

# **THE BIBLICAL STRUCTURE OF HISTORY**

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# **THE BIBLICAL STRUCTURE OF HISTORY**

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**Point Five Press**

## *The Biblical Structure of History*

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This book is dedicated to

**Ardischir Arguelles**

Who is just getting started



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# PREFACE

## A. Benefits of Reading This Book

I wrote this book so that a hard core of Christian leaders and prospective leaders will read it and then will act on what they have read. Leaders act representatively. Action is crucial to all forms of leadership: in households, churches, and everywhere else. Knowledge alone is insufficient for meaningful change, either personally or institutionally. We must act in terms of what we believe. But, before we act, we had better count the cost. Jesus said: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:28–30).

Maybe you do not want to be a leader. You are a leader anyway. If you are a parent, you are a leader. Parents teach their children. If you make decisions on behalf of others, you are a leader. Basic to all forms of leadership is the knowledge of history. Every organization has a history. Successful leaders must know something about the past of the organizations in which they possess God-given responsibility. They need to know how they got into the positions they occupy. They need to know something about the successes and failures of previous leaders.

Why should you start reading this book? Why should you finish reading it? Because you are the heir to a great gift: *Christian civilization*. It began on the day Adam was created (Genesis 1:26). It will not end on the day of judgment (Matthew 25). It will extend into eternity (Revelation 21, 22). You owe God thanks. The more you know about the history of Christian civilization, the more thanks you will owe. He who has received more from God owes more to God. “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged” (Luke 7:41–43).

This debt includes your present knowledge of God's dealings with His people through the ages. The Bible is filled mostly with stories of God's dealings with His people. You know some of them. You know about God and Adam, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood. You know about David and Solomon. You may not be able to identify when they lived, but you know that historical time is linear. It had a beginning, and it will have an end: the final judgment. This structure gives meaning to Bible stories.

You also know stories about Jesus. These stories are central to your faith. You know about His resurrection from the dead. Paul put this event at the center of Christian faith. "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). Then he said it again: "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (v. 17). If you are wise, you know about the men of faith described in Hebrews 11. They are role models for Christians in every era.

More than any other religion except Judaism, Christianity is a religion based on history. Yet Christians are remarkably ignorant about the history of the church. They are even more ignorant about the culture-transforming effects of the church. Even if they know a little about a few key figures in the history of the church, they cannot explain exactly why these people were important in the history of Western civilization. They cannot tell you what difference these people made outside of the institutional church. They have no understanding of the relationship between the church's teachings and historical progress.

One of the reasons for this ignorance is that humanistic historians ever since the Renaissance have dominated the profession of historical storytellers. They have written stories about the history of the church prior to 1500. These stories have been almost universally negative. There has been some recent improvement in the accuracy of the humanists' accounts of the history of Christianity, but not enough. Humanists have written the history textbooks. Textbooks on the history of Western civilization have focused on the historical impact of the rediscovery of Greek and Roman historical documents and sculpture that took place after about 1350, and especially after the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, when Greek refugees came west with copies of ancient Greek documents and the ability to teach. Humanist historians labeled the early history of the church "the dark ages." They also labeled the history of the West up to about 1350 as "the Middle Ages." The middle of what? The middle of civilization between the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. and the advent of the Renaissance.

In this book, I explain the nature of the intellectual warfare between two irreconcilable theories of history and two traditions of writing about history. The first is the Christian concept of history. The second is humanism's concept of history. Both groups have adopted similar organizational categories for understanding history, but their presuppositions are radically opposed. I discuss this conflict of visions in terms of the rivalry between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. I show why you and generations of Christians before you have been deliberately misinformed about the history of Western civilization.

This book will take time to read. You will have to pay attention to some of the details. I have done my best to structure the book to make it readable, but there is no substitute for paying attention. We tell this to our children when they are young. Our children tend not to pay much attention to the warning. I hope you do.

