require a day of rest. But the early church broke with rest on the first day of the week in order to celebrate communion on the evening of that first day. They rested on the Hebrew sabbath, worked on the Lord’s day, and gathered together in the evening. They rested – assuming they did rest, which seems reasonable – on a day different from the day of worship, at least in Israel. In gentile


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cities in the Roman Empire, they probably could not rest even one day in seven. But they celebrated on Sunday evening after work.\textsuperscript{15} The historical circumstances of the early church necessitated compromises with the sabbath principle. Had there been no break from the Old Testament requirement of a full day of rest one day in seven, the church would have been bottled up in Israel, because the Roman Empire did not honor the rest principle. Had the legal obligation of resting on the sabbath been the binding obligation, then the early church, dwelling in Israel, would have had to take two days off: the Hebrews’ day (legally binding) and the Lord’s day (religiously binding). But this would have violated the more important pattern of one day of rest and six days of labor.\textsuperscript{16} The church, in short, was forced to break with the Hebrew sabbath. God, in His grace, abolished the Hebrew sabbath on the day of resurrection, so that church members could rest on the seventh day (Saturday) and celebrate on the evening of the first day, which was a working day in Israel. They could do this in good conscience precisely because they knew that God honored their faith. Like the priests who sacrificed on the sabbath, profaning it blamelessly, the early Christians worked on the Lord’s day, profaning it, but this was not held against them.

This is not to say that the ideal situation is not the Lord’s day as a day of rest and worship, universally recognized, universally respected, except in cases of emergency or merciful labor. But Paul was careful to warn the church at Rome that it should not burden its new mem-

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\textsuperscript{15} “It is certain that the eucharist was at first an evening meal. The name (\textit{deipnon}) implies this.” Wilfrid Stott, in Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, \textit{The Christian Sunday: A Biblical and Historical Study} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 89.

\textsuperscript{16} I am defining “merciful labor” as that activity which gives rest to others, both animals and humans. I argue in this appendix that it is morally and legally valid to sell merciful labor on the Lord’s day.
bers with rigorous regulations concerning a special day of the week. Yes, they were to commune together. But whatever they did on the Lord’s day — and in Rome, most of them must have worked — they were to do it in faith. The sabbath ideal is to grow out of respect for the principle of resurrection, the basis of man’s release from sin and eternal death. The institutional church sets the pattern with its special day of worship, which can be made binding on members (Heb. 10: 25). But it cannot legitimately force its members to honor the one-six pattern of rest. That pattern is built into Christ’s kingdom, but Paul makes it clear that the conscience is to guide men to this conclusion, not compulsion. In fact, he was writing against one man’s criticizing another — moral compulsion. If moral compulsion is forbidden, then how much more ecclesiastical compulsion? And how much more than this, compulsion by the civil government?

The Early Church Fathers on Rest vs. Worship

This distinction between Sabbath rest and Lord’s day worship was unquestionably made by the early church fathers. Until the fourth century, church fathers generally condemned the “idleness” of the Jewish sabbath, and commanded church members to devote Sunday to worship and acts of mercy. Bauckham comments: “For Tertullian, the meaning of the Sabbath commandment for Christians was ‘that we still more ought to observe a sabbath from all servile work always, and not only every seventh day, but through all time.’” It is entirely clear that for all these writers the literal commandment to rest one day in seven was a temporary ordinance for Israel alone. The Christian fulfills the commandment by devoting all his time to God. The

17. Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, ch. IV.
rationale for this interpretation depended, of course, on a wholly ‘religious’ understanding of the commandment; no writer of the period betrays any thought of its being a provision for needed physical rest. The Jewish form of observance was therefore ‘idleness.’ The commandment was really about devotion to God. . . . This was the basic principle from which the Fathers argued that literal Sabbath observance was not required of Christians.”

In short, “It must be stressed that, outside Jewish Christianity, all second-century references to the Sabbath commandment either endorse the metaphorical interpretation or reject the literal interpretation as Judaistic or do both.” The church fathers were so adamant about this distinction that they condemned mere abstention from normal work as idle. “The Fathers could see no value in inactivity and hardly ever recognized in the Sabbath commandment provision for necessary physical relaxation.” Bauckham cites the Syriac Didascalia (c. 250?): “Daily and hourly, whenever you are not in church, devote yourselves to your work.”

In the fourth century, Christians often began to imitate Jewish customs. Again, citing Bauckham: “This Judaizing tendency was a grass roots tendency that the authorities of the church opposed. The Council of Laodicea (A.D. 380), for example, legislated against a series of Judaizing practices including resting on the Sabbath (canon 29). It seems that while the popular tendency was to imitate the Jewish practice, the authorities often responded by insisting on a specifically

19. Ibid., p. 269.
20. Ibid., p. 282.
21. Ibid., p. 286.
Christian kind of Sabbath observance sharply distinguished from the Jewish kind. The Sabbath was not to be observed in ‘idleness,’ imitating the Jews, but as a day of Christian worship when the New Testament Scriptures were read and as a commemoration of God’s creation of the world through Christ.\textsuperscript{22} It was Constantine, in 321, who first legislated Sunday rest. He specified Sunday as “the most honourable day of the Sun.” He may have done so to promote sun worship, as well as to placate Christians.\textsuperscript{23} As soon as the State got involved in sabbath legislation, there was theological confusion and compromise.

**B. Civil Government**

What is the proper “sabbatarian” role today of the civil government? One very distinct possibility is this: The civil government should declare null and void any labor contract that requires a person to work seven days a week as a condition of employment. This is a contract against conscience, comparable to requiring a woman to commit illicit sexual acts as a condition of employment. Businesses would be compelled to honor the desires of employees to take one day off per week – and that day would probably be the first day of the week. The compulsion here is essentially negative: The State may prohibit economic coercion against people’s consciences, when their consciences are based on an explicit statement of the Word of God.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 261–62.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp. 280–81.

\textsuperscript{24} In the summer of 1985, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned state legislation that made it illegal for employers to compel individuals to work on Sunday as a condition of employment. Thus, the Supreme Court has made illegal the one type
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The Bible is quite explicit about resting from our occupations one day in seven. Nevertheless, Paul acknowledges that some men may not see this, and that apart from required church attendance, they should not be molested or made to feel guilty.

The Bible teaches us about Christian maturity. The Old Testament’s death penalty for sabbath violators was stark and entirely negative. Men were not to be governed primarily by conscience in questions regarding the sabbath. They were to be governed by fear. They were told what could not be done. They were treated as children. With the coming of Christ and the victory He sustained at Calvary, His people have been given positive requirements concerning worship on His day. They are to meet corporately to celebrate and worship (as they may have been required to do in the Old Testament: Lev. 23:3). Overnight, the disciples were given a new vision. Overnight, the compulsion of the civil government regarding the Lord’s day ended. Overnight, the sabbath became primarily a positive requirement of corporate worship, without the civil penalty of execution for working on the sabbath. Overnight, the question of a day of rest on the Lord’s day became a matter of conscience. It had to; the Jewish leaders were not about to make the Christian equivalent of the sabbath compulsory as a day of rest.

As the theological insight of men improves over time, they will come to recognize the implications of God’s creation week (six-one) and covenant man’s re-creative week (one-six). They will recognize the necessity of a day of rest – a moral, physical, and economic necessity. When they do, they will make economic decisions and social decisions that will indirectly pressure recalcitrants into honoring the Lord’s day. For instance, if Christians refuse to go out to shop on Sunday, there will be no economic incentive to keep stores open on of Lord’s day legislation that the New Testament implicitly sanctions.
Sunday, except to sell to non-Christians. If most people in a society are eventually converted, or at least honor the Lord’s day externally, then there will be almost no economic incentive to remain open on Sunday. But a person’s conscience is the guide in New Testament times, not civil compulsion.

Because the day of the Lord is now a day of communion, Christians will try to see to it that they get time off for Sunday worship whenever possible. They will not work as professional football players. They will not pay money to go to professional football games. They will not watch professional football games on television, nor will they buy the products advertised during Sunday sports events – at least, not because they are advertised during Sunday sports events. Christians will increasingly honor that day as a day of worship for almost all, and therefore of a day of cessation of income-producing labor for almost all. The new Christian sabbath – cessation from normal work – is a byproduct of worship on the Lord’s day. Christians will do their best to schedule their jobs to give themselves a day of rest. As more and more people do this, more and more occupations will find it economically profitable to honor the desires of their maturing Christian employees. Sunday will become most people’s day of rest, including professional athletes. Only those occupations that serve the needs of resting people – public utilities, emergency services, and restaurants (where wives get a break from the normal work week) – will still be profitable on Sunday.

The State in New Testament times is to leave men free to act positively; its role is to suppress lawless acts of violence and fraud. It is not to make men positively good; it is to restrain them from committing evil, public acts. When the God-revealed emphasis of the sabbath changed from a day of no work to a day on which God mandates corporate worship, the State’s role also changed. I am not arguing here that there was unquestionably no public, corporate aspect of sabbath-worship in the Old Testament, but only that what-
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ever the nature of this corporate worship may have been, the specifics of such worship services did not receive any attention in the Old Testament. There is no mention of tithes being collected on sabbath-day meetings, or psalms being sung, or a communion meal being shared, or lectures from a Levite. Such events may have taken place, but there is no direct evidence. In the New Testament, such events are mentioned as taking place in corporate worship on the Lord’s day. Thus, I am arguing that there is a change of emphasis in the New Testament, and the specifics of biblical revelation testify to this change. Conscience now is to lead men in the decision to rest on the first day of the week or another day, or not rest at all. The State is not to force men to decide. The State is not to be trusted to tell men to take positive steps toward righteousness, such as worship. If God tells men to do something positive (such as worship Him publicly on a particular day and in specific ways), the State must remove itself from the arena of human decision. This is not because societies are not supposed to be formally covenanted to God, but because they are.

Admitted Changes

The church has admitted the following changes in the day of rest: (1) the seventh day to first (eighth) day; (2) the abandonment of sundown-to-sundown timing; and (3) the abolition of the death penalty imposed by the civil government. A fourth change may be involved in the addition of required church attendance (communion and worship) to what was previously primarily a day of rest. (This was not a major change if Leviticus 23:3 did involve weekly public worship.) Unquestionably, the church has modified its concept of what constitutes legitimate labor, which we will consider in greater detail in Section C.
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These alterations are of monumental importance. They represent a sharp break with the Mosaic law. To maintain that such modifications are theologically valid, the church needs New Testament evidence of an announced break. It needs New Testament revelation that specifies that such a discontinuous transformation has been announced by God through His prophets. If the church is unwilling to take seriously the radical break announced by Paul in Colossians and Romans – the abolition of the Mosaic sabbath – then it has only a few scattered references to first-day worship to defend its position. Yet the church has hesitated to use these Pauline teachings to justify the break, because they are so radical in nature. Protestant churches that have clung to at least a watered-down version of the Puritan sabbath – itself a watered-down version of the Mosaic sabbath, because the Puritans did not execute Lord’s day violators – have used the Old Testament passages as guides for modern Lord’s day-keeping. They have not wanted to admit that such a sharp break with the Mosaic sabbath has been announced, because the New Testament offers no specific guidelines for rest on the Lord’s day. Furthermore, the New Testament spells out the requirement of weekly corporate worship, and it mentions a communion meal, celebrated in the evening.

Churches have refused to admit that the kind of rest we choose for the Lord’s day is a matter of conscience discipline rather than church discipline. They have not been content to point to the sabbath of Genesis 2:2–3 as a creation sabbath, the one-six pattern for man’s week. They have selectively and arbitrarily quoted some aspects of the Mosaic sabbath – but always without the death penalty – as if there were exegetical justification for part of the Mosaic law to be brought into the New Testament era, but not the required Mosaic sanction against sabbath desecration. They often call for some kind of sanctions by the civil government – sanctions never mentioned or contemplated in the Mosaic law – but not the death penalty, which is the civil sanction specifically required by the Mosaic law. To say that
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the interpretational principles of modern sabbatarian exegetes are muddled is putting it mildly. It is another case of *smorgasbord religion*: taking this or that aspect of biblical revelation, while leaving others alone, all according to personal taste, familiarity, “reasonableness,” and church tradition.

This is not to say that all Mosaic guidelines to what we should not be doing on the day of rest are permanently abolished. The guidelines are there: avoidance of household chores, no profit-seeking commercial ventures, and no idle talk. *It is not the guidelines that have been abolished; it is the locus of the sanctioning agency that has changed.* The conscience, not the civil government, is the earthly locus of Lord’s day enforcement in New Testament times. It is the *individual conscience*, not the institutional church, that makes the decision concerning what constitutes idle talk, or a postponable household chore, or the lawful limits of recreation. Pressure can come from sermons, or from patient instruction from the elders. Christians are to be educated concerning the Lord’s day principle. They are not to be coerced.

**No Compulsion**

Paul warns us that in the area of diet and the Lord’s day, different views exist. Discussions about the Lord’s day are not to resort to compulsion, social or institutional, in order to settle the issues. Ostracism is not valid. But refusing on Sunday to eat in a restaurant operated by a “Lord’s day-violator” is valid, because the potential meal-buyer has decided that such activities as the purchase of a meal on the Lord’s day are against his conscience. He is not seeking to punish the “Lord’s day violator”; he is seeking to do the Lord’s work in his own life.
The church should not be fearful of the weaknesses of human conscience in the areas of the Lord’s day and diet. (Actually, the church is quite willing to allow personal choice in the case of diet, but it resists the authority of conscience in the question of the Lord’s day.) If the church is to avoid bothering people in these two areas of life, how much more the civil government! Furthermore, it is incorrect to argue that because the State can legitimately establish pure food and drug standards, it (or the church) can therefore legitimately establish sabbath restrictions. Commentators should not make the mistake of equating restrictions against eating certain ritually prohibited foods with the question of restrictions against the sale of chemically or biologically adulterated food. The State is empowered to restrict the sale of adulterated, dangerous products, not on the basis of the dietary laws, but on the basis of the quarantine (Lev. 13, 14); a negative sanction against violence – namely, the violence of microbes or poisons against unsuspecting buyers. The State may not tell people what they must eat, but only what they must not sell, because of injuries that such adulterated food can produce in the victims – injuries that can be proven in a court of law to have resulted from the product in question.

The New Testament does mark off certain areas of life and calls them, in effect, either things indifferent or things that are not a matter of compulsion. A thing indifferent, for example, is circumcision. “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God” (I Cor. 7:19). Yet it is possible to make a case against circumcision, since the resurrection of Christ has made unnecessary the flow of blood in New Testament times: the sacrifices, the firstborn offerings (eighth-day separation from the dams), and

circumcisions (the eighth-day marring of male infants). But Paul does not ask us to make an issue of circumcision or noncircumcision. He wants us to avoid confrontations in this area. The confrontations are divisive in this area, and not worth the trouble they cause. If a medical case were straightforward in favoring circumcision, which it was not in the late twentieth century, the question of circumcision could become important again, but not for narrowly theological reasons. The same is true of diet. Most Christians understand this in the case of circumcision and diet. They do not understand it in the case of the Lord’s day. They refuse to take Paul’s words literally in Romans 14:5.

It must also be pointed out that we are dealing here with specific injunctions in the New Testament. The proper exegetical principle is this: Mosaic law is still to be enforced, by the church or the State or both, unless there is a specific injunction to the contrary in the New Testament. To place the locus of enforcement concerning Lord’s day violations in the human conscience is not a general New Testament principle of social, political, or legal action with respect to Old Testament laws and sanctions. The Bible does not call for a society operated in terms of man-invented sanctions. The reign of conscience is not to become the reign of anarchy. The Bible does not establish anti-

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nomianism as a New Testament principle. But in certain specified instances, New Testament writers have removed the locus of enforcement from the church and State, placing it in the conscience. There are not many of these instances, but the Lord’s day appears to be one of them.

C. Economic Implications of the Lord’s Day

We know that the man caught gathering sticks on the sabbath was tried by God and executed at God’s direct command (Num. 15:32–36). This was what was required by Exodus 35:3. The death penalty was indissolubly integral to the Mosaic laws governing the sabbath. The fact that the church historically has acted as though the death penalty has been officially removed by God from His law testifies to the church’s confusion concerning biblical exegesis and the rule of God’s law. Those who proclaim their allegiance to the Mosaic view of the sabbath must come to grips with the Numbers 15 passage. They must integrate this passage into their understanding of society and economics. I am limiting my enquiry to the question of economics, although the Mosaic sabbath affected far more than just the realm of economics. I here reproduce (with some minor modifications) a section from my essay on the sabbath that was first published in R. J. Rushdoony’s Institutes of Biblical Law (pp. 831–36).

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The gathering of sticks is a fine example of Hebrew case law as applied in the light of a general requirement of the Decalogue. It shows, perhaps, better than any other instance, the economic implications of the fourth commandment for the Hebrew nation. Consider the
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economic implications. What was involved in the gathering of sticks? Sticks could be used for at least four purposes:

1. **Heating** the home
2. **Lighting** the home
3. **Cooking** the meals
4. **Selling** the sticks for uses 1–3

As far as actual use of sticks was concerned, the case-law application in Numbers 15 applied more to the daily life of Hebrew women than it did to the men of the family. It is more often the man and his work that are the focus of modern sabbatarian concern, but this was not necessarily the case in a rural, pre-industrial community. The gathering of sticks was more likely to be the task of children; women were to use the sticks for household tasks, once gathered. Men were to reap the benefits of both the gathering and actual use of the sticks, but in general they would not have much to do with the actual handling of sticks. There could be a few exceptions, of course, but one exception seems to be far more likely, namely, that of the professional stick-gatherer. His work would be most in demand on the sabbath, precisely the day on which the prohibition against work was enforced. A woman who failed to gather sticks earlier in the week could buy some from a professional.

We are not told that the man in Numbers 15 was such a professional, but the severity of the punishment clearly would have made it far more dangerous for such a class of professionals to have come into existence. There was a need for a harsh penalty, men and women being what they are. There is always a delight in violating God’s commandments if one is a sinner; if that violation also brings with it certain superficial benefits above and beyond the mere pleasure of defiance, so much the better. Sabbath prohibitions involved heavy costs for the obedient; enforcement of the sabbath required stiff pen-
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alties, thus burdening violators with high costs in the form of high risk.

What were the costs of the sabbath? For the man, it was the forfeiture of all income – monetary (less likely in a rural society), psychological, or physical property – for that day. But women also paid. They had to gather all sticks earlier in the week. This meant more work during the week, either in longer days, or by increasing the intensity of the working day, or both. Had the working day not been lengthened or intensified, then other tasks that it was desirable to accomplish would have to have been foregone, and that, as any wife knows, also involves costs (especially if a husband or a mother-in-law notices the failure in question). There would always be a temptation to forgo the gathering of sticks during the week, especially if a professional would come by with a load of wood on the sabbath for a reasonably cheap price. If his price was less than the woman’s estimation of the costs involved in gathering the wood earlier in the week, she would set aside funds for a sabbath transaction.