## **B. The Origin of This Book**

In 1975, I persuaded R. J. Rushdoony to use funds raised by his nonprofit foundation, Chalcedon, to publish a scholarly book honoring Christian philosopher Cornelius Van Til, who taught apologetics—the philosophical defense of the faith—at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Rushdoony had been an intellectual disciple of Van Til's ever since 1947, when he read *The New Modernism* (1947), Van Til's critique of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, the European neo-orthodox theologians who denied the historical accuracy of the Bible's narratives. I had taken an introductory apologetics course from Van Til in the fall of 1963. Rushdoony agreed to the project. I then recruited authors who were followers of Van Til intellectually. Each wrote at least one article about a specific academic discipline.

I wrote the article on sociology and the article on economics. Yet my Ph.D. was in history. I decided that the best person to write the article on history was professor C. Gregg Singer of Catawba College. His 1964 book, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, was unique. In 1975, Arlington House published his history of the National Council of Churches: *The Unholy Alliance*. In 1979, his next major book appeared: *From Rationalism to Irrationality: The Decline of the Western Mind from the Renaissance to the Present* (1979).

Singer was not a well-known historian in secular academic circles, but

he was a superior historian. Catawba College was a small Christian college in a small town in rural North Carolina. He did not have ready access to a major research library. But he had a worldview that enabled him to write cogent books on major topics. That was why I invited him to contribute an article. He agreed. The book appeared in 1976: *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*. It was published by Rushdoony's book publishing company, Ross House Books.

Singer's essay was titled "The Problem of Historical Interpretation." He began his essay with this paragraph:

Some five years ago at an annual meeting of the American Historical Association the writer had the occasion to meet informally with a group of the more famous historians in attendance at that conference. The subject under discussion was the meaning and purpose of history. These half-dozen scholars were of the opinion that history lacks any decisive meaning and any discernible purpose. The writer then posed to this group of distinguished scholars one question: If this be the case, then why do we teach history? The scholars looked at him with surprise and even disgust, but no answer was forthcoming from any of them. The group broke up as each went to his own particular luncheon group and discussion of various phases of a subject which they could not really justify as part of a college curriculum and yet which they continue to teach as if the knowledge of it had some inherent value.

In the second paragraph, he drew a conclusion regarding the world of humanist academia:

This incident is by no means unique. The professional historians in this country and in Europe have come to the place where they have little faith in the subject to which they have devoted their lives. Historians with increasing and distressing frequency are openly admitting that history has no meaning and shows little or no purpose or goals. But neither is this anti-intellectual attitude peculiar to the professional historians. The existentialist and positive philosophies have entered into the thinking of most areas of human thought and activity with devastating results. In conjunction with the Freudian school in psychology, they have made irrationalism and anti-intellectualism fashionable and have

virtually removed the concepts of purpose and meaning from the thinking of many historians and those who proclaim themselves to be “social scientists.”

His assessment was correct. Leading historians in 1970 no longer had faith that history reveals any authoritative meaning or purpose. This lack of faith is far more widespread today. It had been building for half a century before Singer wrote his essay. Yet this pessimism regarding the relevancy of historical research and publication has in no way slowed the publication of arcane articles in professional historical journals. Historians continue to write these articles, despite the fact that the articles are rarely quoted by other historians or even read by them. Then why write? They do it to keep their jobs in major universities if they do not have tenure, and to get job offers if they are stuck in colleges with poor academic reputations and low pay. In 1970, publishing journal articles was the way that untenured assistant professors became tenured associate professors and full professors—in every field in the humanities and social sciences.

When the acknowledged leaders in any profession begin to doubt its legitimacy, that profession borders on the fringes of irrelevancy. In the case of the academic discipline known as history, the number of students willing to major in the field has steadily declined. There are so few high school teaching opportunities available to graduates with B.A. degrees in history that the number of students willing to take two years of upper division courses has declined. In 2017, 15 million students attended American colleges. In that year, fewer than 25,000 history degrees were awarded, down from over 36,000 in 2008. The number of history majors declined by two-thirds from 1969 to 1985. (Colleen Flaherty, “The Vanishing History Major,” *Inside Higher Education* [November 27, 2018]. <https://bit.ly/HistoryMajors>)

There was a time in American history when history courses were part of the core curriculum in both high schools and colleges. In high school in the late 1950s, I took a one-year course in world history and one-year course in American history. At the University of California, Riverside in the 1960s, a one-year course in Western civilization was required for graduation. That academic world is long gone. In 2020, an article was published by *Forbes*, a business site: “Who’s Afraid of Western Civ?” Here are the numbers: “By 2011, none of the 50 top U.S. universities required Western Civilization, and 34 didn’t even offer the course. Nationwide, only 17% of colleges require

Western Civ, and only 18% require American history or government.” The turning point came on January 15, 1987 at Stanford University, when 500 students and a visiting celebrity, Rev. Jesse Jackson, demonstrated against a required course in Western culture. Their chant received national publicity by the media: “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western civ has got to go!” The faculty took the hint. It dropped the course in 1989. (A long, carefully documented article on the rise and fall of the Western Civilization curriculum was published in 2020 by the National Association of Scholars: “The Lost History of Western Civilization,” by Stanley Kurtz. <https://bit.ly/LostHistory2020>)

Singer made it clear in 1976 that the academic discipline of history was in a state of crisis. He blamed the presuppositions of secular humanism. Unfortunately, he never wrote a book on the purpose and meaning of history. His article offered no insights regarding an explicitly Christian way of interpreting and writing history. He was therefore in the distressing position of trying to beat something with nothing. Nevertheless, his essay serves as an introduction to Van Til’s writings on history and historiography. This book fills in the details.

### C. The Nature of the Crisis

In Part 2 of this book, I go into the details of the crisis in modern historiography. I became aware of this crisis in my senior year of college, 1962–63. I took a course in historiography in the second semester. The history department required history majors to take this course. Had it not been required, it is doubtful that many students would have enrolled. I was an exception. I was interested in questions regarding epistemology, the philosophical study of what people can know and how they can know it. I had been reading the works of economist Ludwig von Mises for two years. Also, beginning in the fall of 1962, Rushdoony began sending me spiral-bound syllabi written by Van Til for his students.

What I did not know was this: in 1962, Van Til had written a multi-volume mimeographed syllabus, *Christianity in Conflict*. It was a history of Christian apologetics from the second century onward. His contention was this: the early church began a tradition which undermined the testimony of the church, namely, the use of Greek philosophy as a way to defend the teachings of the church and the legitimacy of the gospel. In Part I of that syllabus, Van Til devoted six pages to an analysis of a book by R. G. Colling-

wood, *The Idea of History*. Van Til had correctly identified the scholar who was arguably the major humanist philosopher of history in the mid-twentieth century. Singer relied on Van Til's critique to write his article.

In that course, I read two anthologies of essays on the philosophy of history and the writing of history. Two of the essayists, Carl Becker and Charles Beard, had delivered presidential addresses to the American Historical Association in the early 1930s. These articles were included in one of the anthologies. I discuss them in Chapters 8 and 9. In most of the materials on the meaning of history written after 1920, historians presented some version of historical relativism. They were in reaction against the ideal of late-nineteenth century historians: the objective interpretation of history. This had been called scientific history. Any claim of scientific precision and authority was not taken seriously by leading historians after 1920.

A neglected cause of this loss of faith in objective history was the rise of the Copenhagen school of physics in the 1920s: quantum physics. That movement had declared that the realm of subatomic physics is not governed by the same Newtonian laws of cause and effect that govern the realm of atoms, where you and I live. This change of view began to affect the social sciences. One influential scholar who understood the impact of quantum physics outside of physics departments was Roscoe Pound, who was Dean of the Harvard Law School from 1916 to 1937. After this, he became a University Professor at Harvard. In 1940, he wrote this in his book, *Contemporary Juristic Theory*: "Nothing has been so upsetting to political and juristic thinking as the growth of the idea of contingency in physics. It has taken away the analogy from which philosophers had reached the very idea of law. It has deprived political and juristic thought of the pattern to which they had conceived of government and law as set up. Physics had been the rock on which they had built" (p. 34). Physics was no longer a reliable rock in 1930. I discussed this reconstruction of Newtonian physics in Chapter 1 of my book, *Is The World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (1988).