By imposing a rigorous and permanent form of punishment on the violator – death by stoning – the community was able to force up the price of the sticks; risks would be so high that few professionals could survive. How many women could or would pay the costs? It would be cheaper to buy them earlier or to gather them earlier in the week. Stick-gathering was made an unlikely source of profitable employment on the sabbath. Because the market for sticks on the sabbath was restricted because of the high prices for the sticks (due to the risks involved), the opportunities for temptation were thereby reduced to a minimum. It did not pay many people, net after deduction of risk expenses, to violate the sabbath, and it was very expensive to hire someone to violate it.

To the degree that the penalties are weakened in a case like this, to that degree it becomes a matter of conscience as to whether or not someone violates the sabbath or pays someone else to do it. Cons-
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cience then stands without the protection of higher economic costs to keep a man acting in a holy fashion. In the mid-twentieth century, rest on Sunday is based primarily on Christian tradition and labor union negotiations; where these restraints are absent, conscience is the only barrier against the violation of the Old Testament application of the sabbath principle. Men who value leisure less than other forms of income will tend to seek out employment on the sabbath.

Hiring Others to Sin for Us

If we accept the principle that it is wrong for us to hire another person to commit a crime for our benefit and his profit, then certain implications follow. Sabbath violations were capital crimes. If strict sabbatarians regard Old Testament provisions as binding on Christians, then it is as wrong to hire a man to violate the sabbath as it is to hire someone from Murder, Inc. to kill a neighbor. The execution of the crime and the guilt of the hiring party are in both cases equal. Capital crimes are major ones. If the Hebrew sabbath is legally binding today, then its implications and applications are equally binding.

I have heard Christian people charge their fellow Christians with a violation of the “sabbath” (Lord’s day) because the latter have gone out to a restaurant to eat after church services are over. This violation supposedly also holds for those who purchase food in a supermarket on Sunday. Why should this be a violation? Clearly, only on the grounds that it is a violation of the Lord’s day to encourage another’s violation of the Lord’s day by paying him to remain open for business. If the standards of the Hebrew sabbath are still morally binding today, then entering a place of business on the Lord’s day is morally a capital crime, and an abomination in the sight of God. Therefore, pastors and elders must tell their flock to refrain from entering into
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27. I have worshipped in churches that sold books to worshippers on Sunday, but refused to accept payment until later in the week. To have taken money for the books, the pastors believed, would have violated the sabbath. But the book buyer incurred a debt. He had to pay off this debt later on. What is the difference between this transaction and the purchase of gasoline by means of a credit card? Sabbatarians recognize that credit card purchases are economic transactions, as surely as cash payment purchases are. They would prohibit credit card gasoline purchases on Sunday just as firmly as they would prohibit cash payment purchases. Again, Sabbatarians have not thought through the economic implications of the sabbath.

Buying Fuel

Let us pursue the charge against the “restauranteers” with rigor. Those same people who make the charge pride themselves on their Lord’s day observance because they do not go out to restaurants on the Lord’s day. They do not shop in supermarkets. They have stored up provisions to eat at home. Prior shopping is quite proper, if one is a sabbatarian, for it is of the very essence of Lord’s day-keeping that one store up provisions in advance of the Lord’s day. But the Old

27. I have worshipped in churches that sold books to worshippers on Sunday, but refused to accept payment until later in the week. To have taken money for the books, the pastors believed, would have violated the sabbath. But the book buyer incurred a debt. He had to pay off this debt later on. What is the difference between this transaction and the purchase of gasoline by means of a credit card? Sabbatarians recognize that credit card purchases are economic transactions, as surely as cash payment purchases are. They would prohibit credit card gasoline purchases on Sunday just as firmly as they would prohibit cash payment purchases. Again, Sabbatarians have not thought through the economic implications of the sabbath.
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Testament required more than the mere storing up of food. The passage we have referred to, Numbers 15, makes it explicit that not only food but the fuel was to be stored up in advance; fuel for heating the home, cooking the meals, and lighting the room had to be procured in advance. It was a capital offense in the eyes of a righteous and holy God to gather sticks – fuel – on His sabbath.

The modern Puritan-Scottish sabbatarian thinks that his is the way of the holy covenant of God simply because he buys his food early, and cooks it on Sunday, while he regards his brother in Christ as sinning because the latter eats at a restaurant on Sunday. But under the provisions of Numbers 15, both crimes appear to be equally subject to death, for both the restaurant-goer and the meal-cooker have paid specialized fuel producers to work on the Lord’s day. There is this difference, however: The man who enters the restaurant is not self-righteous about his supposed keeping of the Lord’s day, and he has made no charges against his fellow Christians. He would seem to have violated the sabbath provisions of Numbers 15, but that is the extent of his guilt. The modern sabbatarians I have met too often violate the Lord’s day and the commandment against gossip, or at least they indulge in the “judgment of the raised eyebrow and clicking tongue.” They neglect Christ’s warning: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what ye judge, ye shall be judged . . .” (Matt. 7:1, 2a).

The very architecture of our churches is a standing testimony to the unwillingness of contemporary Christians to accept the economic implications of the Lord’s day. We fill our buildings with all sorts of electrical appliances; we heat and cool the rooms to a comfortable 75 degrees, winter and summer. We often pride ourselves on the efficiency of modern technology, forgetting that people must go to work and operate the machines that provide the power – the fuel – for our gadgets. These workers are committing sabbatarian capital crimes each Sunday, and every Christian sabbatarian who uses these gadgets,
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apart from some legitimate emergency, implicitly sends people to hell every Sunday, morning and evening, as he sits in the comfort of his air-conditioned church. If the sabbatarian creeds are correct, then sabbatarians are weekly condemning others to the flames of eternal torment, just so that they can sit in 75-degree comfort.

Naturally, sabbatarians can always defend a 75-degree temperature in the name of “works of necessity.” Freezing churches would drive away unbelievers in winter; stifling churches would do so in the summer. Possibly this argument is legitimate, if this really is the reason we heat our churches. Or perhaps our bodies really could not stand what our Puritan forefathers went through to establish Reformed worship in America; perhaps we could not bear churches so cold that communion bread would sometimes freeze solid. Possibly we would die if our present technological comforts were to be taken away from us (as pessimists have asserted may be a prospect in the near future). But if mere comfort is our defense of our power-consuming central heating systems, then we are not giving much thought to our sabbatarian creeds. It has become altogether too fashionable to adapt the interpretation of the Lord’s day to each new technological breakthrough; sabbatarians cling religiously to standards written centuries ago, while violating the terms of those creeds regularly. It is schizophrenic. The wording of the creeds should be altered, or else sabbatarians should alter their easy acceptance of a radically non-sabbatarian technology.

McCheyne’s Accusations

This plea should not be regarded as something new. It was made by one of the strictest and most consistent sabbatarians in the history of the post-Reformation Protestant church, the Scotsman, Robert
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Murray McCheyne. He minced no words in his condemnation of his fellow Christians: “Do you not know, and all the sophistry of hell cannot disprove it, that the same God who said, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ said also, ‘Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy’? The murderer who is dragged to the gibbet, and the polished Sabbath-breaker are one in the sight of God.”28

Andrew Bonar has preserved McCheyne’s teachings on the sabbath question in his Memoirs of McCheyne, and any self-proclaimed strict sabbatarian would do well to ponder what McCheyne wrote. If the standards of Numbers 15 made no provision for exemptions of specific professions,29 and if these standards are still morally and legally binding in New Testament times, how can a man who proclaims the sabbath escape the thrust of his words? McCheyne saw clearly what the industrial revolution would mean. In 1841, he challenged the right of the railways to run on Sunday, but he was not followed by most of his sabbatarian countrymen in Scotland. They chose, as sabbatarians ever since have chosen, to turn their backs on the implications of their creed, while vainly proclaiming the moral validity of that creed. McCheyne has a word for those who today enjoy, having others work on the Lord’s day to provide them with fuel at reasonable prices: “Guilty men who, under Satan, are leading on the deep, dark phalanx of Sabbath-breakers, yours is a solemn position. You are robbers. You rob God of His holy day. You are murderers. You murder the souls of your servants. God said, ‘Thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy servant;’ but you compel your servants to break God’s law, and to sell their souls for gain. You are


29. I argue later in this appendix that there were probably exemptions in specific cases: “Rescheduling Worship,” pp. 367–73.
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Enforcement Should Begin at the Top

When the elders of the church begin at home to follow the sabbatarian standards of the Old Testament, and when they impose such standards on their recalcitrant wives who enjoy their stoves, their hot running water, and their air-conditioning systems, then non-sabbatarians will be impressed. Let them turn off their electrical appliances, or purchase 24-hour power generators (no “lighting fires,” please), or install solar-powered cells on their roofs, in order to provide the power. Let them turn off the natural gas, or else purchase butane in advance. Let them cease phoning their friends for “Christian fellowship,” so that the lines might be kept open for truly emergency calls. Let them stop using the public mails on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, so that mail carriers and sorters will not have to miss their


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observance of the Lord’s day. Let them, in short, shut their eyes to the offenses of others until the church, as a disciplinary force, begins to enforce more rigorous requirements on all the membership, starting at the top of the hierarchy and working down from there. Let all self-righteousness be abandoned until the full implications of the economics of sabbath-keeping are faced squarely by the church’s leadership. Until then, the debate over the sabbath will remain an embarrassment to Christ’s church.

Rethinking the sabbath question will involve a rethinking of the whole of Western industrial civilization. It will certainly involve the questioning of the last two centuries of rapid economic growth. Strict sabbatarians should at least be aware of the possible effects of their proposals. If the world should be conformed to Christian standards of biblical law, and if the standards of the Hebrew sabbath practice are, in fact, still the rule for the Christian dispensation, how would these standards be imposed on the population at large? Would it not make impossible our modern version of industrial, specialized society? In other words, if such standards had been enforced for the past two centuries, could this civilization, which most modern Christians accept as far as its technological conveniences are concerned, have come into existence? How much of our economically profitable, efficient, “sabbath-desecrating” technology would we have been forced to prohibit by civil law? The costs, I suspect, would be considerable. It is time for strict sabbatarians to count those costs.

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Fire has served as man’s major technical tool of dominion, and it was challenged as a primary tool only in the twentieth century, first
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by electricity and then by the electronic computer. Lewis Mumford has discussed the three-fold uses of fire: light, power, and heat. His culturally evolutionistic interpretation could easily be reworked to conform to biblical imagery. “The first artificially overcame the dark, in an environment filled with nocturnal predators; the second enabled man to change the face of nature, for the first time in a decisive way, by burning over the forest; while the third maintained his internal body temperature and transformed animal flesh and starchy plants into easily digestible food. Let there be light! With these words, the story of man properly begins.” Thus, fire has been basic to the dominion covenant from the beginning. That the kindling of a sabbath fire was prohibited in the Old Testament is understandable; it is the very essence of work. To kindle a fire, or to gather sticks for a fire, would have symbolized man’s autonomy in the dominion process, the essence of lawlessness. Furthermore, as symbolic of God’s glory cloud, fire unquestionably served the Hebrews as a reminder of God’s power, in addition to being a primary economic tool. Kindling a fire on the sabbath therefore was illegal for more than one reason.

“Strange Fire”

There was a fourth use of sticks on the sabbath: lighting a fire, or expanding the intensity of a fire, as a religious testimony. Exodus 35: 3 prohibits the kindling of a fire on the sabbath. This seems to mean starting a fire.

The priests of Israel kept a fire burning constantly on the altar (Ex.


29:25; Lev. 1–7). When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered strange fire on the altar, God sent a fire and consumed them (Lev. 10: 1–2). So, it is possible to regard the kindling of a fire on the sabbath as an assertion of sacramental rebellion. For this reason, it has been argued, there was a death penalty for kindling any new fire on the sabbath – an assertion of autonomy from the sacrificial system of Israel. 33 This line of argumentation was pursued by at least one sabbatarian Puritan scholar in the seventeenth century, George Walker. 34

One possible piece of evidence for this position is that the Hebrews were not sure what to do with the stick-gatherer in Numbers 15. The law was clear: Violators must be executed. Why didn’t they know what to do with him? Why did they seek God’s specific pronouncement (Num. 15:34–36)? Doesn’t this indicate that they were not sure what to do with him because they had not actually caught him kindling a fire, meaning indulging in a ritual trespass of starting a strange fire? He was working, but he had not kindled a fire. Why didn’t they execute him, if merely working on the sabbath was a capital crime? Wasn’t their hesitation based on their confusion concerning an unstated warning against strange fire, a confusion that would not have been present if Exodus 35:2 referred to all labor? Gathering sticks was labor, but they nevertheless enquired of the Lord. Doesn’t this imply that they did not suppose that God required the death penalty for working in general – the mere gathering of sticks – but that He required it for lighting a fire, something they had not seen him do?


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My answer is no, it was not any confusion associated with an unstated but implied warning against false ritual that led them to enquire of God. It was a much more basic problem: confusion over the specific transgression. But before I present my reasoning, I need to point out the obvious: Exodus 35:3 does not speak of strange fire. It speaks only of fire. The “strange fire” interpretation is roundabout and hypothetical, although biblically possible. It relies on an exclusively symbolic interpretation of otherwise plain words. I prefer to interpret the passage as primarily economic but with implicit symbolic overtones.

It should be clear why a few interpreters have appealed to strange fire as the frame of reference for the imposition of the death penalty for sabbath violations: It gets them out of an embarrassing exegetical problem. With the permanent extinguishing of the temple’s fire by the Romans in 70 A.D., the biblical law against kindling a fire on the sabbath ceased to be symbolically relevant. Thus, if the altar’s fire was the sole reference point in the discussion of the death penalty for sabbath-breaking – that is, if the death penalty that is required by Exodus 35:2 is to be interpreted exclusively in terms of 35:3, the prohibition against starting fires – then the death penalty cannot sensibly be imposed in New Testament times. This enables the commentators to escape from a highly embarrassing problem, namely, the requirement of the death penalty for working on the sabbath in New Testament times. But this line of reasoning immediately backfires on any “strict sabbatarian.”

If “strange fire” was the sole reference point for the death penalty for sabbath breakers, then what penalty is to be applied today? Excommunication alone? Are we to interpret Exodus 31:14 – the cutting off of the sabbath-breaker from the people – as excommunication rather than execution? If this “cutting off” is not the execution demanded by Exodus 31:15 – and I argue that it did mean execution for sabbath violators – then an inescapable conclusion results: The
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civil government has no legitimate sanctions to apply against sabbath-breakers in New Testament times. The only civil sanction specified is execution (35:2), but if this was only for a ritualistic trespass, then there was nothing for the civil government of Israel to do about non-ritual violations. Certainly there is nothing specified for the civil government to do about a now meaningless practice in New Testament times. First, the fires of the temple are long extinguished. Second, hardly anyone in industrial societies gathers sticks to light fires. This highly anti-sabbatarian conclusion concerning civil sanctions is not likely to appeal to modern sabbatarians. Yet so far, this line of reasoning is the only one which any scholar has used in response to my arguments regarding the termination of institutional sanctions against sabbath violators.

Let us return to the problem of why the Hebrews enquired of God about what to do with the stick-gatherer. Why were they unable to decide what to do with him? The text says that it was not declared to them what should be done (Num. 15:34). I interpret this to mean that as a case-law application under either interpretive scheme – either as a work transgression or as a sacramental transgression – it was not clear to them whether stick-gathering constituted a capital crime. God then said that it did. But the text does not tell us which interpretation governed. Either type of violation constituted a capital crime: false worship or sabbath work. If stick-gathering was the latter type of violation (and I think it was), we then need to ask: What constituted unlawful labor on the sabbath? My answer: (1) commercial labor was prohibited on the sabbath (Ex. 31:15; 35:2), and (2) no household labor that could be done beforehand, e.g., kindling a new fire – was permitted (35:3).

Again, it comes back to capital punishment. This is the issue that sabbatarians have refused to face forthrightly. They implicitly accept the reality of the break between the Mosaic sabbath and the New Covenant’s Lord’s day.
What about Nehemiah 13? Here we find a specific case of sabbath-breaking by foreign merchants from Tyre who came into Jerusalem to buy and sell on the sabbath (v. 16). Nehemiah locked the doors of the city on the evening of the sabbath to keep them out (v. 19), but they clustered around the wall. “Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath” (v. 21).

He could have had them executed, in terms of biblical law, but he warned them first. As foreigners, they may not have understood the specifics of the law, and because biblical law had not been enforced in the land for so long, the general public may not have understood the nature of the penalty. In this respect, modern strict sabbatarians are not much different from the people of Nehemiah’s day. They proclaim the continuing application of the Old Testament’s sabbatarian standards, but they have forgotten about the death penalty. By threatening to lay hands on them, Nehemiah warned them that the full rigor of God’s sanctions would be imposed. For good reason, they ceased their violation of the sabbath. This does not testify to a reduced penalty; on the contrary, it shows how great a threat was involved. Once they understood that the civil government was serious about adhering to Exodus 31:15 and 35:2, they ceased selling goods in the city.

The question of strange fire was not raised by Nehemiah. The issue was buying and selling on the sabbath. While stick-gathering could have involved some aspect of outright sacramental rebellion, it didn’t need to in order to call down the death penalty on violators. As far as the Hebrews were informed by God, either working on the sabbath or the kindling of a fire could result in execution. The subtleties of bibli-
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cal theology or symbolism were of no real concern to them. They simply had to avoid working and also avoid kindling a fire.

Mass Production and International Trade

Consider the modern metallurgy industry and its consumption of “sticks.” It takes enormous quantities of power to produce steel or aluminum. Power is expensive, and grew more expensive in the 1970’s, as a result of oil price hikes. The cost of shutting down a steel mill for one day and then starting it up again the next day would make the production of steel economically prohibitive. It could be done technically, of course, at some astronomical cost. It would be like the proverbial textbook example of growing bananas at the North Pole. Technically, it can be done; economically, it would involve massive losses – waste of scarce economic resources. Such waste is not tolerated by a free market. Steel could not be manufactured under such conditions. The cost of the power required to reheat a steel plant, not to mention the man-hours wasted in supervising such a wasteful operation, would force steel manufacturers out of business.

If the civil government enforced the Puritan-Scottish Presbyterian interpretation of the Mosaic law against Lord’s day violations on the steel industry, there would soon be almost no domestic steel being manufactured. At that point, buyers of steel would begin to pay foreign manufacturers for their steel – manufacturers who do not honor the Mosaic sabbath. This would place the sabbatarian nation at the mercy of foreign manufacturers. The “Lord’s day-desecrating” foreign firms would be rewarded for their violation; the Lord’s day-honoring domestic manufacturers would go bankrupt. Furthermore, because the supply of steel would be reduced worldwide, as a result of the bankruptcy of the domestic firms, the cost of steel would
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rise, thereby penalizing marginal purchasers and users of steel, who could no longer afford to buy.