. . . God created the world, and then He created man to exercise dominion over it (Gen. 1:26–28). Man's mind comprehends his environment—not perfectly, but adequately for a creature responsible before God to exercise dominion in God's name. It is only because mankind has this interpretive ability that science can ex-



ist. Even more crucial, *it is only because God created and actively, providentially sustains this universe that science can exist.*

Few Christians have been told that without three key doctrines that stem directly from Christian theology, modern science could not have been developed: first, the creation of the universe by a totally transcendent God out of nothing; second, the sustaining providence of God; third, linear (straight line) history. The pagan world, including Greece and Rome, did not believe these doctrines, and it did not develop theoretical science. Similarly, both Chinese and Islamic science failed to carry through on their hopeful beginnings in science because they rejected a Christian worldview. Because the West believed in these three doctrines, modern science became possible.

Because modern man has abandoned all three of these doctrines, modern science has become increasingly irrational, despite its tremendous advancement. As the experiments become more precise, physicists have lost faith in the coherence of the universe. The twentieth century has abandoned the stable, rational worldview of late-nineteenth-century physical science (pp. 13–14).

What I wrote about modern natural science in 1988, I am writing about modern historiography in this book. The problem is the same—skepticism—because the cause is the same: the abandonment of a worldview that affirms the possibility of objective knowledge. The twenty-first century is increasingly an era of subjectivism. This started in the late-nineteenth century, and it accelerated after World War I. In his book, *Twilight of Authority* (1975), Robert Nisbet observed:

Twilight periods are rich in manifestations of subjectivity, and our own is no exception. The retreat to inner consciousness that began in literature at the very beginning of the century, but which was offset for a long time by still-powerful currents of objectivity, has become a major phenomenon in the cultural setting of the present, and may be seen not only in literature and the fine arts, but in substantial areas of the social sciences, philosophy, and, variously, in the wide range of popular therapeutic explorations of self. This subjectivity would be less significant if it were not associated with what has become an enlarging distrust of reason



and science in some of the areas of inquiry which only recently have become accepted in the terms of rationalism (pp. 139–40).

As I explain in Part 2, the spread of subjectivism has steadily undermined humanistic historians' trust in the meaningfulness of their research and the research of their peers. This subjectivism is an inescapable result of the academic world's rejection of biblical creationism. It assumes a rival view of origins: impersonal, purposeless, meaningless cosmic evolution.

## Conclusion

I have learned after six decades of experience in teaching, primarily on the printed page and the computer screen, that it is more effective to start with a presentation of what is correct before launching into detailed criticisms of what is incorrect. The old saying is true: *you can't beat something with nothing*. It is best to begin with something, and especially something true. This is why I devote Part 1 to a presentation of the biblical foundations of history and also historiography. These five covenantal categories are foundational to the study of society: sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and succession. The Bible identifies the content of these five categories in the realm of history: creationism, the image of God in man, biblical law, God's imputation of meaning, and cultural inheritance over time.

In Part 2, I survey humanism's rival construct. Humanist historians rely on the same five categories in their pursuit of an understanding of the past—sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and succession—but they substitute different content in four of the five: evolution, autonomy, relativism, and nominalism,. On the fifth point, succession, they remain silent. It is too depressing: entropy—the heat death of the again purposeless universe. (See Chapter 10.)

In Part 3, I discuss how and why Christian historians must reconstruct the epistemological foundations of their field from the bottom up, and then begin to produce historical studies that are consistent with the Christian worldview regarding the structure of history. There is such a worldview. The fact that Christian historians have ignored it for so long has undermined their understanding of historical development. They have adopted too much of the humanists' covenant model, which is implicit in the history profession's university screening system that certifies professional compe-

tence. But there is no formal university course in presuppositions in any academic discipline. At most, there is are courses in methodology, which never mention the presuppositions that undergird the professors' world-view. But the humanists' presuppositions exist, and they shape the thinking of most professional historians.

# INTRODUCTION

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (1 Corinthians 6:1–3)*

## A. Analysis

This is a familiar passage. Paul was writing to the church at Corinth to raise money. First Corinthians is the first known example of a fund-raising letter. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye” (1 Corinthians 16:1). Second Corinthians is the second known fund-raising letter.