The only way to make steel available domestically apart from rewarding the foreign Lord’s day violators would be to erect tariffs against foreign steel. This would force up the national price of steel to levels that would permit the production of six-day-per-week steel, meaning very expensive and specialized steel. The middle class and lower class would be effectively cut off from the enjoyment of many products made of steel. In a modern economy, this could produce a breakdown of the division of labor. It could produce an economic collapse, a return to low-productivity subsistence agriculture.

There is no way that steel can be produced that would not involve profits from Lord’s day production. If the civil government required all profits (let alone total revenues) from the seventh day of production to be paid as a fine, or paid to the poor, then the price of steel would rise. The income from the other six days would have to cover the losses of the seventh day. The six-day-per-week revenue limitation would make the nation’s steel mills uncompetitive in world markets. Again, tariff barriers would have to be placed on imported steel, and the nation in question would find its foreign markets for steel wiped out. The world consumers of steel would turn to the steel produced by “Lord’s day-desecrators.”

The International Division of Labor

The modern economy involves the whole world in the international division of labor. Manufacturers of hundreds of thousands of products have been drawn into a worldwide market. Transportation costs have dropped steadily in the modern world, so those products that once satisfied only local needs are now facing competition from similar
products produced abroad. Also, products that once stayed in a local
district can now be sold abroad. The pressures of world competition
force all manufacturers to respect world market prices.

In Israel in Moses’ day, a predominantly agricultural and tribal
society did not involve itself in extensive world trade. There was
trade, or course, but this trade was centered on the major cities and
port cities. Consider an undeveloped rural economy. Transportation
costs effectively insulate interior rural communities from the benefits
and competition of world markets. Trade is overwhelmingly aimed at
high-value, low-volume products bought and used by the rich, the
powerful, and the well-connected. The division of labor is minimal,
and output-per-unit-of-resource-input is low. Per capita productivity
is low, and therefore per capita income is low.

The Puritan-Scottish interpretation of the Mosaic sabbath laws
could be enforced in ancient Israel without wiping out whole seg-
ments of the economy only because per capita income was low,
economic expectations were low, and the international market for
goods did not affect most of the products in use in rural areas. More
than this: If the Puritan-Scottish view of the Mosaic sabbath laws had
remained in force, the sabbath-honoring economies of the world
would probably still be predominantly rural, characterized by a
minimal division of labor. The rhythm of the one-six week is suitable
only for rural societies, if that rhythm is mandatory on all citizens on
the same day.

Do we want to argue that God has determined that the low division
of labor of rural life is a moral requirement forever? Do we want to
argue that God has created limits on the development of world trade
in the form of a rigid sabbath code that forces all men within a coven-
antally faithful society into an identical one-six weekly pattern?

As far as I am able to determine, questions like these have not been
dealt with by defenders of a New Testament version of the Mosaic
sabbath. Those who defend such a view of the Lord’s day have sel-
dom been in positions of formulating or enforcing national economic policy. This is why they have been able to avoid the hard reality of sabbatarianism. They have not thought through the economic implications of their position.

When I raised some of these questions in the appendix that appeared in *Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, I expected to see strict sabbatarians respond, to propose answers or at least modifications in their position that would enable them to avoid the obvious implications of their position. I waited twelve years to receive a single letter or see a single refutation in print. None came. Yet Rushdoony’s book has been read by many influential theologians and Christian leaders, and critics have attacked its overall thesis concerning the New Testament applicability of Old Testament laws, but sabbatarians have systematically, conscientiously avoided going into print with objections to my original appendix on the Lord’s day.

It is now two decades since I wrote this appendix. I have yet to see a published refutation. As I wrote in 1986, the debate has not yet begun. I do not think it will. Strict sabbatarians are few in number. They have chosen not to defend their position. They prefer to maintain the formal language of strictness, despite their inability to assess the fundamental judicial issue: the locus of sovereignty of sabbath enforcement. They also ignore the subsidiary task: identifying the details of exactly which practices must be prohibited by law, i.e., by ecclesiastical and civil sanctions.

Silence is not golden.

The Puritan Sabbath

The sabbatarian heritage is unquestionably a legacy of the Puritans. It is just about the only theological legacy of the Puritans that still
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exercises widespread intellectual influence within the Protestant community. It does not exert widespread practical influence, because few people honor the Puritan vision of the sabbath, even though they may honor it verbally.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, a uniquely Puritan document, states: “This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs before-hand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy” (Chap. XXI: VIII). The Larger Catechism amplifies these words: “The Sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful . . .” (A. 117).

We lack a detailed historical study of the Puritan view of recreation. I have never seen even a scholarly article on the topic. I would never advise a doctoral student to adopt such a dissertation topic. The reason should be clear: The Puritans had no doctrine of recreation. It was a topic utterly foreign to them. It is exceedingly difficult to take seriously their view of holy rest when they had no doctrine of worldly rest.

The Puritan Obsession

There is a popular picture of the Puritans that says that they were a dour bunch, that they never laughed, or wrote poetry, or wrote plays, or created great works of art, or in any way delighted in the recreations of life. It has become popular in recent years to dismiss
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this picture of the Puritans as a myth. It is not a myth. It is rooted in reality – at least the reality of the documentary record.

I spent several years working with the primary sources of the colonial American Puritans, especially their sermons and legislative records. If someone were to tell me that the male Puritans were a fun-loving lot because of their fondness for taverns, I would reply: “How do you know they enjoyed taverns?” There is only one reasonable reply: “Because I read all the laws that the colony passed regulating them.” In every town and in the records of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a recurring legislative concern was the control of taverns: hours they could be open, the kinds of games that could be played in them. Legislators were obsessed with the evils of shuffleboard, and the laws repeatedly took notice of this notorious deviant behavior, restricting access to taverns by apprentices, and so forth. The legislators did their best to minimize the operations of these dens of iniquity.

What about Puritan poetry? There was Milton, whose reputation as a Puritan is somewhat questionable (though I think on the whole he was in the Puritan camp). There was no one else of comparable reputation. Anne Bradstreet, the poetess of North Andover, Massachusetts, had a collection of her poems published without her knowledge in England in 1650, and twenty-eight years later, a larger collection was published in Boston. By this time, she had been dead for six years. 35 The other great colonial Puritan poet was Edward Taylor, who forbade his heirs to publish any of his poems, and which did not see publication until 1939. His manuscript book was not even discovered in the Yale University Library until 1937. 36 Not until 1968


36. Ibid., p. 119.
was a full-length edition of seventeenth-century American poetry published. Meserole’s comments as the editor are appropriate: “In New England particularly, there were strictures against too consummate an attention to poetry. ‘A little recreation,’ asserted Cotton Mather, was a good thing, and one should not contemplate an unpoetical life. But to turn one’s mind and energies wholly to the composition of verse was to prostitute one’s calling, to risk opprobrium, and most important, to lose sight of the proper balance God envisioned for man on earth. The sheer quantity of verse that has come down to us proves that these strictures were not completely heeded. It is similarly clear that these strictures had their effect not only in the nature and intent of much of the surviving verse but also in the sparse numbers of poems printed in America before 1725.”

There were the two poems by Michael Wigglesworth, *The Day of Doom* (1662) and *God’s Controversy With New-England* (1662). No copy of the first printing of 1,800 copies of *Day of Doom* survives. Meserole says that they were literally read to pieces. These two heavy dirges were obsessed with death and judgment. They were wildly popular in New England, and probably had a great deal to do with the shift in perspective in New England sermons from a more optimistic postmillennialism to a new pessimistic sermon form called the *Jeremiad* by Perry Miller. These were formula sermons of imminent judgment that were as predictable as they were ineffective in achieving their goal: repentance and the “affirming of the covenant” by the second and third generations.

There were no Puritan playwrights, no Puritan sculptors, no Puritan painters, no Puritan composers of merit. They were, from start to


finish, craftsmen, not artists. Puritans were theologians of artisanship, of diligence in the calling, of self-discipline and lifelong exertions to achieve middle-class output. They achieved their economic goals as no similar group in man’s history ever has. They subdued a howling wilderness in New England, a land of insects, rocky soil, fierce winters, and no minerals of value, a land of which it could truly be said it was devoid of milk and honey. As a substitute, its trees had sap for maple syrup. But New England was a “promised land” of freedom and abundant land. Puritans swapped their way to wealth. “From Puritan to Yankee” is a constant theme in history books, for good reason: It was a real transformation.

From beginning to end, they were obsessed with one sin. It was not sexual debauchery, it was not drunkenness, it was not theft or murder or any of the other commandments. It was the sin of idleness that obsessed them. In their sermons, their laws, and their pious diaries, they were obsessed with the fear that they were not working hard enough to please God. They did not believe that they could work their way into heaven, but they took seriously the dominion covenant – took it more seriously than any Christian society before or since. It was through work and thrift that they believed they could turn the wilderness into a paradise. Their efforts helped to prepare the religious soil for the industrial revolution a century later. The Methodists of the late eighteenth century were the true spiritual heirs of the Puritans, for they too adopted a theology of work and thrift. The legacy of Puritanism even bears its name: the Puritan work ethic.

One thing they never learned to do gracefully was to rest. They did not understand how they could rest and also please God. They had no developed theology of lawful recreation. They worked from sunrise to sunset six days a week. The men sneaked out to a tavern occasionally, and felt so guilty about it that for decades they elected and re-elected magistrates who kept writing unenforced laws regulating their beloved taverns. They had no systematic theology of leisure.
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They could not deal with the prosperity that their great efforts produced. They remind me of the medieval Benedictine monasteries that also could not deal with the wealth they produced, and so suffered periods of recurring internal reform every few centuries.

The Marathon Sabbath

This obsession with work colored their view of the sabbath. The Directory for the Publick Worship of God, published by the Westminster Assembly, specifies this concerning Sunday activities: “That what time is vacant, between or after the solemn meetings of the congregation in publick, be spent in reading, meditation, repetition of sermons; especially by calling their families to an account of what they have heard, and catechising of them, holy conferences, prayer for a blessing upon the public ordinances, singing of psalms, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, and such like duties of piety, charity, and mercy, accounting the sabbath a delight.” To which the modern reader replies: “You’ve got to be kidding! A delight? An ordeal beyond measure after the pressures of a Puritan workweek.”

James T. Dennison’s polemical defense of the Puritan sabbath (published in the guise of a master’s thesis in history) is a detailed account of the debates concerning the sabbath of this period. Summarizing William Gouge’s tract, The Sabbaths Sanctification (1641), Dennison writes: “Duties of mercy consist in those which concern man’s soul and those which concern man’s body. Ministering to the

39. Perry Miller writes: “. . . the Jeremiad could make sense out of existence as long as adversity was to be overcome, but in the moment of victory it was confused. . . . It flourished in dread of success; were reality ever to come up to its expectations, a new convention would be required, and this would presuppose a revolution in mind and society.” Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 33.
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soul includes: instructing the ignorant; establishing those who are weak in the faith; resolving doubts of the downcast; comforting the troubled; informing those in error; reproofing the sinner; and building one another up in the Lord. Ministering to the body includes: visiting the sick and imprisoned; relieving the need; rescuing those in danger; and giving all other succor necessary. This is in addition to works of necessity: preparing food, washing the body, putting on clothing, putting out fires in houses, closing up flood breaches, fighting in wars, releasing animals in danger. He admits that not all sabbatarians took the following strict sabbatarian positions (though some did): no baking or cooking, walking, any kind of work, or gathering sticks for a fire. Thus, we can appreciate Dennison’s summary statement: “It is apparent that the Puritan Sabbath was not a day of idleness. There was as much activity, if not more, on the Lord’s day as on any other day of the week.”

The question arises: When did these people rest? The answer: They seldom did. When they did, they had no developed theology to tell them when they had rested too much. So, out of desperation, they avoided rest like the plague.

By the early eighteenth century, Puritanism was fading. Newer religious movements arose that were capable of dealing with success – success that came from the Puritan work ethic. The second and third generations of Puritan heirs failed to affirm the covenant, join the church, and take up the “redeemed man’s burden” of endless labor. Puritanism literally worked itself to death.

The Jeremiad sermon warned of God’s coming negative sanctions

40. Dennison, Market Day of the Soul, p. 113.
41. Ibid., p. 110.
42. Ibid., p. 113.
against a faithless society. The problem was, the faithless society got ever richer. Nevertheless, the forms of the Jeremiad were retained, decade after decade. In the 1730’s, ministers were still using its outline, even though it was even less relevant as a formal exercise than it had been eight decades earlier. Social and literary forms sometimes survive long after the cultural environment that gave birth to them has disappeared. Even longer lived has been the Puritan rhetoric of sabbath-keeping, a rhetoric that is still maintained by a handful of Calvinist churches whose members have never observed the detailed positive requirements for hard, merciful work that Puritan sabbatarian doctrine established, and who would transfer membership from any church that would actually enforce these requirements, and vote out of office any politician who might attempt to legislate them.

The Puritan view of the sabbath (though not its practice) has been maintained unbroken only by the more rigorous Presbyterians in the Scottish tradition. This tradition goes back to the seventeenth century. In Aberdeen, Scotland, in the 1640’s, shops were shut on Thursdays, Saturday afternoons, and of course all day Sunday. On Sundays, the highways were watched to identify absentees. In April of 1646, at the height of critical negotiations between Charles I, the Scots and English representative of Parliament, Balmerino, who was travelling to Newark with an urgent message from London, stopped when he was thirteen miles from his destination in order not to travel on the sabbath. The Scottish-Puritan doctrine of the sabbath unquestionably had powerful effects on its adherents – effects that would today be regarded as near-pathological by those who claim that they are still faithfully upholding that very sabbatarian view.

43. Miller, Colony, p. 484.

Appendix A

General Preaching Creates Specific Guilt

In *Presbyterion*, a journal published by Covenant Theological Seminary, Robert G. Rayburn offers a standard essay on the sabbath. He defends the idea of a day of rest, and his familiar line of argumentation is that of the Presbyterian elder in the Scottish tradition. There is nothing unique about the essay, and nothing uniquely wrong with it. It is *traditionally* wrong, *familiarly* wrong, but not uniquely wrong. It is no different from a thousand other essays on the topic over the last three centuries.

What needs to be pointed out is that in a 15-page essay, he devotes fewer than two pages to the section: “Practical Questions Concerning Sabbath Observance.” This, too, is typical. It is traditionally the practical questions that the sabbatarians have avoided dealing with for the last century. From the day the Scots faced the question of Sunday railroads, the commentators (McCheyne excepted) have mumbled. When it comes to public utilities – water, gas, electricity – they do not even mumble. They are stony silent.

Rayburn offers several reasons for the sabbath, all of which are traditional and correct: the dependence of man on God; the glorification of God through worship, especially corporate worship; the biological need for rest in the weekly rhythm. He says that Christ observed the sabbath, and He used it for works of mercy. Equally predictably and equally traditionally, he rejects the clear meaning of Paul’s words in Colossians 2:16–17 concerning new moons and sabbaths, arguing that Paul was really concerned about a “teaching which was a mixture of Jewish ritualism and an Oriental Gnostic-type philosophy.” He therefore concludes: “So this passage, as well as two others which do not use the word ‘sabbath’ but speak of observing days (Rom 14:5 and Gal 4:11), obviously do not refer to the observance of the first day of the week as the Lord’s Day, the Christian’s...
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sabbath, for Paul observed the first day himself and directed others to observe it by setting aside their offerings to the Lord (I Cor 16:2). He was instructing believers not to attach special significance and sacredness to Jewish religious festivals and thus to pass judgment on those who failed to observe them, but rather to rejoice in their wonderful new-found liberty in Christ. As for the observance of the first day as the Lord’s Day or Christian Sabbath, all Christians, Jew and Gentile, kept it.\textsuperscript{45}

Where should I begin? First, if this really is the meaning of these passages, then why do churches refuse to insist that the civil government execute sabbath-breakers, as required by Exodus 31:15 and 35:2? If the locus of sovereignty of enforcement has not shifted to the individual conscience, then on what basis do New Testament commentators assert (implicitly or explicitly) that the civil government is no longer the responsible agent of enforcement? Why has the church remained silent about the death penalty for two millennia? After two thousand years, the silence has become deafening. Second, it is not true, as Bacchiocchi’s Ph.D. dissertation\textsuperscript{46} makes clear, that all Christians, Jew and gentile alike, worshipped on the first day of the week in Paul’s day. Third, just because Paul insisted on corporate worship does not explain why the day of the Lord is to be a day of rest. It only shows that corporate weekly worship is required by New Testament law. Paul emphasized this because there was no equally clear-cut requirement for sabbath worship in the Old Testament.

What does Rayburn say is required? We must glorify God by not making Sunday a day of doing our own personal desires and pleas-


ures. There are no definitions, no examples, no study of what is restful or fun, what is allowed and prohibited. In short, he burdens his readers (should they take him seriously) with a mountain of guilt. They are told to be faithful to God, but they are not told how. This, too, is traditional.

We must make the day a day of rest, he says. But rest really does not mean rest; it means . . . ? (Marathon sabbath? What?) “Resting on the Sabbath does not mean staying in bed all day or even most of the day, although some rest for the body is certainly appropriate.” But, we should be moved to inquire: What amount of time in bed is appropriate? He does not say. In short, here is another pile of guilt for the reader. How about a one-hour nap? A two-hour nap? Why all this chatter about staying in bed all day? Who on earth ever recommended staying in bed all day? This is a serious article and a serious topic, yet what we are given is exaggeration and hyperbole rather than specific, God-required guidelines. This is all that we ever get from sabbatarian commentators. This is all we have been given for 400 years. We grow tired. We want rest from guilt. We want specifics. When will the sabbatarian commentators give us rest?

Then comes the usual refrain: evil restaurants. “Since the obedient believer is to observe the Sabbath as a holy day of rest, he must be careful not to interfere with others having the same privilege. He must not keep others working that he might not need to work. The waitress or cook at the restaurant and the attendant at the filling station have the right to rest also.”47 Restaurants on Sunday: Here is the modern Calvinist’s equivalent of taverns in seventeenth-century New England.

This essay is neither better nor worse than a century of similar essays, which stream endlessly from the pens and word processors of

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47. Ibid., p. 86.
theologians who simply will not take seriously the problems of economics and their relationship to the Bible. They just hammer away at the helpless readers, who desperately need specific, God-required guidelines. Neither do the commentators confront Exodus 31:15 and 35:2. They refuse to deal with the problems of public utilities, yet they criticize those who attend restaurants. It is clear why: They do not attend restaurants on Sunday. *It is exegesis based on personal convenience and tradition.* Such exegesis is productive of nothing except guilt, and perhaps a late reaction against sabbatarian precepts because of the lack of guidelines. The exegesis never progresses, because it never gets sufficiently explicit in its applications. It still sounds as though it was written in 1825 – and even then, such exegesis was running into difficulties with respect to the industrial revolution.