The call for money came at the end of this letter. Paul devoted the early section to issues of church discipline. Chapter 5 deals with the sin of incest. Paul called on the church to bring the sinner under church discipline. Chapter 6 deals with church members who were taking other members before Roman courts. Paul said this should stop. By submitting to Rome’s courts, church members were acknowledging that justice from Rome was superior to justice from the church. This meant that they trusted the judgment of covenant-breakers more than they trusted covenant-keepers. They trusted Roman law more than God’s law. This was an implicit statement of faith. They trusted the gods of Rome more than the God of the Bible. Those gods would provide justice. This is a crucial attribute of the gods in every society.

Then Paul asked a remarkable question. Didn’t they understand that Christians will judge the world? This was not a rhetorical question. Paul did not think that they understood this. This was a matter of eschatology. He was saying this: at some point in between his day and Christians’ entry into the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21, 22), Christians will be in a position of judicial authority, judging the world. He did not say when, but he made it clear that this would be the case.

Then he asked an even more amazing question. Didn't they know that Christians will judge the angels? This is one of the most astounding statements in the Bible. It is so astounding that Christians find it difficult to believe. It has significant implications for biblical eschatology: the doctrine of the last things. Yet you have probably never heard a sermon on this passage.

Christianity confronted the ancient world with a unique doctrine: the final judgment. This doctrine was not clearly taught in the Old Testament. It was not taught by classical religion. There will be a final end to history. It will be marked by God's judgment of everyone who has ever lived. It is described in Matthew 25, but especially the final third of Matthew 25: verses 31 to 46. This is the passage made famous by the phrase "sheep and goats."

This will not be the final act of the final judgment. John added this: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14–15).

If we believe what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:3, something will take place after the separation of the sheep and the goats, but before God's casting the goats and the fallen angels into the lake of fire. Yet 1 Corinthians 6:3 is never discussed in terms of the final judgment's sequence. It is rarely discussed at all. There will be a final judgment that separates covenant-keepers from covenant-breakers. Christian churches have always taught this. This judgment will determine who will go into the lake of fire: the contents of hell. Fallen angels will be in hell. God made hell expressly for them. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

There are covenant-keeping angels and covenant-breaking angels. Christians call covenant-breaking angels "demons." They are sometimes called devils. Who will judge them at the end of history? Paul was quite clear about this: covenant-keeping humans. This will be the final task in history given to covenant-keepers. This will complete history's phase of the dominion covenant (Genesis 1:26–28). Fallen angels and human covenant-breakers will no longer be factors in history after this final judgment. They will be consigned to the lake of fire.

Conclusion: *the final judgment of humanity is not the final act of judgment.* Then what is? Execution: the second death. But, before that can be imposed on men and demons, there has to be a trial. Paul said specifically that this trial will be conducted by covenant-keepers. Humans will judge fallen

angels. During history, angels have far more power than humans. They are closer to omnipotence than humans. They are closer to omniscience than humans. They understand something of the future. Yet all of this is reversed in what can be called, judicially speaking, a great reversal. Covenant-keepers will judge fallen angels. Until this takes place, the marriage supper of the lamb cannot take place (Revelation 19:9). Neither can the establishment of the sin-free new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21, 22).

The transition from wrath to grace will be completed immediately after the final judgment of humanity. The transition from grace to wrath took place at the fall of man. The fall of man was specifically a failure on the part of humanity to exercise biblical justice. Eve or perhaps Adam and Eve together were required by God to bring judgment against the serpent: execution. But Adam and Eve instead rendered judgment against the word of God. They ate the forbidden fruit. God then brought them under judgment. God held a trial. God convicted Adam, Eve, and the serpent. But He did not end history. Mankind still was required to fulfill the dominion covenant.

The primary assignment to mankind is to exercise godly judgment. That was true in the garden. That is true today. That will be true after the separation of the sheep from the goats. *Rendering judgment is the essence of the dominion covenant.* There are economic aspects to this. There are technological aspects. But the central task of the dominion covenant is to improve our ability to render godly judgment. The final act of history, according to Paul, will be the comprehensive rendering of judgment by covenant-keepers against fallen angels. This is the narrative of history: the transition from grace to wrath, followed by the transition from wrath to grace. It will culminate with the abolition of wrath for covenant-keepers (Matthew 25). For covenant-breakers, eternity will be marked by excruciating wrath. There will be no transition out of this wrath.