**Preliminary Conclusion**

The New Testament Lord’s day is not the same as the Old Testament sabbath. The shift in the day of the week, from Seventhday (Saturday) to Firstday (Sunday), which is in fact the Eighthday, indicates that there are fundamentally new aspects of the Lord’s day. This shift enables us to understand better Paul’s warning of *a shift in the locus of enforcement* of the “day of rest” principle: from the ecclesiastical and civil governments to the conscience of the individual, meaning the head of the household.

By attempting to impose the workweek rhythms of the sabbath-honoring Old Testament rural society onto a modern industrial economy, the civil government would destroy modern civilization. This fact has been “honored in the breach” by most magistrates and church officials for several centuries, but sabbatarian theologians have yet to
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present a coherent biblical case that would morally justify this “aversion of the eyes” of civil and ecclesiastical governments. Church leaders see what is going on, yet they remain silent.

It is one thing to say that the conscience governs the selection and enforcement of the day of rest. It is something else to say that the church may not enforce the day of church attendance. The New Testament’s emphasis on the Lord’s day as a day of worship may have eliminated the role of the civil government in enforcing public rest, but what about the institutional church’s unquestioned right to name the day of public worship for its members, and to establish times for worship? Does the church have an obligation to provide alternative times of worship for members who, because of specialized occupations, decide to honor the rest principle by resting on a day other than the first day of the week?

**Rescheduling Worship**

It is not normal in a Christian nation to find that most occupations of necessity involve labor on seven consecutive days. In fact, most of them are five-day occupations, leaving time for goofing off Saturday (that terrible Roman word for Seventhday), to watch televised sporting events all day in violation of God’s one-six pattern for the workweek. But a few members are called to occupations that require Sunday work at least occasionally. And, by the grace of God, most pastors say nothing if the practice does not spread.

**Rescheduling Passover**

We find a parallel in the case of the Israelite who was not able to
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celebrate the Passover in the specified month, the first month of the year.

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even[ing] they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Num. 9:10–11).

Why would any man be on a journey? What would a Hebrew be doing outside the nation? He might be on some sort of a foreign policy mission, serving as an ambassador of the king. He might have been an evangelist. More likely, he would have been a merchant. His occupation kept him away from Jerusalem in this important month. For those who had a legitimate excuse, the Passover could be celebrated in the second month of the year. Not many people would have had a legitimate excuse. This was no license for missing the Passover feast. “But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in the appointed season, that man shall bear his sin” (Num. 9:13). The penalty was excommunication from the congregation. The first-month Passover was normally binding, but those on journeys were exempted.

The law of God provided a means of satisfying the requirement of the Passover in certain instances when, through no fault of the individual, it was impossible or unlawful for him to enter into the celebration. Old Testament law was not perfectionist. It acknowledged the problems men face in complying with its terms. The law was neither perfectionist nor antinomian. Within the framework of the law, there is no temptation facing man which is in surmountable; God offers a way of escape (I Cor. 10:13).
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The normal requirement was that each family should celebrate the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month of the year. There was an institutional arrangement that enabled each man to fulfill the terms of the covenantal celebration. This should convince us that the celebration of the New Testament version of the Passover, namely, the weekly communion feast, normally takes place on the day of rest, but this should not be absolute in every instance.

Worldwide Trade: Passover vs. Dominion?

The question then arises: What if the Hebrew were on a distant journey? What if he couldn’t return to Jerusalem even for the second Passover? If the journey were limited to the Middle East, there could be time available to return. But what if the Hebrew were visiting North America on a trading mission? They did journey this far in the days of Solomon, although conventional historians refuse to face the evidence. A remarkable piece of evidence for just such a journey is the Los Lunas stone near Los Lunas, New Mexico. The alphabet used was a North Canaanite script that was in use as early as 1200 B.C., and would have been no later than 800 B.C. Here is what the inscription says:

I am Yahweh your God that brought you out of the lands of Egypt.

You shall not have any other gods beside me.

48. Barry Fell, Bronze Age America (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982).

49. This is the correct name, despite the normal Spanish usage of the article “los” as masculine and “as” suffixes as feminine.
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You shall not make for yourself any graven image.

You shall not take the name of Yahweh in vain.

Remember the day of the Sabbath, to keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the land which Yahweh your God is giving to you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not testify against your neighbor as a false witness.

You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor anything of your neighbor’s. 50

Here we have evidence of a worldwide trading system. Barry Fell’s revolutionary books demonstrate how early this trading system existed, especially his book, Bronze Age America (1982). There is no doubt that the Hebrews were involved in this trade.

What could a distant Hebrew trader have done about Passover? The Bible does not say, but it seems clear that he would occasionally have missed a Passover celebration. There is no specific release provided in the law, but to have required Passover for every Hebrew,

regardless of circumstances, would have restricted the spread of Hebrew culture and trade. The Ten Commandments would have been far less likely to have wound up on a rock in New Mexico. Thus, we have to speculate about the rule of God’s law as applied by the priests. Was the “dominion mandate” or dominion covenant to be sacrificed on the altar of formal adherence to ritual requirements? Was the celebration of the Passover more important than the subduing of the earth? Should we not conclude that the laws associated with Passover were flexibly applied in cases where Hebrews had legitimate, world-subduing reasons to be absent from the festival?

The same problem faces modern keepers of the sabbath or Lord’s day. What should a pastor do in cases where a church member must work on the traditional day of rest to keep his job, because of the nature of that job? Wouldn’t the best approach be to go to the member and see whether he is taking another day for his rest? After all, the early church took Seventhday off in Israel, because it was the law of the land. Would it not be proper for the member to do the same? The priests of the Mosaic era must have taken other days off, family by family. Should we not regard modern laborers as priests? “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people . . .” (I Pet. 2:9a). No doubt, most priests rested on the national sabbath day in Israel. No doubt, most Christians rest on the Lord’s day. Would it not be proper to acknowledge the legitimate exceptions – profanations of the Lord’s day that are blameless?

*Rural Life Forever?*

We have to ask ourselves this fundamental question: Did God establish the self-sufficient rural society as His perpetual societal standard? Is this standard still morally binding on Christian cultures?
The Mosaic sabbath was specifically created as a means of preserving an economy that adhered to a six-one rhythm of the workweek. Even the most seemingly trivial violation of the pattern, namely, stick-gathering, was to be punished by death. It is difficult for us to imagine the smooth operation of a modern industrial economy within the stated framework of Numbers 15. But the Mosaic law was not perfectionist. It did allow exceptions with respect to Passover. It is likely that similar exemptions existed for other celebrations for Hebrews with unique occupations. But there is no list of exceptional occupations in the Old Testament that proves that such exceptions did exist, other than for the priesthood itself. It should be clear that anyone appealing to the elders for an exemption would have had to prove his case, namely, that his occupation unquestionably required seven-day operations.

It is true that automation is steadily reducing the number of people who must be employed on any given day, but engineers and emergency servicemen must be there to keep the equipment running. The moral issue of using services that require only a few men to violate the Lord’s day, simply because there has been a change in technology, is still a question of right and wrong. In any case, could such a technology ever have developed, had Sunday workers been prohibited from the very beginning in the light and power industry?

What the strict sabbatarian is calling for is a drastically reduced material standard of living one day per week, an alteration of modern life styles so radical that its consequences for the economy can barely be contemplated. The Puritan-Scottish interpretation of the Mosaic standard is undeniably rigorous: no cooked meals, no restaurants, no television, no radio, no newspapers delivered on Sunday or Monday morning (Sunday production), no hot water for showers or shaving (unless produced by wood heat, solar power, or bottled gas), no commercial recreation centers, no air conditioning (unless powered by home diesel electrical generators), no gasoline stations open (except one or two stations on a rotating basis, and only for servicing emer-
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gency vehicles or aiding legitimate travellers in an emergency – state-certified legitimate travellers), no supermarkets open for business, and endless forms to fill out in any commercial operation in order to justify the emergency nature of the sale, with fines and warnings for buyers and sellers for first violations, and death for repeated violations.

It should be understood that these conclusions are minimal ones; a strict sabbatarian civilization, if it is to remain true to its professed faith, would have to impose these restrictions, and it might very well find other wide-ranging applications of the sabbath principle. That contemporary sabbatarians, or even most of the sabbatarians since 1825, have refused to discuss the comprehensive specific proposals that follow from their position, has led to confusion on the part of church members. That anything so minimal as not going to a restaurant on Sunday has become the “litmus test” of strict sabbatarianism indicates just how misleading modern sabbatarianism has become. Closing all restaurants on Sunday would be the mere beginning, not the end, of civil legislation in a sabbatarian commonwealth.

A Proposal for Lord’s Day Reform

What I am proposing is a consideration of the possibility that the Old Testament did make provisions for an alternate sabbath observance schedule for people whose professions, by their very economic nature, require seven-day operations. If so, then the New Testament Lord’s day should also make provision for an alternate day of rest-worship for certain individuals. When some employees must work on the day of normal worship, the church could make another day of the week available for rest and worship. In our era, it would probably be Saturday, when the whole family is at home. If several churches with
similar theological views made a single service available for their
Sunday workers, the fact that few members per congregation are in
need of the alternative day would not be a pressing institutional
problem. A few members from several congregations could meet to
partake of the Lord’s supper in the evening. In short, the churches
should make institutional provisions for those who are required from
time to time to work on the day of rest.

Certain professionals, such as policemen and firemen, are already
granted a kind of unofficial “Lord’s day-desecration voucher.” They
are not brought before the elders for working on Sundays. They are
also paid by the civil government for their Lord’s day-desecration
activities. But this is an unofficial exemption. Sabbatarian churches,
as far as I have been able to determine, make no official institutional
alterations for these church members to celebrate communion. These
members are simply ignored. Elders “shrug off” the whole problem.
Why not face the problem, and rethink the whole question of legiti-
mate employment on the Lord’s day, and legitimate communion
meals on other days of the week?

Admittedly, corporations and small firms should see to it that no
one employee is stuck permanently with Sunday (Firstday) assign-
ments. This assignment should be rotated, so as not to disrupt men’s
worship on a permanent basis. But labor on the Lord’s day is not
automatically to be regarded as Lord’s day desecration.

Priestly Exemptions

There is always the standard solution to the general problem posed
by the steel industry example: the “works of necessity” argument.
Perhaps this really is the right approach. The sabbatarian argues that
steel is vital to the economy. Such an argument certainly seems
reasonable. Then, because there appears to be no way to produce steel on any basis except seven days per week, the steel industry should receive a special dispensation from the church and the State that allows it to go on producing. While the Lord’s day is profaned, the profaners are held guiltless. The owners (share-holding investors), managers, and laborers are treated as Christ said that God treated the priests in the temple. They are held innocent. Those associated with steel production have become “honorary priests.” They are laboring in a vital industry, so this constitutes an assignment from God, comparable to God’s assignment to his priests in Moses’ day. They become exempt from the Lord’s day prohibitions.

The church or State that takes this position has decided to become involved in endless appeals from industries that want to be reclassified as “priestly” in nature: vital to the economy and also innately seven-day operations because of the nature of the markets they face. What predictable, legal criteria would the State use to determine such questions? What constitutes a vital industry? Which industries, now just starting out, will (and should) be allowed by the civil magistrates to become vital? Which industries used to be vital, but are no longer vital? Public utilities? (What about cable television service?) The healing professions? (What about cosmetic plastic surgery?) Should they be allowed to charge a fee for “emergency service”? What is an emergency service?

Having somehow solved the problem of providing legal definitions of vital services and products, the State’s authorities would then have to decide what market pressures really face these industries. Are they really required to operate seven days a week? They may say that they are, but are they? What criteria should be used by civil magistrates to determine the true state of affairs? Which factors determine the economics of any particular profession or industry and its market? Foreign competitors (including competitors across the county line, or state line)? Consumers’ buying habits (including consumers across
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The county line or state line)?

The World State

Perhaps most important, how can we grant such a decision-making authority to the civil government without seeing the creation of a vast, arbitrary, powerful bureaucracy? These questions concerning “works of necessity and mercy” and “true state of market competition” are enormously complex. They cannot even be decided on a local basis, given the worldwide division of labor. They cannot even be decided nationally. They have to be decided by a world State – a State that has the power to enforce its decisions.

The Mosaic sabbath was to be enforced in Israel, whatever its exemptions for specific occupations, despite tribal practices or preferences. With the breaking of the old wineskins of Israel’s economy (taken in the broader sense of “economy”), any church that would impose the Mosaic sabbath laws now faces an enormously more difficult and complex task. How can it define the problem areas? How can it enforce its decisions internationally? And if solutions can be found to these questions, there is always the critical one remaining: How can a world State enforce the Mosaic sabbath without becoming top-heavy, imperial in nature, and a threat to the very idea of decentralized Christian institutions? How can the Mosaic sabbath be enforced in international markets without destroying the legal basis of freedom, namely, predictable law enforced by an impartial civil government?

Will sabbatarians now argue that nations have to come to an agreement on the nature of the semi-priestly offices (e.g., steel workers, physicians, public utility workers) and the nature of the markets facing them? But what if one or more nations will not agree? If there
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is no enforcement mechanism internationally, will sabbatarians then argue that each nation must decide for itself, in terms of a hypothetical “national conscience”? And once they admit this exception, what is to prevent further extensions of this “conscience” exemption: to the states or provinces, to the counties, to the cities? What about to the churches? And finally, we find ourselves right back where the Apostle Paul began in Romans 14:5, namely, with the conscience of the individual Christian.

If sabbatarians refuse to allow conscience to decide, then the exegetical war will be carried right back up the chain of appeal: to denominational authorities, to the cities, counties, states or provinces, nations, and finally to the world State. Each level of government attempts to impose its view of the Lord’s day on those below it. But the Mosaic law does not tell men what to do on the sabbath, and the New Testament does not tell men how to rest. Will we need a world State to enforce laws against idle talk (Isa. 58:13)? What will constitute, or should constitute, lawful recreation? Is walking through a garden lawful? How about running through a garden? How about running after a ball in a meadow in front of paying spectators? On worldwide television? And if some nation’s rulers decide that playing football (soccer) on worldwide television is immoral, then watching it is equally immoral. Will they set up jamming stations to keep out the satellite broadcasts? (Operating State-owned or State-licensed jamming stations would unquestionably be classified as a sabbatical work of necessity.)

Leisure

We do not know for certain how Adam and Eve spent their first sabbath, although it seems likely that they ate of the forbidden fruit.
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on this day. We do not know how they spent their second sabbath, though it probably was outside the garden. We do not know how the sabbath operated from Adam and Eve until the Hebrews experienced the manna that would not come on the seventh day. We do not know how the Hebrews spent their sabbaths. We know a little about what they were not to do, but nothing for certain about what they did.

We know what the early Christians did on the Lord’s day: They worked for a living. At the end of the day, they went to a meeting and ate the Lord’s Supper.

We have sufficient revelation to know that the normal pattern of the week is to rest one day and work for six. Must we always work six days? The Mosaic law said yes, in general, but it also established other feast days and days off. There are problems of applying God’s word to specific cases.

These were precisely the problems faced by new Christians in Romans 14:5. They are our problems, too. Which days off are legitimate? Which day should men take off during the week? None? One (Sunday or Saturday)? Two (Saturday and Sunday)? Three (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, given the trade unions’ pressure to create three-day holidays whenever an American national holiday rolls around)? What is the answer? What is the incontrovertible, conscience-binding answer that all Christians must respect, because it is so clear exegetically and historically? Which is the morally and legally binding day for rest?

The answer is not so easy to produce. Sunday (the Roman name for Firstday) is the common day of worship and therefore preferable, although the early church could not always adhere to it as the day of rest. But some members have to work on Sunday, at least part of the day. In practice, the churches tend to acknowledge this economic reality, so long as the individual shows up one Sunday out of three or four. Why make exceptions at all? Why not get every member to quit his job if it requires Sunday labor? Because the church officials are
more realistic when they count the tithes than when they read sabbatarian tracts. They do not want trouble. They acknowledge in practice what their tracts deny: Men do have legitimate callings that appear to be seven-day operations by economic necessity. Cows need milking, and churches need tithes.

This raises the question of legitimate leisure. What should men do for leisure? Also – a question virtually never discussed by sabbatarians – what kinds of leisure are legitimate on the other six days of the week? God’s law gives no indication that the six days of labor in a normal week were to involve leisure activities. With the exception of national (nonweekly) sabbaths, and the various feast periods (Deut. 14:23–29), men were told to work six days a week. Yet it is obvious that people cannot long sustain a life of zero leisure six days a week – not if they are to maintain their productivity. They sleep, they eat, and they chat. They teach their children (Deut. 6:7). Presumably, families enjoy some hours of leisure during the day. But the Bible says nothing about such leisure, or when it is legitimate to enjoy it during the week or during the day. It leaves this decision to the individual conscience, within the framework of family schedules and occupational requirements. If idle talk – “speaking thine own words” (Isa. 58:13) – is prohibited on the Lord’s day, then is it legitimate on the other six days? If doing “thy pleasure” is prohibited on the Lord’s day, then is it legitimate on other days? Or are these things prohibited generally, but especially on the Lord’s day?

Bishop J. C. Ryle had answers, or at least strong opinions, in regard to lawful and unlawful leisure on the Lord’s day. “When I speak of private Sabbath desecration, I mean that reckless, thoughtless, secular way of spending Sunday, which every one who looks

51. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 34.

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around him must know is common. How many make the Lord’s Day a day for giving dinner parties – a day for looking over their accounts and making up their books – a day for reading newspapers or novels – a day for talking politics and idle gossip – a day, in short, for anything rather than the things of God. . . . When I speak of public desecration of the Sabbath, I mean these many open, unblushing practices, which meet the eye on Sundays in the neighbourhood of large towns. I refer to the practice of keeping shops open, and buying and selling on Sundays. I refer especially to Sunday trains, Sunday steamboats, and excursions to sea and country, and the opening of places of public amusement; and to the daring efforts which many are making in the present day, to desecrate the Lord’s Day, regardless of its Divine authority. 53 (Sabbatarians have always had problems with large towns.)

This is quite a list of desecrations. But let us add some more. What about watching television on the Lord’s day? Not allowed? Then what if we could make video recordings on the Lord’s day with our electronically controlled video machines (with automatic timers)? Not even then, by the consistent logic of sabbatarianism, for men and women must labor at power-generating stations and television stations in order to deliver the programs to our lifeless video machines.

What about listening to music? With a church choir, it is obviously legitimate. What about classical music? At the park? Aren’t the performers working? What if they are offering their services voluntarily? What if they are amateurs? Possibly legitimate. What if they are professionals who are paid on other days of the week to practice, but who then play on Sunday? Who pays them? The city? This is socialism. A private corporation? This is business (advertising). A

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charitable organization? Possibly valid.

What about listening to a radio broadcast of classical music? Not if you use public power or public airwaves. Then again, is classical music really valid? Should we regard it as Christian? Would we allow listening to folk music as a Lord’s day activity? After all, is folk music or popular music any less secular than Wagner or Beethoven?

Choirs sing words, and words are a form of preaching. Choir music is therefore valid on Sunday – music performed “in his sanctuary” (Ps. 150:1); all other music, delivered anywhere but in church, is either suspect or outright illegal, given the Mosaic law.

How do we settle these issues by means of legislation? How do we create an enforcing bureaucracy to police such activities without jeopardizing freedom? How can sabbatarian expositors go on writing tracts without providing plausible biblical answers to these practical, inevitable legal questions? How, in short, can we legitimately remove these questions from the area of human conscience and transfer their enforcing to an agency of institutional government, other than the family, where the father’s conscience is given legitimate authority over his children? If men must struggle intellectually and morally to discover concrete answers to Lord’s day questions for their own lives, businesses, and families, then how can we expect the institutional church or the civil government to come to recognizably valid, freedom-protecting conclusions? In short, how will we design institutional restraints on the bureaucrats?

Additional Questions

There are other questions that need practical answers. A corporation or business may permit people employed by it to take a day off each week, yet the firm remains open seven days a week. The exam-
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ple of a restaurant is useful here. The restaurant may remain open on Sunday, helping to make a day of rest available to housewives. Some of the employees must work on Sunday, but their labor makes it easier for families to enjoy a meal together without putting burdens on the wives. Most of the employees are given another day off. They take a day of rest on a day other than Sunday, just as members of the early church did.

Is a Business a Person?

Here are some fundamental questions. If the firm splits working schedules for Sunday laborers, allowing them to attend morning or evening worship services, has it profaned the Lord’s day blamefully or blamelessly? If workers take another day off, has the firm forced its employees to violate the Lord’s day? If so, then everyone who spends money in that restaurant on Sunday is as guilty as the proprietor and the employees. Second, is the firm to be treated as a person? Must a firm remain closed one day each week, even when employees are given alternate days of rest?

The problem exists, especially in an urban, industrial society, because of the high division of labor and high specialization of production. Companies serve the needs of large numbers of people. The rhythm of rural, subsistence farming can be more easily geared to a six-day workweek than the rhythm of an industrial society. The workweek’s rhythm in an industrial society is necessarily flatter, because its members are far more dependent upon the availability, moment by moment, of services of other citizens than is the case in a low division of labor rural society. Urban dwellers do not produce many goods for their own personal use; they produce specialized services or goods for sale. If we can legitimately buy natural gas or electricity from a public
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utility in order to cook our Sunday meal, then why is it illegitimate to buy a meal at a restaurant? Either both acts are blameful violations of the Lord’s day, or neither, assuming that the selling firm does not require seven days of consecutive labor from individual employees.

Cooking on the Lord’s Day

The Mosaic sabbath in the wilderness seems to have required the baking of manna on the sixth day; they ate cold cakes on the sabbath. Will strict sabbatarians call for the death penalty of anyone cooking on the Lord’s day? If not, why not?

The issue of cooking on the Lord’s day is a difficult one. The Hebrew women probably cooked their manna cakes on the sixth day during the period they spent in the wilderness. We are not told specifically in the Mosaic law that cooking was permanently abolished on the seventh day. At the same time, the experience in the wilderness was to have given them indications concerning the cooking schedule preferred by God, and that schedule involved storing up cooked food the day before the sabbath, just as it involved storing up extra firewood.

When we come to the New Testament, we face a more difficult problem. The Lord’s day should be timed from morning to morning. The communion meal in the first-century church was an evening meal. Must we therefore conclude that this communion meal, the central weekly event in the life of the corporate church, prohibited the eating of freshly cooked food? Does the Sunday evening meal have to be cooked on Saturday night or even earlier on Saturday? Would we not expect the wives in the early church to have prepared their

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best meal of the week for this night? On the other hand, is the Lord’s day to become a day of cooking competition? In modern churches, the existence of Sunday evening church suppers stands as a testimony to sabbatarian confusion.

Meals, whether cooked or leftovers, leave messes behind. What are wives to do, leave the crumbs lying on the table for the benefit of rodents and insects? But if they clean up the table and kitchen in their households, haven’t they violated the Lord’s day? If so, is this a case of Lord’s day desecration comparable to the desecration of the priests, that is, blameless? May they use hot water to wash dishes? Can they legitimately (blamelessly) draw such hot water out of the tap? If so, someone is on duty at the local public utility company, serving the needs of the Lord’s day-desecrating wives. It takes power to heat water. It also takes a water company to deliver water that is to be heated.

The modern church has given no systematic thought to these issues. The Protestant churches have their Sunday evening covered dish suppers, and no one goes away feeling guilty about having cooked on the Lord’s day or having eaten cooked food on the Lord’s day. But the ethical question still remains: Is cooking on the Lord’s day a sin?

**Evading the Problems**

These are relevant issues. The fact that they are not discussed seriously by modern defenders of the Puritan-Scottish sabbath is an indication of the political impotence of those who defend it. They write their booklets and preach their sermons, but the authors do not address their tracts to those officials who make decisions, or who might possibly make decisions in the future, in the world of business.
and government. Their tracts and booklets fail to speak to these issues. They are written as if we were still in the deserts of Palestine, as if paper and ink were not produced for international markets, as if the steel in printing presses could be produced in a six-day workweek. These men are rather like the professional ecologists who decry pollution and then climb into their automobiles to be driven to airports, where they fly on mass-polluting jet planes in order to give their emotion-laden speeches.

The writers of sabbatarian tracts would better spend their time in dealing with the real questions, the questions of conscience. What are the guidelines that pastors should use in counselling guilt-ridden congregation members who realize that they have ignored the one-six pattern of covenant man’s week? How should pastors and elders teach the Lord’s day, in order not to pressure excessively those who have not fully understood the implications in their own lives of the Lord’s day, but who still need instruction? How can leaders deal with ignorance without violating consciences? This is the focus of Romans 14:5. Here is where we need tracts, books, and seminars.

Sabbatarian Debates in England

After this appendix was typeset in 1985, I went on vacation. In a Church of England book store in London, I found a copy of John Wigley’s *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday*. This book is a scholarly survey of the debate over sabbatarianism from Puritan days until twentieth century, but focused on the nineteenth century. I decided to add a summary of this little-known history to this appendix.

What I learned from the book is that many of the issues that I had raised in this appendix had been discussed at length throughout the period, 1550–1900, and in many cases, the debates had been taken to
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Parliament for reconciliation. Parliament never seemed to be able to reconcile them. Thus, the seemingly hypothetical arguments found in my theoretical discussion of various sabbath issues were far from hypothetical in English history.

Wigley’s book presents evidence that the most decisive changes in English attitudes and manners took place between 1780 and 1830, the period of the early industrial revolution. Wigley cites several authorities, including Charles Dickens, to this effect. Each social group had different values and manners, and all were subject to changes in the nineteenth century. He argues that English sabbatarianism was the primary influence on the Victorian sabbath, and that it was an integral aspect of English life and history.

The sabbath debates began long before 1780. Sunday amusements were prohibited by law by the Sunday Observance Act of 1677, which was passed not in the Cromwell era but over a decade and a half into the Restoration era of Charles II. A century later, in 1780, Anglican evangelicals were able to pressure Parliament to pass an Act that made it illegal on Sunday to charge admission to places of entertainment. They wrote in a loophole for themselves, however, which was to be taken advantage of by their opponents a century later: religious organizations were allowed to charge a fee.

Elizabethan and Puritan England

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Church of England had no clear-


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cut teaching with respect to the sabbath. In 1569, Queen Elizabeth authorized certain sports on Sunday: archery, leaping, running, wrestling, and oddest of all, hammer throwing. In 1574, she authorized other sports, but forbade them during church services. Bear-baiting and bull-baiting were prohibited. A 1580 law against Sunday plays in London pushed plays into Southwark, an early indication of the problem faced by all strictly local sabbatarian legislation: geographical escape. Then, in 1595, Nicholas Bownde published his strongly sabbatarian book, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*: no saints days during the week, and no recreations on Sunday. Controversy increased from that time until the Puritan Revolution of the 1640’s.

In 1618, James I issued his *Book of Sports*, in which he reaffirmed the legality of Elizabethan Sunday sports. His recommended Sunday was recreation-oriented. The English Calvinists, following Bownde rather than Calvin, were outraged. Many non-Calvinists in the Church of England shared their views. Restrictions on Sunday travel were passed in 1625 and 1627. The debate accelerated after 1633, when Arminian Archbishop Laud promulgated Charles I’s rewrite of his father’s *Book of Sports*, and required it to be read in the churches. Essentially, the debate was between the “marathon sabbath” Puritans and the “recreation sabbath” traditionalists.

During the Puritan era, 1642–1660, the Parliament abolished all remaining saints’ days and holy days, along with Christmas and Easter, and substituted the second Tuesday every month as a holiday for apprentices. Why there was a legitimate exception to “six days

shalt thou labor” was not explained. This was the Act of 1647.

The problem of technology arose in this era. What about occupations that seem to be seven-day operations? “In 1657 two Acts forbade between them milling, cloth-making, tallow-melting, baking, brewing, soap-boiling and distilling – trades in which natural contingencies, market pressures and technical considerations made it difficult to avoid Sunday work.”61 But, as the author says, Parliament met on Sundays during emergencies. Furthermore, Cromwell was no sabbatarian.

The debates continued. The rival opinions concerning the proper administration of the sabbath proved to be irreconcilable. Many of the same disagreements persist today. “Even before the Civil War disputes about the commandment’s meaning had raised disconcerting issues of principle. If the Fourth Commandment no longer applied in its full and original force, did the other nine? If it applied to all men, was a servant right to disobey his master’s order to work on the Sabbath? Who should judge in such cases? Now extremists claimed that the Sabbath should be kept from sunset on Friday till sunset on Saturday, mystics believed that Sabbath-keeping destroyed true spiritual religion, the Quakers taught that there should be no distinction of days and the Diggers began to cultivate St George’s Hill on a Sunday. No less a person than Milton thought that the only true guide and authority in such matters was the individual’s conscience.”62 The question arises: How can society find rest from these interminable disagreements? How can church and State be governed by God and be blessed by God if God-fearing people have discovered no way, at least so far, to come to an agreement about these issues?

61. Ibid., p. 23.
The Traditional Sabbath

The Puritan era and its legislation lapsed in 1660, when Charles II came to the throne, but sabbatarian pressures continued. The Sunday Observance Act of 1677 was the king’s attempt to forestall a more rigorous bill being considered by the House of Commons. It prohibited all Sunday labor except for emergencies and charity, and prohibited all retail trade, except for the general sale of milk and meat for inns and other restaurants. It severely restricted Sunday travel. Opposition began almost immediately, for sabbatarian ideas were beginning to lose their popularity. The Act was more closely enforced in rural areas; in the cities, retail sales were overlooked where custom allowed, except during worship services.

What about honoring the sabbath in the home? Would it be a feast day or a fast day? Different groups took differing positions. Some upper class members ate uncooked meals, banished secular reading, newspapers, horseback riding, needlework, and painting on Sunday. Others used the day for huge feasts, toured the kennels and gardens, and ate a light supper, thereby allowing servants to attend the evening meeting. For most Englishmen, it became traditional to have the best meal of the week on Sunday. The middle classes followed this tradition, but generally avoided recreation. There the matter rested – with regional tradition as the primary guide – for a hundred years.

In the 1780’s, sabbatarianism had a revival. In the 1790’s, sabbatarianism was set in contrast to the anti-sabbath ten-day week of the French Revolution. Loyalty to Britain and sabbatarianism became...
William Wilberforce, who would soon take up the cause of abolitionism, in the late 1780’s became a moderate sabbatarian. Parliament reacted negatively to these views in the 1790’s, loosening some of the old requirements of the 1677 law, legalizing bakers’ work from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sundays, when they could sell puddings and meat pies (the poor man’s Sunday dinner). In a very real sense, the home sabbath made itself felt in the marketplace; the law was revised in order to favor an easier celebration of the home feast. Parliament rejected several attempts over the next 30 years to outlaw Sunday newspapers.

In the 1820’s, the sabbatarians emerged as a determined group with a strong sense of mission. Rev. Daniel Wilson preached a series of sabbatarian sermons in 1827. In 1831, he helped found the Lord’s Day Observance Society (LDOS), which still exists. (It published F. N. Lee’s dissertation, *The Covenantal Sabbath*, in 1972.) In the 1830’s, Sir Andrew Agnew, a one-issue member of Parliament, introduced a sabbatarian bill four times, and it was defeated each time. It is interesting that the bill exempted the labor of servants in households. The fourth commandment, he argued, gave masters complete religious and civil authority over their servants. This was in defiance of the reason given in Deuteronomy for the sabbath law: The Israelites had been exploited as servants in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Wigley comments: “The Sabbatarians’ distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ behaviour enabled them to avoid a fundamental challenge to the rights of property. They defended the right of the private

property owner to use his servants, his horses and his grounds without any interference; but claimed the right to regulate that which was corporately or nationally owned, such as railways and the Post Office.” 70 This represents a continuing compromise, or at least confusion, among sabbatarians. Is the civil government the enforcer inside the family? If not, then the sabbath principle is not primary but secondary to the rights of private property, at least in this one area. But if the State can impose no sanctions here, why is it allowed to in “public” property, meaning private property outside the household? By the 1840’s, the 1677 law was close to a dead letter. Fines were small, the authorities preferred not to enforce it, and prosecutions brought by individual citizens did not often lead to convictions. 71

Urban, Industrial Society

The 1830’s and 1840’s were years of rapid development of railroads. The sabbatarians organized politically to keep trains from running on Sundays. Some rail companies tried to honor their wishes. The Liverpool & Manchester restricted Sunday operations and actually inaugurated a scheme whereby sabbatarian shareholders could donate to charity that portion of corporate profits that were generated by Sunday traffic. The North Eastern adopted a similar practice. Most companies restricted traffic during worship hours. Demand was small, so this was reasonable. All refused total closure, however. 72 This did not satisfy the sabbatarians.

70. Ibid., p. 46.
71. Ibid., p. 53.
72. Ibid., p. 54.
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The Post Office Act of 1838 enabled the Postmaster General to compel trains to operate a Sunday mail train, and firms added passenger cars in order to gain some revenues. In 1846, the final attempt to prohibit Sunday rail traffic was introduced into Parliament. It failed.\textsuperscript{73}

The Post Office in 1847 announced its intention to send mail through London on Sundays. The Lord’s Day Observance Society began a campaign to reverse this decision, and also to cease Sunday collecting and delivering of the mail. Eventually, Sunday mail delivery ceased, as a result of trade union pressures, long after the sabbatarians had ceased to be a political factor, but the movement of the mail went on. Some Post Office employees, then as now, had to work on Sundays.

Two other sabbatarian societies were formed in this period: the Evangelical Alliance and the Wesleyan Methodists. John Henderson, a Glasgow merchant, began a national essay contest on the benefits of sabbath observance. Other groups followed his lead, and a tradition of annual prizes was begun. Wigley says that these contests and the publication of the essays transformed the controversy. What had been primarily a debate over religion became a debate over practical benefits of the sabbath. The essays did not ask for legislative action; they advocated total abstention from Sunday amusements.\textsuperscript{74} These essays were generally non-theological in nature; they were practical. Understandably, the LDOS took no part in promoting them.

In 1851, the Great Exhibition opened. This monumental exhibition of the wonders of mid-century technology transformed the thinking of a generation. In 1852, a private company took it over as a business venture, and the firm announced its intention to open it on Sunday

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 65.
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afternoons. This created a huge wave of protest. Tracts aimed at every sector of society poured off the presses, with different arguments for each class. The government inserted into the firm’s charter the language of the 1780 Act, that no money payment could be collected. This was a victory for the sabbatarians.

There was a loophole in the 1780 Act that was exploited in the late 1860’s. The Act exempted religious organizations from restrictions on taking in money. One anti-sabbatarian, Baxter Langley, organized his followers into a “free unsectarian church,” registered it under the Toleration Act of 1688, and began selling reserved seats to Sunday evening lectures. The government could not prosecute the group successfully.\(^{75}\)

In 1855, working men protested a Sunday trading bill that would have permitted open shops. A crowd of 150,000 turned out on Sunday, June 24, to protest the support that Chartist radicals were giving to the bill. The shops remained closed.

The next crisis was provoked by a radical M.P., Sir Joshua Walmsley, who in 1855 and 1856 introduced legislation to allow the British Museum to open on Sundays. It was supposed to be an alternative to Sunday drinking. Sabbatarians were outraged. The bills did not pass. Then Sir Benjamin Hall, Commissioner of Works, began promoting military band concerts in the parks. The sabbatarians were again outraged. This was national desecration. Prime Minister Palmerston later stopped the concerts.\(^{76}\) So the theoretical question I have raised concerning music in the park is not hypothetical; it became a serious political issue.


Wigley argues that the appeal of sabbatarian ideals to middle class people gave it great strength. A new appeal, based on practical benefits rather than an appeal to the Bible, became increasingly prominent within sabbatarian circles. He calls this social sabbatarianism. “Social Sabbatarianism was of enormous importance. It moulded and enlivened the controversy for almost fifty years. It allowed the Sabbatarians to avoid authoritarianism and to champion the working classes. It allowed Nonconformists to assuage their consciences and to defend the civil observance of the Sabbath. It allowed M.P.’s to reconcile their laissez-faire principles with their religious values, for no legislation was called for, merely the defense of the status quo.”\textsuperscript{77} But it was a departure from the earlier sabbatarianism, and on many occasions, defenders of a religious sabbath refused to join with social sabbatarians in “the great cause.” As the pragmatic arguments weakened, especially as the century wore on and more leisure time was made available to workers, the religious sabbatarians recognized the epistemological weakness of social sabbatarianism. “Six days shalt thou labor” became five and a half, and in the twentieth century, five; Sunday amusements also appeared to be beneficial, so the pragmatic arguments no longer carried as much weight. But the religious sabbatarians had been pre-empted by 1900, and few people listened to them any longer.

The leisure of the high-capital late nineteenth century was not characteristic of the low-capital era of the late eighteenth. There is no doubt that the industrial revolution increased the number of working days in the late eighteenth century. For example, the Bank of England (the private central bank) steadily reduced the number of holidays

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 72.
from 46 in 1761 to 4 in 1836. The 12-hour, 6-day industrial work-week became the norm as the industrial revolution gathered strength. Sabbatarians could appeal to overwork as one reason for a legislated sabbath. But they steadfastly refused to promote a law that would prohibit masters from working servants on Sundays. The theological justification: acts of mercy and necessity. This was an exemption for rural lords at the competitive expense of the industrial managers.