A trial takes time. Under a jury system, competing lawyers present the cases for guilt and innocence. A jury decides which narrative is more plausible. To do this, the jury must exercise memory. One of the advantages of a jury is this: there is a division of labor. This division of labor applies to memory. Jury members remember different points made by the lawyers. It is through discussion that jury members come to an agreement regarding the comparative plausibility of the rival narratives.

In the United States, criminal trials have a high standard to justify conviction of guilt. The standard is this: "beyond reasonable doubt." The key

word is *reasonable*. The standard is not perfection. Christians should recognize that perfect justice is available only on judgment day. God will supply it for mankind. But it is clear from what Paul said that covenant-keepers will play a role in rendering judgment on fallen angels. God will not fill the offices of judge and jury by Himself. He will invite post-judgment covenant-keepers to participate in the final judgment. Creatures without enormous power in history will render final judgment against those creatures that possessed enormous power in history. This leads me to a conclusion: the is of the conflict between God and Satan ethics, not power. The battle for control over history is not primarily between God and Satan. The battle is between the *covenantal representatives* of God and Satan. Therefore, the supreme skill associated with dominion in history is the skill of rendering godly judgment.

## **B. Casuistry: Applying Laws to Circumstances**

Casuistry is the application of general legal principles to specific cases. It can also be the application of general ethical principles to specific situations. It is the exercise of judgment. The Bible calls this wisdom. In the Old Testament, the great model of a master of casuistry was Solomon. He was legendary for his ability to apply biblical law to specific legal situations. However, he failed completely with respect to his multiplication of wives. There, he is the classic example in the Old Testament of a man devoid of wisdom.

We gain understanding of the task of rendering judgment from about the time we turn two years old. In the United States, this age is called the “terrible twos.” Children begin to use this word: *no*. The only word that rivals it is this one: *mine*.

Children learn about discipline. They learn to exercise self-discipline in order to avoid the imposition of physical or other discipline by parents. They learn to render judgment in their own lives. The parents give them instructions, just as God gave Adam and Eve instructions. The children then learn how to follow these instructions in order to meet the standards set by the parents. The parents are in a position to impose negative and positive sanctions. These sanctions are teaching devices. They help children learn the crucial discipline of self-discipline. Children learn about rules early in life. They also learn how to manipulate parents by playing one parent off

against the other. Not possessing power, they learn how to manipulate people who possess power. They become remarkably skilled at this at a young age.

The process of becoming an adult has more to do with learning and then applying the skills of self-discipline than any other skill associated with adulthood. Every society has rituals associated with becoming an adult. But the essence of becoming an adult is not passage through a ritual. The essence of becoming an adult is learning how to apply general principles of law, especially ethical principles, to specific circumstances in life. This used to be known as *casuistry*, but the term has fallen out of favor. From a young age, we are told by those possessing the power to impose sanctions that the rules are constant. We are told to observe the rules in specific circumstances. Circumstances constantly change, but we are told that the rules do not change. The rules enable us to make wise decisions. We learn the skills of casuistry. If we do not learn these skills, we suffer negative sanctions: as children and then as adults.

*Continuity in life has more to do with the constancy of law than anything else.* This may be ethical law. It may be biological law. It may be physical law. There are numerous realms of law in this world. In order to guide our own behavior, we must believe that there is continuity of law over time. If there were not, we would live in chaos. We would have no reliable idea of what will happen next as a result of a decision. The world would fall apart. But the world does not fall apart. This is strong evidence of the fact that there is continuity in law, and it is also a testimony that we learn how to apply general laws to specific circumstances.

We need accurate memories regarding what we have been told the laws are. We also need accurate memories regarding the consequences of disobeying specific laws. If we did not have memories, we would live in personal chaos. We would be as those who have Alzheimer's disease. We would have to be institutionalized. Someone else would have to take care of us. The fear of Alzheimer's is one of the most widespread fears in the modern world. Nobody wants to become dependent on somebody else as an adult. Nobody wants to be a drain on family resources. Nobody wants to be in a position of not being able to make responsible decisions. So, nobody wants to forget all of the past. A disease that removes our ability to recall the past is correctly seen as a debilitating affliction. It incapacitates the victims' judgment.