Wigley presents the interesting case of W. H. Smith, the Christian founder of the giant book store chain. Smith invoked the “acts of necessity and mercy” exemption when he decided to publish the names of the dead and wounded during the Crimean War in 1855. On the other hand, he refrained from walking outdoors on a visit to Canada, to avoid giving the impression of being a sightseer. On the other hand, he complained when his Sunday evening bath was late, blaming the assertive attitudes of Canadian hotel workers. Convenience, predictably, triumphed over theology.

What about the Sunday operation of profit-seeking public utilities? This is not a hypothetical example. In the 1840’s, some private water companies had left parts of London without water on Sundays. In the 1870’s, numerous secular organizations formed lecture societies. Libraries began to remain open on Sundays. So did free art galleries. The sabbatarians opposed all such violations. In 1884, Herbert Spencer, the evolutionist and defender of pure laissez-faire, remarked that a dispute over the opening of a reading room on Sun-

78. Ibid., p. 74
79. Ibid., p. 78.
80. Ibid., p. 78.
81. Ibid., p. 82.
82. Ibid., p. 131.
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day could split a mechanics’ institute.\(^\text{83}\)

By the late 1880’s, sabbatarians had generally lost public support. In 1896, the government finally voted to allow the opening of the British museums and national galleries on Sundays.\(^\text{84}\) There was no opposition from the churches or the denominational newspapers. The twentieth century, especially after World War I, saw the end of most relics of the 1677 and 1780 laws.

Wigley’s summary is remarkably similar to my own discussion of the economic questions raised by the sabbath in an industrial civilization, especially with respect to the differing rhythms of the workweek, urban vs. rural. “Sabbatarianism was an inappropriate way to provide rest, for it applied a simple, essentially pre-industrial, religious prescription to a complex, essentially urban, social problem. Sabbatarians avoided the difficulties which a complete cessation of labour would have produced for themselves by requiring servants to work and applying the formula ‘acts of necessity and mercy,’ but failed to appreciate that society at large similarly needed the work of some railwaymen, shopkeepers and the like, whose work rhythm ran counter to that of the rest of the community. Sabbatarianism thus justified some Sunday work, but regarded the unjustified as sin for condemnation, rather than as a problem suitable for social reform.”\(^\text{85}\)

Self-imposed Irrelevance

It is also revealing that the LDOS refused in 1855 to enter into the

\[83. \text{Ibid., p. 1.}\]

\[84. \text{Ibid., p. 147.}\]

\[85. \text{Ibid., p. 79.}\]
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political question of the half-Saturday movement, which would have required employers to provide the afternoon off. It merely established a committee to look into the subject, and it was not required to report back. One Presbyterian minister argued that anything less than six full days of work was generosity on the part of employers that went beyond God’s justice.\footnote{Ibid., p. 80.} So, the sabbatarian commitment to one day off seemed to imply no rest for the other six days. When, then, would men receive time for recreation, which was banned on Sunday? The sabbatarians have never faced this issue. Their concern as sabbatarians is not with rest, and their concern as neo-Puritans is with work.

Frederick Peake, the LDOS’s secretary, made the society’s position clear in a statement in 1895, one that summarized three centuries of sabbatarianism. The issue is not rest. The issue is enforced religious behavior. “Anything [on Sundays] that is not distinctly religious is wrong. . . . We should hardly make it purely a question of ‘rest.’ We . . . seek the religious observance of the Lord’s day as the primary thing, and the question of human rest . . . as a secondary matter arising out of that.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 153.}

The Sunday school movement had been developed in the late eighteenth century in order to provide religious education for the children of the poor. But some sabbatarians objected when Sunday schools began teaching newly literate children to write, “arguing that it was not necessary to be able to write to understand the Bible, and writing was thus a secular employment, unfit for the Lord’s day.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 81.} The controversy gathered force in the early years of the nineteenth

\begin{footnotes}
86. Ibid., p. 80.
87. Ibid., p. 153.
88. Ibid., p. 81.
\end{footnotes}
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century. The Wesleyan Methodist Conference passed such an anti-writer measure in 1808. This controversy divided sabbatarians. In the 1840’s, the sabbatarians had succeeded in most independent congregations in stamping out the practice. 89

The LDOS became progressively more consistent and progressively out of touch with reality. It criticized Charles Spurgeon for allowing his sermons to be telegraphed to Cincinnati on Sunday mornings. It criticized book sales in church. (At least it did not have to deal with the issue of book deliveries on Sunday with payment coming on a work day; churches were not likely to extend credit in this era.) In 1892, the Quarterly Paper of the LDOS said that Salvation Army bands “have done untold harm.” 90 The LDOS thereby forfeited the support of Nonconformist leaders. It also opposed the use of automatic vending machines in the 1880’s, despite the fact that no labor was involved. 91 In short, the issue was not rest; the issue was the marathon sabbath - self-denial for God, not external convenience and rest. As the Society announced in response to a 1909 attempt to pass a pro-sabbatarian law that had been drafted by the National Hygenic League, “This determination to settle the whole matter on the basis not of Divine Law but of personal convenience, with a flavouring of humanitarian sentimentality . . . a most threatening danger.” 92

What the LDOS and strict sabbatarians had accomplished in over a half century of non-cooperation with other “less rigorous” brethren and allies was to demonstrate the political irrelevance of their posi-

89. Ibid., p. 82.
90. Ibid., p. 141.
91. Ibid., p. 153.
92. Ibid., p. 165.
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They had taken the “moral high ground” – so high that they were in the heavens and of little earthly use to the cause of restful Sundays. They had adopted the marathon sabbath position of certain segments the non-industrial seventeenth-century English Puritans, and had suffered the consequences.

Conclusion

Several questions should be raised. Did the failure of the Lord’s Day Observance Society come as a result of its political intransigence? If so, was this intransigence biblically valid? Were its leaders correct in refusing to compromise with anything that was not “pure marathon sabbath”? Was the LDOS doomed at the end because of an increasingly secular society? Or was it doomed from the beginning because the “marathon sabbath” is neither biblical nor suitable in an urban civilization?

There really were public debates over the timing-of the sabbath, the locus of sovereignty of enforcement (Milton’s locus: conscience), travel on Sunday, feast day vs. fast day, “seven-day-per-week” technologies, railways, public utilities, defining “mercy and necessity,” servants’ labor on Sundays (“mercy and necessity” . . . for the masters), mail delivery and shipping, newspapers, museums, bakeries, and the appropriateness of cooking on Sunday. There were debates, but there were no definitive answers. Eventually, people grew tired of debates that could not be resolved, and the honoring of the sabbath became a matter of conscience. Milton’s suggestion became a social reality.

The summary provided by Wigley is accurate, but it indicates the extent to which sabbatarianism brought Christians little credit in English history, even though a day of rest was universally acknowl-
edged at least in principle to be a blessing. The marathon sabbath did not survive, and it is understandable why it didn’t.

In the depression-stricken countryside of the 1880’s no harvest work was done on Sundays, but the migrant Irish labourers were thought to be heathens because they sang and danced after returning from Mass. Protestant English farmers’ children were taught to “remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.” Of course the man-servant and the maid-servant had to milk the cows, that was necessary work [but] . . . Nobody ever read a newspaper or whistled a tune except hymns . . . on Sundays.’ [Allison Uttley, *The Country Child* (Penguin ed., 1970), pp. 222, 206.] No wonder the Sabbatarians quoted the Fourth Commandment as given in Exodus and ignored the version in Deuteronomy (5: 14) ‘that thy man servant and thy maid servant may rest as well as thou.’

The most characteristic feature of Sabbatarianism and of the Victorian Sunday which it produced was the attempt to proscribe Sunday amusement and recreation, and over the course of the century this had had different effects on each class. By encouraging church and Sunday school attendance, and drawing a picture of domestic comfort, the Sabbatarians had given the lower classes a standard at which to aim. But by doing so they had undermined the festal Sunday tradition in accordance with which the lower classes already cleaned and dressed themselves on Sundays. They wanted a day of abstinence, whereas the workers kept a holiday, a feast not a fast.

The abstemious Sunday was better suited to those who spent their week in easy circumstances than to those who labored for their bread. The Sabbatarian standard and the Victorian Sunday were essentially middle class phenomena. They produced a day which had a funeral character, notorious for its symbols – the hushed voice, the half-drawn blind and the best clothes. When adopted by the lower classes these symbols produced the respectable poor. Neville Cardus, the (Manchester) Guardian’s cricket correspondent, remembered William Attewell, in 1912 cricket professional at Shrewsbury School:
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‘Each Sabbath, after our mid-day meal, he put on a hard stiff collar. I recollect his struggles with it. “Cuss it,” he would protest, “but ah mun do it; it’s the Lord’s day.”’ 93

Conclusion

Questions concerning the proper form of Lord’s day observance, not to mention the proper role of the institutional church and civil government in enforcing Lord’s day observance, are extremely complex. This is one reason why Paul assigned to the individual conscience the task of sorting out these problems. They are too complex and too disputed for the institutions of government to apply sanctions. This was not the case in rural Israel, when the sabbath was primarily negative – refraining from normal, profit-seeking labor one day per week – and the civil government’s role was also negative, namely, prohibiting commercial trade and restricting most of a family’s daily routine. When the Lord’s day became both a day of rest and a day of corporate worship, its emphasis changed, and the State’s role in protecting the Lord’s day was radically altered. When the sabbath day, or the Lord’s day, became a day that emphasizes positive worship, the State ceased being a reliable agency of enforcement.

The Lord’s day is essentially a day in which the normal routine of work is broken – a ritual testimony of a man’s reliance upon God’s grace rather than his own labor. It is a day of inactivity one day in seven with respect to one’s source of income and to one’s area of daily responsibility for labor. It is an admission that man is not sovereign, that man rests on God’s creative work, that man cannot bring his work to completion apart from God, that man’s efforts are

93. Ibid., p. 185.
limited, and that autonomous man cannot, even with a seven-day workweek, expect to prosper. It is a symbolic announcement that man must rest in the grace of God, and that he can rest one day per week in confidence that God honors His covenant with His people. It takes faith to honor the Lord’s day – faith in the terms of the covenant, and faith in the ability of God to fulfill His part of the compact.

The Lord’s day of rest-worship forces men to schedule their lives more efficiently, to take time for rest. It forces them to order their workweek carefully, buying in advance, storing up goods in preparation for the Lord’s day. It forces wives to get their homes cleaned before the day of rest. It forces people, in short, to establish budgets, rather like the budgets necessitated by the requirement of the tithe. In this case, however, what is budgeted primarily is time, not money. A family’s week is to have a God-honoring one-six rhythm.

The break from the normal work routine was required of the priests of Israel, but other responsibilities forced the priesthood as a whole to maintain seven-day operations. What was required of individual priests was not required of the priesthood as a whole. The corporate body of priests had to offer sacrifices daily; each individual priest could reschedule his workweek to permit him to rest on another day, if it was his day to offer sacrifices on the sabbath. God distinguishes between organizations and the individuals who make up the organizations. A six-day workweek was required of individual priests and their families, but not the priesthood as a unit.

Modern Christians are priests. They are sometimes assigned tasks on the Lord’s day that are vital to the economic survival of the firm. The decision as to whether the seven-day workweek is really crucial to the economic survival of the firm is made in terms of several criteria: the decision of the owners; the decisions of employees and potential employees whether they are violating their consciences in working on the Lord’s day; and the decisions of customers who
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decide whether they are violating the sabbath principle in spending their money on the products or services of the Lord’s day-profaning company. We are not told how the priests of the Old Testament worked out the mid-week day of rest for those who had to offer sacrifices on the sabbath. We are not told exactly how the sorting out of the Lord’s day issue would be done in modern, industrial, post-resurrection societies. Some men regard all days the same. Others regard one or more days as special. Each man should be convinced in his own mind (Rom. 14:5).

What we must understand is this: Paul assigned to the individual human conscience the task of making the decisions concerning rest, leisure, and employment on the Lord’s day. This does not mean that all days are the same during the week. Man’s conscience must make the decision for man, but this does not mean that God’s revelation is not clear regarding the special nature of the Lord’s day. It does not mean that the one-six pattern is invalid in New Testament times. It means only that from an institutional standpoint, Paul removed the civil government and the church courts from the position of decision-makers. With respect to the day of rest-worship, the external sanction of the Old Testament economy, the death penalty, has been abolished. It has been abolished along with the duty of the civil government to impose sanctions on individuals or firms that choose to work on the Lord’s day.

The fact that individual conscience is assigned the task of decoding the limits of the Lord’s day activities has not subjectivised the reality of the sabbath principle of rest-worship. The sabbath principle of rest-worship is still intact. But God has determined that the complexity of Lord’s day observance is too great for the church or State to enforce. The requirement of honoring one day in seven is still with us, but not all people see this, and hardly any group agrees concerning the exact ways in which any profit-seeking firm or individual must honor
The Economic Implications of the Sabbath

the sabbath principle. God will be the final judge, not the earthly institutions of government. There are objective standards, but they must be interpreted subjectively, person by person, in the New Testament era. We have been given specific revelation to this effect with respect to the sabbath, and we must honor this revelation.

It solves few if any concrete sabbatarian problems to read into Leviticus 23:3 an Old Testament sabbath version of the New Testament’s requirement of positive worship on the Lord’s day. The testimony of the Old Testament is clear: Seventhday was generally (and possibly even exclusively) a day of rest except for a few priests in the temple. It is equally futile to read into Exodus 35:3 a highly symbolic and hypothetical interpretation concerning “strange fire.” Clear texts should be used to interpret obscure texts. Even more to the point, clear texts should not be turned into obscure texts. Exodus 35:2 is clear: death for working on the sabbath. Exodus 35:3 is also clear: no kindling of fires. An apologetic for a hypothetical “less rigorously enforced Old Testament sabbath” that is then said to be in continuity with a church government-enforced and State government-enforced New Testament Lord’s day – an apologetic based on “strange fire” – is clear to practically nobody, which is why we find no similar line of argumentation in the historic creeds. It also fails to explain the sharp discontinuity that was announced by Paul in Romans 14:5 and Colossians 3:16.

In short, if Paul’s words are not taken at face value, a whole series of problems arises. Few churches have been willing to face these problems squarely over the last two hundred years, and none has been willing so far to deal forthrightly with the question of the death penalty in Exodus 35:2. There is no way, biblically speaking, to escape the necessity of imposing the death penalty on persistent sabbath violators, unless we interpret Romans 14 as having changed the locus of enforcement from the civil government to the individual
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conscience. If Paul was not speaking about the Old Testament sabbath in that passage, then Exodus 31:15 and 35:2 are still morally and legally binding, and Christians must forthrightly call for the civil government to abide by God’s sabbatical standards, and to begin executing sabbath breakers.
F. N. Lee’s book is a comprehensive treatment of the sabbath question. It raises many interesting points. One of them relates to the timing of the sabbath. Three distinct positions have been maintained by Christians historically: the sundown-to-sundown sabbath, the midnight-to-midnight sabbath, which Lee holds,¹ and the sunrise-to-sunrise (approximately) sabbath, which I hold. The inability of commentators to agree on this point obviously poses difficulties for those who might recommend nationwide or civil sanctions against sabbath violators.

The Hebrews celebrated the sabbath of the day of atonement from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32), and we presume that the other sabbaths were similarly celebrated. The sabbath in Jesus’ day was begun at sundown (Mark 15:42). The Jews wanted the bodies of the dead to be removed before the evening (John 19:31). Nevertheless, we need not assume that Old Testament practices regarding the sabbath are still binding on the New Testament church, since the change of the day represents a fundamental break with the past. Christian scholars have not generally believed that the New Testament day of rest begins at sundown on Saturday evening, although some, including certain Puritan groups, have argued that it does.

The case for the sundown-to-sundown sabbath is based primarily on Old Testament law.² The case for the midnight-to-midnight sabbath is more problematical, resting on the idea of midnight being

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2. Ibid., p. 39.

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the midpoint between evening and morning. Jesus rose before the sun did, since the women came at the dawn to Jesus’ tomb (Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:2), and the tomb was already empty. Finally, the firstborn of Egypt were slain at midnight (Ex. 12:29). Deliverance, in other words, was based on an event that took place at midnight.³

Promise and Deliverance

The modern world has cheap clocks. This is one of the main facts of modernity. The mechanical clock changed the West.⁴ In Moses’ world, there was sunrise and sunset, assuming that the sky was not cloudy. Any other marker would have been monopoly information of priests. But the farther away from the equator a society is, the more unequal in length days and nights as the seasons approach the two solstices. This makes a sunset or sunrise marker inefficient.

I think the sabbath should be marked by a clock, as Lee does, but I prefer sunrise over midnight as the marker. For one thing, until the advent of home-based clocks with alarm devices, midnight would have had to be announced by the clanging of bells, presumably church bells, at midnight Sunday morning. Kings and nobles would have made that practice highly unlikely. So, instead of sunset-to-sunset as general markers to be used to guide our clock-run society, I suggest a sunrise-to-sunrise New Testament Lord’s day. This is based on the theme of promise and deliverance.

The Hebrews were required to begin their celebration of the Passover at sundown. The Passover lamb was slain in the evening (Ex.

³. Ibid., p. 74.

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12:6), and nothing was to remain by the next morning (12:10). The Passover feast looked in faith to the coming deliverance. The promise of God was sure. The Israelites began the feast in the evening; they had been told that by the next morning, they would be delivered. The basis of deliverance, the death of Egypt’s firstborn, came at midnight, but no one could have known this at the time; they had no clocks. The actual deliverance came later, for Pharaoh then called Moses and Aaron by night and ordered the Israelites out of the land. They had to return to the people and convey Pharaoh’s message. Then, hastily, the people gathered together their belongings, taking their unleavened (ready for cooking) bread. They had no time for preparing food (12:39). This points to an early morning deliverance.

Long before the exodus, Jacob had wrestled with the theophany of God through the night, fighting for His blessing. They wrestled “until the breaking of the day” (Gen. 32:24). Jacob received the blessing, the thigh wound, and his new name, Israel, at daybreak (32:25–28). Thus, Israel’s deliverance (the Day of the Lord) came as the sun rose. But the struggle had begun at night (32:22–24).

God’s righteousness is equated with the sun in several instances. Perhaps the most forthright is Malachi 4:2: “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” Again, “He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springeth out of the earth by clear shining after the rain” (II Sam. 23:4). “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and the kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa. 60:1–3). “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared
as the morning. . .” (Hos. 6:3a). The righteousness of the faithful is also compared to morning: “The course of the righteous is like the morning light, growing brighter till it is broad day” (Prov. 4:18; NEB; cf. Jud. 5:31). Israel is to be delivered at the rising of the sun, the coming of light when there previously had been gross darkness.

The theme that Israel is delivered with the rising of the sun on the seventh day corresponds with the idea that Adam rebelled on the morning of the seventh day, and that man needs grace early in the morning. The New Testament reveals a similar message. The women came to the tomb at dawn, not at sundown the evening before, when the third day began officially, according to later Hebrew law. Furthermore, the day of Pentecost came seven weeks later, according to Mosaic law (Lev. 23:16). The disciples were meeting together, and the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1–5). Speaking in many foreign languages, they communicated the gospel to a multitude (2:6), each in his own language (2:8). Critics charged that they were drunk with “new wine” (2:13). Peter’s response is significant: “For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day” (2:15). In other words, it was about three hours after the dawn. Peter was saying that these men had not had time to get drunk. People were not gathering to hear the gospel three hours after sundown, for then Peter’s words would have been meaningless. Obviously, an evening of drinking might have preceded a nighttime outpouring of the Spirit. If we assume that dawn was around six o’clock in the morning, then “the third hour of the day” would have been about nine A.M. This corresponds to the Roman sun dial, which marked noon as the sixth hour. The sundial was an appropriate tool during sunlight hours. It was not appropriate in the winter at six a.m.

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The Communion Meal

There are other pieces of data that point to a sunrise-to-sunrise Lord’s day. Jesus met with His disciples on the evening of His resurrection (John 20:19), eating with them (Luke 24:41–43). This communion meal took place after the sun had gone down. He had already eaten with two disciples at Emmaus, approximately seven miles from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13; Berkeley Version), and this meal took place as the sun was setting (Luke 24:29–30). These two disciples then walked from Emmaus to Jerusalem in order to meet with the other disciples. Then Jesus appeared to the whole group (Luke 24:33–34). Yet this meeting is described as having taken place “the same day at evening, being the first day of the week” (John 20:19a). John was not using the Hebrew day, sundown to sundown, as his measure of the first day.

Paul’s lecture to the church at Troas took place on the Lord’s day. “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7). He departed at the “break of day” (20:11b).

The evening meeting was a communion feast, as was the first evening of Christ’s resurrection. After the day was spent, men gathered together to partake of the Lord’s supper. We know also that Paul criticized the Corinthian church for its drunkenness at the Lord’s table. “For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken” (I Cor. 11:21). They had not been drinking early in the morning, any more than the disciples on the day of Pentecost had been drinking in the morning. The Corinthian church members had been drinking too much in the evening, prior to the communion meal.

We celebrate communion on the Lord’s day. We know that the
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early church celebrated communion in the evening. There is no evidence that the early church met for communion the night before the Lord’s day, i.e., on “Saturday” evening. The first communion feasts took place on the evening of the Lord’s resurrection, at Emmaus and Jerusalem, and in the latter case, the sun must have gone down before the meal. They did not take communion with Christ the day after His resurrection. Communion is taken on the Lord’s day. Hence, we should count the New Testament day of rest from sunrise to sunrise (“Sunday” morning to “Monday” morning).

Modern churches have not been rigid in this regard. Few of them ever discuss the matter. Among more sabbatarian denominations, the timing of the beginning of the sabbath is left to the discretion of individual members. Except on Easter, churches do not ask their members to be in their seats at daybreak. Nine o’clock, the hour that the Holy Spirit fell upon the church at Pentecost, is about as early as most churches require attendance.

The Passover celebrated by Jesus and His disciples looked forward to deliverance, just as the Passover meal in Egypt looked forward to deliverance. The communion feast of the church looks back, knowing that deliverance has come, and it dates the Lord’s day with the risen sun. The communion feast is the capstone of a day of rest. As such, it then looks forward ritually to a week of work beginning the following day, the continuation of men’s efforts to fulfill the terms of God’s dominion covenant. Passover points to dominion. Christ announced at the Passover, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22: 29–30).6

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Conclusion

We no longer look forward to deliverance from bondage; we look forward to dominion. Dominion begins with our labor on the day following the Lord’s day of rest, just as it was supposed to begin for Adam. The communion meal, like the Passover meal, is to be celebrated in the evening. Also like the Passover meal, it looks forward to the next morning. But the victory is behind us. Deliverance came definitively at Calvary. We are strengthened in our faith the night before we are to go forth to exercise dominion, just as the Hebrews were strengthened in body by their Passover meal the night before God delivered them from bondage.
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The Sabbath Millennium

The year 2000 was a focus of concern by humanists since at least the era of the French Revolution.7 The year 2001 inaugurated the third millennium after Christ, and almost simultaneously, some six-day creationists expected to see the seventh millennium (if the world is just about 6,000 years old). This new millennium could easily be correlated with the “third day-seventh day” symbolism of rest and resurrection – a new Sinai, a new sixth-day covenant, which will inaugurate the seventh-day millennium.

A new Sinai should be marked by a rediscovery of Old Testament law, which is precisely what has happened since 1973, when Rushdoony’s Institutes of Biblical Law was published. For the first time in New Testament church history, there is a systematic attempt to defend and apply the principles of Old Testament law to New Testament society, but without the mixture of Greek categories of natural law. If this truly is the “evening before the Sabbath,” then we can expect the millennial sabbath to follow. James Jordan’s analysis of the symbolism of “third day-seventh day” is significant in this regard:

The process of covenant renewal with man dead in sins and trespasses must involve resurrection. . . . To be cleansed, therefore, is to undergo resurrection. This is the meaning of the cleansing rituals of Leviticus 11–15, and other places. The covenant can only be reestablished with resurrected men, so the people were to cleanse themselves before the third (sixth) day, when the covenant was to be made (Ex. 19:10–14). . . . And so, God drew near on the third day (after God’s announce-

ment to Moses on the fourth day), which was the sixth day of the week, to renew covenant with men. It was not the New Covenant that God was renewing at Sinai, but the Old Adamic Covenant. It was the Old Covenant temporarily and provisionally reestablished in the sphere of temporary, provisional, ceremonial (New Covenant) resurrection. It was temporary; but just as the original Adamic Covenant had pointed forward to sabbath rest, so the renewed Adamic Covenant at Sinai pointed forward to the work of Christ and the Future New Sabbath Covenant to come.

It was the third day, and the third month (19:1, 16). For the significance of this we need to look at Numbers 19:11–12. The man who is unclean from contact with a corpse is to be cleansed on the third day and again on the seventh day. This double resurrection pattern is found all through the Scriptures. For instance, in John 5:21–29, Jesus distinguishes a first resurrection, when those dead in sin will hear the voice of Christ and live (v. 25); and a second resurrection, when those in the grave will come forth to a physical resurrection (v. 29). The first resurrection comes in the middle of history to enable men to fulfill the duties of the old creation. The second resurrection comes at the end of history to usher men into the new creation.

Jesus was raised on the third day, thereby inaugurating the New Covenant in the midst of the week of history. Christians live between the third and seventh days of history, Spiritually resurrected and in the New Covenant, but physically mortal and assigned to complete the tasks of the Old Adamic Covenant. The fact that the law was given at Sinai on the third day, and in the third month, was a provisional anticipation of the third-day resurrection yet to come in Christ. The third-day resurrection was only provisional under the Old Covenant, so it had to be repeated year after year. Thus, every year, the third day after Passover, there was a waving of the first fruits before the throne of God (Lev. 23:5, 7, 10, 11). This was a prophecy of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, which came three days after Passover. Jesus’ third-day resurrection, however, was not provisional
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but definitive, and never to be repeated.  

The Prophesied Thousand Years

A common estimation of the date of the beginning of Solomon’s kingship and the beginning of the construction of the Temple is 970 B.C. This would make the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. the thousandth year after the beginning of its construction. James Jordan dates the beginning of construction in year 3000 after creation. If he is correct, then the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. inaugurated the fifth millennium.

Consider the millennial implications of Jordan’s analysis. Sometime around the year 2070, there will be a one-time-only fusion of symbolic “days.” The sixth “day” (millennium) comes to a close. This symbolically closes the six days of fallen mankind’s labor. The sixth day was also the day on which God created man and delivered the dominion mandate to him. As Jordan points out, the sixth day was also the day of re-covenanting between God and man at Sinai. On that day, God’s law was delivered to Israel.

Simultaneously with this closing of the sixth “day” will be the closing of the second “day” (millennium) since the death of Jesus Christ. On the third day, He was resurrected. On this third day, true life – life beyond the grave – was manifested. On the evening of the day of resurrection He took communion with His disciples. He spent


two days in the grave, and then He visibly triumphed over death.

A “day” of rest, and a “day” of resurrection life: this is what the seventh millennium appears to offer. Furthermore, beyond it lies the eighth “day,” which points to the culmination of creation; the new heavens and new earth. The new creation was definitively established by Christ’s “eighth-day” resurrection. The church’s switch in the day of rest-worship from Seventhday to Firstday meant that Eighth day is the day of the new creation. In short, the symbolism fits together.

The idea that the six days of the week and six millennia are linked symbolically was common opinion in the very early church. Barnabas wrote concerning the sixth day of God’s creation: “Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, He finished in six days. This implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. And He Himself testifieth, saying, ‘Behold, to-day will be as a thousand years.’ Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished.”

It is not clear to me whether he believed that the final judgment would come 6,000 years after Christ’s era, or that the whole period of fallen man’s life on earth lasts a total of 6,000 years. What is clear is that he believed that the 6,000-year period is significant. Then comes the eighth day: “. . . when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.”

Christians need to be in a position to explain the nature of the transition to a new stage in the manifestation of Christ’s new world
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order, which was established during His lifetime, and was made visible by the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.12 The old humanism has bet a great deal on the inauguration of a humanist millennium, the dream of a humanist New World Order. So has New Age humanism.13 When these dreams do not come true, and the premillennial expectations of fundamentalists concerning the imminent Rapture also do not come true, men will again begin to ask: “What must we do now?”

The millennium as such is not limited to a thousand years. The millennium as millennium began with the fall of Jerusalem – the end of the old order. The interim transitional period was called “the last days.”14 It could extend well into the “eighth day,” or eighth millennium, which will begin sometime around the year 3070. But there could very easily be a specific manifestation of the millennium as well as the general manifestation. The specific manifestation would be exactly what Revelation 20 refers to, a thousand years in which Satan will be uniquely chained up and rendered civilizationally impotent. It would be most fitting if this full-blown restraining period would begin in precisely the period that the humanists and occultists have looked to for centuries as the beginning of their millennial reign.

As I wrote in 1986, there were several theological problems with predicting the inauguration of the long-awaited sabbath millennium sometime around the year 2000. One is that the world may be older than 6,000 years. Another is that there could be a period of “Babylonian captivity” in between the year 2000 and the full manifestation of


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victory – a 70-year period comparable to the era between the birth of Christ and the fall of Jerusalem. A third problem is that the symbolism of the week, however convenient, really has no clear temporal manifestation in terms of millennia.\textsuperscript{15} Symbolic convenience, after all, is not necessarily the focal point of God’s work in time. But the most important problem will appear if, in retrospect, a great period of worldwide conversions began close to the year 2000 (or 2070).\textsuperscript{16} This is the subsequent risk of prophesying the advent of the “eighth day” – the second coming – close to the year 3000 (or 3070). But the attempt to date His return is improper, for only the Father in heaven knows the date; not even Jesus, as perfect humanity, knew it (Matt. 24:36). So the question must be asked: What could follow the seventh millennium, other than the final judgment, if the seventh millennium is in fact the millennial sabbath?

The Conversion of the Jews

One possibility of what might follow the sabbath millennium is the conversion of the Jews and an indeterminate period of blessings that will result. Paul wrote: “Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:12, 15). Romans 11:11 says: “I say then, Did they stumble that they might fall? God forbid: but by their fall

\textsuperscript{15} This is Jordan’s opinion: Geneva Review, No. 18 (March 1985), p. 1.

\textsuperscript{16} This seems to be taking place in sub-Saharan Africa, South America, and mainland China. Philip Jenkins, The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
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[trespass] salvation is come unto the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy.” The salvation of the gentiles, however important, is subordinate to the more important phenomenon: to provoke the Jews to jealousy. John Murray comments: “Paradoxically, the unbelief of Israel is directed to the restoration of Israel’s faith and the fall of Israel to their reclamation. . . . The idea is that the Jews observing the favour and blessing of God bestowed upon the Gentiles and the privileges of the kingdom accruing there from will be moved to emulation and thereby induced to turn to the Lord.”

There is a close relationship between faith and external blessings, both individually and corporately. Therefore, Paul predicts that the conversion of the gentiles will bring blessings to them. The eventual fulness of the gentiles will produce a triple response in the Jews: first jealousy, then a desire to participate in the blessings, and finally their conversion to Christ. Their conversion, in turn, will bring an unprecedented era of blessing to the whole earth. Murray Writes:

For if ‘fulness’ conveys any idea it is that of completeness. Hence nothing less than a restoration of Israel as a people to faith, privilege, and blessing can satisfy the terms of this passage. The argument of the apostle is not, however, the restoration of Israel; it is the blessing accruing to the Gentiles from Israel’s ‘fulness.’ The ‘fulness’ of Israel, with the implications stated above, is presupposed and from it is drawn the conclusion that the fulness of Israel will involve for the Gentiles a much greater enjoyment of gospel blessing than that occasioned by Israel’s unbelief. There thus awaits the Gentiles, in their distinctive identity as such, gospel blessing far surpassing anything experienced during the period of Israel’s apostasy, and this unprecedented enrichment will be occasioned by the conversion of Israel on a scale commensurate with that of their earlier disobedie-

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ence. We are not informed at this point what this unprecedented blessing will be. But in view of the thought governing the context, namely, the conversion of the Gentiles and then of Israel, we should expect that the enlarged blessing would be the expansion of the success attending the gospel and of the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{18}

It is possible, however, that this conversion of the Jews will take place after the millennial sabbath, after the fulness of the Gentiles has produced so stupendous a civilization that the Jews will have something visible to be jealous about. They have little culturally to be jealous about with respect to the visible performance and productivity of Christian gentiles in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Therefore, gentiles can look forward to the conversion of the Jews at the end of the millennial sabbath, with exponential blessings taking place as a result.\textsuperscript{19}

What will these blessings be? Paul is silent. This might lead some forecasters to predict that the ultimate blessing is final judgment unto sin-free existence – in short, the return of Christ in judgment, and the creation of the post-resurrection world. This would return us to the temptation of dating Christ's return, something which has always led the church into the pitfall of short-term thinking and planning. At this point, we are not sure what these blessings will be. What we are sure of is that the Jews as a covenantal, identifiable (but not necessarily national) people will be converted to Christianity before the end of time, and that historically unprecedented blessings will be the direct result.

The best answer is: we cannot be sure in advance. If blessings

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., II, p. 79.

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abound, if revival comes and is sustained, and if we can reasonably date the changes around 2070, then we can imagine the end of time around 3070, but we cannot be sure. Symbolism is not “chronology in advance.” Expectations are one thing; precise timetables are another.
Appendix D

MACAULAY ON DEMOCRACY

Lord Macaulay, the English historian-statesman of the mid-nineteenth century, was a defender of the classical liberal society, meaning a society marked by constitutionally limited civil government and by private property. In 1857, he wrote a letter to an American, H. S. Randall, in which he discussed his doubts about pure democracy in general and Jeffersonian democracy in particular. He made a number of predictions concerning the fate of private property under a rule of universal suffrage. Some of these predictions have come true in the United States. They did so during the New Deal of the 1930’s. Other remarks seem more appropriate in describing his beloved England, especially since the 1930’s.

The fundamental political issue, he argued, is the question of self-restraint, or as I have put it elsewhere in this book, self-government. He despaired at the ability of the poorer members of society to refrain from using their numerical superiority at the ballot box to extort the property of richer men. His arguments, taken individually, are familiar to anyone who has studied the interminable debate over democracy, taxation, and the franchise. What is remarkable was his ability to articulate them in one place, and then apply them to his own era.

He was convinced that those people without wealth will not restrain themselves in the pursuit of other people’s money if they ever got the franchise. The problem with this argument is this: Self-restraint regarding other people’s money is not a quality limited to those who already possess money. If anything, the addiction grows, which is why Christ warned against Mammon as the chief rival of God (Matt. 6:24–25). Mammon is the great, insatiable god of more. The prophets of Israel noted repeatedly that the leaders of the nation were
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economically corrupt – surely as corrupt any modern special-interest group. When it comes to the politics of plunder, every interest group fears the vote-getting abilities of its rivals, and deservedly so.

Because of the difficulty in obtaining copies of the book in which his letter appeared, I reproduce it in full, except for a brief introductory paragraph, in which Macaulay thanked Randall for his gift of some books on the history of colonial New York State, and a concluding paragraph on Thomas Jefferson. The doubts raised by Macaulay are with us still, and will continue to be problems for stable political orders for as long as: (1) all men can vote; (2) some men have little property; (3) the Christian teachings against envy, covetousness, and theft are not universally honored. (I have taken the liberty of breaking this letter into paragraphs; the original constitutes the longest sustained paragraph I have ever come across.)

You are surprised to learn that I have not a high opinion of Mr. Jefferson, and I am surprised at your surprise. I am certain that I never wrote a line, and that I never, in Parliament, in conversation, or even on the hustings – a place where it is the fashion to court the populace – uttered a word indicating an opinion that the supreme authority in a state ought to be entrusted to the majority of citizens by the head; in other words, to the poorest and most ignorant part of society. I have long been convinced that institutions purely democratic must, sooner or later, destroy liberty or civilization, or both.

In Europe, where the population is dense, the effect of such institutions would be almost instantaneous. What happened lately in France is an example. In 1848 a pure democracy was established there. During a short time there was reason to expect a general spoilage, a national bankruptcy, a new partition of the soil, a maximum of prices, a ruinous load of taxation laid on the rich for the purpose of supporting the poor in idleness. Such a system would, in twenty years, have made France as poor and barbarous as the France of the Carolingians. Happily, the danger was averted; and now there is a
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despoticism, a silent tribune [Emperor Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, supposedly the nephew of the more famous Bonaparte – G.N.], an enslaved press. Liberty is gone, but civilization has been saved. I have not the smallest doubt that if we had a purely democratic government here the effect would be the same. Either the poor would plunder the rich, and civilization would perish; or order and prosperity would be saved by a strong military government, and liberty would perish.

You may think that your country enjoys an exemption from these evils. I will frankly own to you that I am of a very different opinion. Your fate I believe to be certain, though it is deferred by a physical cause. As long as you have a boundless extent of fertile and unoccupied land, your laboring population will be far more at ease than the laboring population of the Old World, and, while that is the case, the Jefferson politics may continue to exist without causing any fatal calamity. But the time will come when New England will be as thickly populated as old England. Wages will be as low, and will fluctuate as much with you as with us. You will have your Manchesters and Birminghams, and in those Manchesters and Birminghams hundreds of thousands of artisans will assuredly be out of work. Then your institutions will be fairly brought to the test. Distress everywhere makes the laborer mutinous and discontented, and inclines him to listen with eagerness to agitators who tell him that it is a monstrous iniquity that one man should have a million, while another can not get a full meal.