### C. Historiography as Retroactive Casuistry

The Bible's unifying themes for history are these: the transition from grace to wrath, followed by the transition from wrath to grace. The transition from grace to wrath took place in Genesis 3. It was marked by a trial. God cross-examined Adam and Eve. Then He imposed negative sanctions. But He did not kill them: grace. The transition from wrath to grace ends with a trial: the final judgment (Matthew 25).

History after the fall of man is marked by a pair of trials. In between these trials was the most important trial in history: Pilate's trial of Jesus Christ. Pilate admitted that he saw no fault in Christ, but he sentenced Him to death anyway. Then Roman soldiers imposed negative sanctions. Pilate was a corrupt judge who violated Roman standards of evidence in order to placate a mob. This was a recapitulation of Adam's fall: rendering false judgment against God's word. Pilate condemned an innocent man and released a guilty man (Barabbus). He believed that he would benefit from this violation of the law. For this corrupt act, he became the most infamous regional Roman official in history. Millions of people have recited this historical judgment against him: "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

Pilate was an evil man. The Christian church has judged him accordingly down through the ages. His violation of the rule of law stands as the archetype of a corrupt judge. He committed this act of injustice based on historical evidence and his cross-examination of Jesus. There was no question in his mind that the evidence was not sufficient to convict Jesus, but he convicted Him anyway. This was not ignorance on his part. He did not make a mistake in assessing the evidence against Jesus. It was reliable evidence. But the Jews in the courtyard imputed evil to Jesus' statements in the Sanhedrin's earlier trial, and they demanded the imposition of Rome's negative sanctions. From that day until today, Pontius Pilate has been regarded by the Christian church as the covenant-breaker who committed the greatest crime in history. This was a greater crime than the crime committed by Judas. Judas merely identified Jesus so that the Jewish authorities could arrest him. That crime was significant historically only because Pilate committed the greatest crime in history before the day was over.

The retroactive judgment of the Christian church against Pontius Pilate has shaped the church ever since. Before A.D. 70, the church possessed written evidence of this evil act: the Gospels. The church regarded this ev-



idence as reliable. The Council of Nicea identified Pilate as evil in 325, but the church had concluded this over two centuries earlier. Christian creeds have shaped the church ever since. They have provided a model for Christian historiography. They asserted that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified. He died and was buried. On the third day, He rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of God. He will return in final judgment. This historical and also eschatological account has become authoritative as a major ritual of the church. This testimony is repeated in all the three branches of the church: Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism.

Christians know who Pontius Pilate was. They impute guilt to him. They verbally condemn him every time they recite a creed that mentions his name. No other person in history has been publicly condemned more often by more people as an evildoer. Christians mark the origin of the church by reciting a creed, and the creed identifies Pontius Pilate as the culprit. The centrality of the creed in the history of Christianity marks the centrality of a specific historical narrative. The creed declares the birth, trial, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ at a precise time in history as the central narrative in history.

The creeds provide the model for Christian historiography. They identify righteous figures in history, and they identify a supreme villain. The creeds tell us that the public assessment of guilt and innocence retroactively, based on reliable evidence, is at the center of the biblical understanding of history. Here is one implication of the creeds: *Christian historiography should correspond to what the Bible reveals as the structure of history.* It must also do justice to the evidence of history. In short, Christian historians must not imitate Pontius Pilate. They are to render judgment in terms of reliable evidence. They are to judge evidence in terms of standards. These evidential standards must reflect God's evidential standards. Human actions are governed by God's law. Sanctions in history, both positive and negative, are imposed by God in history as well as in eternity. History is a series of human decisions that are tried by God from heaven, during history, and also at the end of history. He imposes sanctions, during history and also at the end of history. Christian historians, following the examples of the church creeds, should publicly declare people's guilt or innocence retroactively in terms of objective evidence, God's ethical standards, and casuistry: the judgment of historical events in terms of reliable evidence.

These declarations over time constitute a biblically sanctioned narrative of history. The narratives of history should conform to this pattern. Christian narratives of history should include retroactive assessments of good and evil, wisdom and foolishness, success and failure. People pay little attention to narratives that are not marked by sequential retroactive judgments of representative figures in history whose decisions shaped history. They want to hear about the good guys and the bad guys. What they want to hear about the good guys and the bad guys is this: *the good guys win, and the bad guys lose*. They win or lose in terms of permanent ethical standards that still govern success and failure in history today. This is the biblical structure of history from the trial in the garden of Eden until the final judgment.