In bad years there is plenty of grumbling here, and sometimes a little rioting. But it matters little. For here the sufferers are not the rulers. The supreme power is in the hands of a class, numerous indeed, but select; of an educated class; of a class which is, and knows itself to be, deeply interested in the security of property and the maintenance of order. Accordingly, the malcontents are firmly yet gently restrained. The bad time is got over with out robbing the wealthy to relieve the indigent. The springs of national prosperity soon begin to flow again; work is plentiful, wages rise, and all is
tranquility and cheerfulness. I have seen England pass three or four times through such critical seasons as I have described. Through such seasons the United States will have to pass in the course of the next century, if not of this. How will you pass through them? I heartily wish you a good deliverance. But my reason and my wishes are at war, and I can not help foreboding the worst.

It is quite plain that your Government will never be able to restrain a distressed and discontented majority. For with you the majority is the Government, and has the rich, who are always a minority, always at its mercy. The day will come when in the State of New York a multitude of people, none of whom has had more than half a breakfast, or expects to have more than half a dinner, will choose a Legislature. Is it possible to doubt what sort of Legislature will be chosen? On one side is a statesman preaching patience, respect for vested rights, strict observance of public faith. On the other is a demagogue ranting about the tyranny of capitalists and usurers, and asking why any body should be permitted to drink Champagne and to ride in a carriage, while thousands of honest folks are in want of necessaries. Which of the two candidates is likely to be preferred by a working-man who hears his children cry for more bread?

I seriously apprehend that you will, in some such season of adversity as I have described, do things which will prevent prosperity from returning; that you will act like people who should in a year of scarcity devour all the seed-corn, and thus make the next a year not of scarcity but of famine. There will be, I fear, spoilation. The spoilation will increase the distress. The distress will produce fresh spoilation.

Your Constitution is all sail and no anchor. As I said before, when a society has entered on this downward progress, either civilization or liberty must perish. Either some Caesar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government with a strong hand, or your republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth; with this difference, that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman Empire came
from without, and that your Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions.  

This is an eloquent statement. It is easy enough to pick apart some of his specific arguments. For example, the territory of the United States remains predominantly either rural or wilderness, with a very thin population per square mile. The myth of “open spaces” as a factor in reducing class warfare in the United States is just that, a myth (and certainly as far as God was concerned when He promised the Israelites even more population growth in an already “overpopulated” nation). Overpopulation theories always paint pictures of starving masses, but in the decade following Macaulay’s letter and continuing into the last decade of the nineteenth century, population in the United States doubled, filling the Eastern seaboard with immigrants who did not speak English, and who had little or no formal education, yet economic output quadrupled in this same era, doubling per capita income and lowering prices by 60 percent. The question of per capita wealth does not hinge primarily on population growth as


such, just as the Hebrews were informed by God. Population growth is a blessing. The relevant factors are such things as the time-orientation of the society, its commitment to biblical law, and its rate of per capita investment. The important question is: What is a society’s capital base, which includes above all men’s education and ethics?

In this respect, Macaulay misjudged the political life of his own nation, for it was England that first capitulated to the politics of envy, of mass democracy, not the United States. When, on August 10, 1911, the House of Lords voted to abolish its veto power over the House of Commons, under threat of the creation of hundreds of new Liberal Party peerages by the King, the handwriting was on the wall. When, the next day, the Commons passed the Payment of Members Bill, the wall itself collapsed. No longer would members be required to raise their own funds to serve as politicians. The era of the professional politician had arrived in England.

But Macaulay’s warning about the ability of the statesman to withstand the rhetoric of the “tax and spend” demagogue was valid. The history of the twentieth century points to the grim reality of the impotence of any institutional arrangements or formal constitutional restraints, in and of themselves, to reverse the spread of the ideology of socialism. Compulsory wealth redistribution is almost universally accepted in nation after nation, irrespective of the political history of any given society. Furthermore, it has not always been the propertyless masses who have voted to impose socialistic policies; all too often the leadership has come from financially secure intellectuals. Middle-class voters, simultaneously guilt-ridden and envious, have


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voted away their own economic futures unknowingly, always in the name of the poor, with the bills supposedly to be paid for by the rich.

So, Macaulay’s concern about American institutional arrangements, as distinguished from British institutions, was misguided. Both the British and the American systems capitulated in principle about the same time, from 1900 to the First World War, and both societies experienced increasing collectivism in the 1930’s, in the political responses to the Great Depression. After the Second World War ended in 1945, British socialists made far more gains politically than American economic interventionists did.

What Macaulay did not perceive was the rise of the middle class. The long-term effect of compound per capita economic growth has been to reduce the percentage of voters who regard themselves as poor. Middle-class voters own their own homes, even though the homes are mortgaged. These voters have a stake in society: property. By the standards of 1850, let alone 1650, the common man today is rich. He thinks of himself as a property owner. He resists additional taxation.

Both nations began to reverse the drift into statism, beginning within a two-year period: Margaret Thatcher in Britain (1979) and Ronald Reagan in the United States (1981). A majority of voters in both nations decided that they had suffered from more than enough from government regulation, bureaucracy, and high marginal tax rates. The welfare State was rolled back at its edges, but not where it counts most, fiscally speaking: the inter-generational redistribution of wealth. In the case of Great Britain, the State-funded National Health Service remains sacrosanct, as does the Medicare program for the elderly in the United States.

The substance of Macaulay’s letter has been confirmed in several respects, and in no sense did the twentieth century prove him to be categorically incorrect. The drift toward the welfare State continues,
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despite intermittent political reversals. Only when the major State programs of inter-generational wealth-redistribution are repealed through the politically concealed bankruptcy of mass inflation or by outright default will this drift be reversed. The West faces this prospect well before the twenty-first century reaches the halfway point.
Appendix E

ANDREW CARNEGIE: SOCIAL DARWINIST

During the final decades of the nineteenth century in the United States, a group of entrepreneurs collectively known in the history textbooks as “the robber barons” created the modern industrial economy.\(^1\) Never before had a nation experienced economic growth on a scale as great as the United States experienced from 1870 to 1900. Enormous fortunes were made and lost and made again. Output quadrupled between 1867 and 1897, while the population doubled, from 37 million to 72 million. The wholesale price index fell by a hundred points, or 60\%, from 168 to 68 – and this was accomplished in spite of the tripling of the money stock, from $1.3 billion to $4.5 billion.\(^2\) The vast increase in per capita output meant an increase in per capita wealth – doubling in one generation, something that few people living in previous periods of man’s history could have believed possible.

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The secret of success for the entrepreneurs of the late nineteenth century was efficiency. They cut costs. They cut prices. They broadened their markets by making goods available to millions of buyers who could not have bought at the older prices. By increasing the size of their firms, by adapting new techniques of cost accounting, and by discovering new sources of power, raw materials, and communications, these men created a whole new world. The social costs were high for some groups, but the huge immigration from Europe indicated that millions of newcomers believed the costs were worth it.

The dream of rags to riches was still basic to the American vision. Men such as John D. Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan, and Andrew Carnegie became living legends, both to admire and to despise. The archetype cost-cutter was probably Carnegie. He arrived in the United States in 1848 at the age of 12 or 13. He, his brother, and his parents had come from Scotland. His parents had been poverty-stricken radicals. Their son picked up many of their opinions. “As a child,” he later said, “I could have slain king, duke, or lord, and considered their death a service to the state.” When he was 14, he worked 12 hours a day in a textile mill. At 16, he was a skilled telegraph operator. At 17, he was the assistant to a high official of the Pennsylvania Railroad, one of the largest firms in the world (it became the largest in 1865, when Carnegie left it at age 30). At age 20, he was appointed the general superintendent of the railroad’s western division. He went on to create the largest manufacturing organization in the world, Carnegie Steel, and in January, 1901, he sold the company to J. P. Morgan for $480,000,000; $220,000,000 of this was his. This was

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not a cash sale, but involved long-term bonds. Morgan contacted him a few days after the deal was transacted. “Mr. Carnegie, I want to congratulate you on being the richest man in the world.” For comparison’s sake, the price of gold at the time was fixed at $20 per ounce. The average household in the United States at that time earned a little under $1,000 per year. There were approximately 16 million households in the United States in 1900. National income was in the range of $15 billion.

How had he accomplished this? By systematically cutting costs, year after year. He never ceased looking for new manufacturing processes to cut costs. His other tactic was brilliant and daring. He expanded production and improved production facilities during economic depressions of the period. By 1900, his firm had become the largest steel producer in the world, and it was in a position to bankrupt most of its competitors. Carnegie Steel was producing steel for $12 a ton, and hiding behind the tariff which allowed the firm to sell at $23.75 a ton. Carnegie, the “rugged individualist,” was a high tariff man, as every steel producer in recorded U.S. history has been, and he agitated strongly for the McKinley tariff in the early 1890’s. Of course, his U.S. competitors also hid behind that import wall, but


7. Ibid., p. 139; Series F 10–21.


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it did them no good with Carnegie’s ability to underprice them. J. P. Morgan took the firm, merged it with others, and the result was the U.S. Steel Company. Morgan stopped Carnegie’s competition by buying him out. Immediately, the new trust announced a price increase to $28 a ton.¹¹

What did Carnegie do with the money? Over the next nineteen years, he gave it most of it away.¹² This is what sets him apart from all the other “robber barons” of his day. He had achieved his goal. He had become fabulously wealthy in an era of falling prices and no income taxes, when the average family earned less than $1,000 a year. But he did not pass this wealth along to his heirs, for he left little money behind. He married late, at age 53, and had one daughter. His vision was limited to what he could accomplish with his capital within his own lifetime. Only an elite could do much in one lifetime.

Carnegie’s “Essay on Wealth”

Carnegie set forth his opinions concerning wealth and the responsibilities of those who possess it in a memorable essay, published in 1889. Predictably, he did not see wealth as the product of adherence to a biblical law structure, given his rejection of all supernatural religion. He was a religious evolutionist. He once described his conversion to Darwinism: “Light came in as a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of the theology and the supernatural, but I had


¹² He gave millions away to create libraries throughout the United States. He also set up several tax-exempt foundations. The total gifts may have reached $300,000,000, given the interest returns on the original principal, which he also gave away.
Andrew Carnegie: Social Darwinist

found the truth of evolution. ‘All is well since all grows better’ became my motto, my true source of comfort. Man was not created with an instinct for his own degradation, but from the lower he had risen to the higher forms. Nor is there any conceivable end to his perfection. His face is turned to the light, he stands in the sun and looks upward.”¹³ Not the family, not God’s covenantal law-order, but the impersonal processes of evolution will bring progress. Wealth is the product of competition, and the fittest survive. Carnegie was a devoted follower of Herbert Spencer’s brand of evolutionism, with this exception: Unlike Spencer, he did not fear the effects of charity. He saw charitable activities as obligations of the rich, who would give direction to the masses.

What Carnegie called “the law of competition” supposedly raises society and is the source of progress. “But whether the law be benign or not, we must say of it, as we say of the change in the conditions of men to which we have referred: It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and while the law may sometimes be hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department.”¹⁴ Cosmic impersonalism rules the world of man.

Carnegie pulled no punches in his defense of elitism. “We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentrations of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few, and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future progress of the race. Having accepted these, it follows that there must be great scope for the exercise of special

¹³ Livesay, Andrew Carnegie, pp. 74–75.

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ability in the merchant and in the manufacturer who has to conduct affairs upon a great scale.”  

The market process is to be left alone; individualism must be the ruling principle of production and distribution. Communism cannot work. We must defend the ideas of “Individualism, Private Property, the Law of Accumulation of Wealth, and the Law of Competition; for these are the highest results of human experience, the soil in which society so far has produced the best fruit.”

So far, Carnegie sounds very much like the typical proponent of rugged individualism, or social Darwinism. But his frame of reference was both very short and very long: the individual’s lifetime and the eternal evolutionary process. In between, the laws of Individualism, Private Property, and Accumulation of Wealth do not apply. Once a man dies, the State must move in and confiscate the bulk of the dead man’s estate – in the name of the people. With this doctrine, Carnegie broke with nineteenth-century social Darwinism.

“There are but three modes in which surplus wealth can be disposed of. It can be left to the families of the descendants; or it can be bequeathed for public purposes; or, finally, it can be administered during their lives by its possessors.” Carnegie overwhelmingly favored the third approach. He absolutely rejected the idea that rich men should bequeath their capital to their children. Children should be provided for “in moderation.” Leaving one’s wealth in a will to the public often does not work, since the executors may not use the funds as the testator had hoped. What is needed, therefore, is a

15. Idem.

16. Ibid. p. 3.

17. Ibid., p. 3.

18. Ibid., p. 4.
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massive tax on inherited wealth. “The growing disposition to tax more and more heavily large estates left at death is a cheering indication of the growth of a salutary change in public opinion. . . . Of all forms of taxation, this seems the wisest. Men who continue hoarding great sums all their lives, the proper use of which for public ends would work good to the community, should be made to feel that the community, in the form of the state, cannot thus be deprived of its proper share. By taxing estates heavily at death the state marks its condemnation of the selfish millionaire’s unworthy life.”19 A man’s children must be expropriated.

Here is the theology of the pseudo-family. The public, or community, is narrowly (and improperly) defined as the civil government, meaning organized political power. The State is entitled to “its proper share,” and that share is large. The hoarder is living “an unworthy life.” He set forth no limits on such taxation: “It is desirable that nations should go much farther in this direction. Indeed, it is difficult to set bounds to the share of a rich man’s estate which should go at his death to the public through the agency of the state, and by all means such taxes should be graduated, beginning at nothing upon moderate sums to dependents, and increasing rapidly as amounts swell. . . .”20 This vision was widely accepted by voters and civil governments in the twentieth century. The State had replaced the family as the lawful heir of the rich.

Carnegie the Benefactor

What Carnegie never understood was that the wealth he possessed

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was the result of his enormous contribution to human welfare. Before Carnegie, steel had not been used in construction projects, except for bridges and railroads. Because of his relentless cost-cutting techniques, the “age of steel” became a reality throughout the industrial world. Millions of people became the beneficiaries. In contrast, his philanthropies, such as free public libraries, his peace foundation, and similar projects, became places of employment for the middle-class bureaucrats who used his wealth to promote the religion of secular humanism.21 It was Carnegie the “hoarder,” the “wage suppressor” – in short, Carnegie the reinvestor of profits – who benefited the world. When he began to give away his wealth, he found (or at least we have found) that his skills were limited. His elitism trapped him. Carnegie the producer, not Carnegie the donor, was the great benefactor.

His scheme, he argued, was the “true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth, the reconciliation of the rich and the poor. . . .” It would produce “a reign of harmony.” He even adopted a Marxist-like concept of surplus wealth. Under the sway of his system, “we shall have an ideal state, in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the property of the many, because administered for the common good, and this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if it had been distributed in small sums to the people themselves.” The radical elitism of his perspective should be obvious. The man of wealth must live unostentatiously (although Carnegie himself had several mansions), “shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent on him; and after doing so to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called

21. On the revolutionary and elitist ideas promoted by the Carnegie Foundation, see William P. Hoar, Architects of Conspiracy: An Intriguing History (Boston: Western Islands, 1984), ch. 7.
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upon to administer, and strictly bound as a matter of duty to admin-
ister in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to
produce the most beneficial results for the community – the man of
wealth thus becoming the mere agent and trustee for his poorer
brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience,
and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or
could do for themselves.”

He warned against “indiscriminate charity.” Echoing Benjamin
Franklin, he said, “In bestowing charity, the main consideration
should be to help those who will help themselves. . . .” In short,
“Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee
for the poor; entrusted for a season with a great part of the increased
wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far
better than it could or would have done for itself.”

The irony of this is that Carnegie, in order to finally cash in his
investment and begin giving away $300,000,000 (Cramer estimates
that he eventually gave away $350 million, including $62 million in
the British Empire), sold out to J. P. Morgan, knowing that Morgan
was about to establish a giant conglomerate steel trust that was
composed of companies whose profits were being wiped out by
Carnegie’s cost-cutting tactics. Carnegie had served as a trustee of
the masses by his activities as an entrepreneur; he abdicated that
position of trusteeship in the name of philanthropy, where he had few
skills. As a producer, he had increased the wealth of millions of steel

23. Ibid., p. 8.
25. Robert Hessen, Steel Titan: The Life of Charles M. Schwab (New York:
users, allowing them to benefit from his efforts as they chose. He never understood this. This is a major problem with most rich entrepreneurs. They know how to make money. They are not equally skilled at giving it away.

**Darwinian Elitism**

The sort of blatant elitism which Carnegie espoused did not survive the onslaught of socialistic and interventionist thought which became the predominant position of twentieth-century intellectuals. Elitism survived, but not blatant, visible elitism. His variety of modified social Darwinism still contained too strong an element of individualism. Once Carnegie acknowledged the validity of confiscatory estate taxation by the civil government – obtaining “its proper share” – his case for private property was lost. The pseudo-family could not wait until the death of the testator. It could not rely on his good judgment in distributing his wealth before his death. What was needed was a graduated income tax, compulsory old age pensions, and numerous other sorts of taxes. No one could be legally entitled to escape – not the rich, not the middle class, and not the poor. After all, if the State is a family, it is everyone’s family. If it is a trustee, as every family should be, it is a trustee for everyone.26

It is significant that before he died, Carnegie abandoned his professed faith in the free market, and became a promoter of the statist Darwinism of the Progressive movement. Intellectually, this shift was first promoted, and promoted eloquently, by Lester Frank Ward, an early sociologist, whose book, *Dynamic Sociology* (1883),

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was an attack on individualistic Darwinism in the name of the Darwinism of central planning.\textsuperscript{27} Progressivism’s influence increased steadily after 1900. The leaders of the Progressive movement almost without exception adopted some version of Ward’s Darwinism, including the business leaders who were supposedly the targets of the crusading zeal of the reformers. It was marked by a shift from individualism to collectivism and State economic planning and regulation.

Carnegie became a proponent of corporate licensing by the Federal government. By 1908, price competition was still plaguing the older steel firms, and Carnegie (the best of the old competitors) remarked: “. . . it always comes back to me that Government control, and that alone, will solve the problem. . . .”\textsuperscript{28} He had learned how valuable the Federal government could be in protecting the capital of established, large corporations. He understood the nature of the corporate State. He recognized the means by which his heralded elite could direct the affairs of “little people.” Perhaps he at last perceived why the market could no longer be trusted: It gives too much power to the masses, who by their day-by-day decisions to buy or not to buy determine who among the producers is the “fittest” to survive.


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