### D. The Denial of Casuistry

Covenant-breakers wish to suppress evidence of this structure of history. They do not want to think about the final judgment. They do not want to believe that Jesus Christ will return in final judgment in order to separate eternally the sheep from the goats. They correctly perceive that they are the goats. So, the more self-conscious humanist historians deny that history is structured in terms of a specific form of casuistry. They deny that it is the primary function of historiography to identify those individuals who served as representatives of the forces of good and the forces of evil. They do not wish to think about the fact that the kingdom of God is going to triumph over the kingdom of man. They resent the suggestion. They try to live consistently with this denial of the structure of history as a form of casuistry.

A representative example of a philosopher of history with this outlook was Benedetto Croce [CROWcheh], who was an intellectual leader in Italian society from the late 1890s until his death in 1952. He was a liberal politically. Because he was a lifetime senator, he served in political office during the reign of Mussolini. He opposed Mussolini during most of this period. In 1938, he wrote a book on historiography: *History as the Story of Liberty*. Part 4 of the book is "Historiography and Morals." Chapter 1 of Part 4 is "Moral Judgment in Historiography." He got right to the point. He cited Matthew 7:1, "Judge not that ye be not judged." He did not offer any exegesis of this passage that would have indicated its historical context. That was because he did not regard it as authoritative. He was an agnostic. But the passage might be regarded as authoritative by some of his readers, so he

quoted it. He then went on to deny the legitimacy of all moral judgments by historians.

He began by describing what history should never be. He denied this view of history: "History is supposed to be the great High Court which reviews all the trouble judgments arising out of the passions and errors of man, corrects them, and pronounces a final verdict as in a universal judgment, separating the elect from the reprobates" (Meridian Books, 1955, p. 201). He spoke of history as if it were a living thing. He meant historians, but he said history. "Neither the future nor history can carry this utterly intolerable burden of the task intrinsically absurd and impractical" (p. 201). In order for historians to pass judgment retroactively, they would have to have inner certainty. He wrote: "... no documents can possibly be converted into an inner certainty" (p. 201). "The labeling of men as good and bad is a troublesome enough business in practice and for practical purposes. Surely we need not desire to pursue it and take it up anew in our historical considerations" (p. 202). The historian must not judge people's motivation. He must only judge the outcome of their actions. "The only moral judgment which attains to consistency and significance in historiography is that which is concerned with the character of the achievement, apart from the private impressions, illusions, and passions which may accompany it in the mind of the author, or which contemporaries and posterity enveloped it" (pp. 202–3). Only God may pass judgment on individuals. But, since Croce did not believe in God, that left everyone off the hook in both history and eternity. He wrote: "... we must agree that this intimate knowledge, reserved to man's conscience and into which alone the eye of God penetrates, or in certain singular moments the eye of love and friendship, is not only not historical knowledge, but is not knowledge of any kind, not even the order of truth which belongs to poetry, where the part is always seen as a part of the whole, the human drama within the divine drama of the Cosmos" (p. 205).

The next year, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland, and this started World War II. Croce had opposed Italy's participation in World War I. Mussolini took Italy into the war on the side of Germany on June 10, 1940. In 1945, he attempted to escape, dressed in women's clothes, but he was identified and executed on the spot. The executioners hung his body upside down in the public square. After 1945, the widespread hostility to Hitler as the most evil man in modern times was extended to the legacy of Mussolini: the fool who joined with Hitler. Hitler made it virtually impossible for historians to adopt

anything remotely resembling Croce's view of retroactive silence regarding immoral individuals. *Hitler, more than any other person in modern times, undermined the intellectual charade of moral neutrality by historians.* Any classroom teacher of American history who would argue in favor of moral neutrality could be removed from his position by this question from any student: "Are you saying, professor, that there was no moral difference between Franklin Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler?" The professor would either have to deny what he just said about moral neutrality in teaching history, or else he would have to affirm that there was no such moral difference. If he affirmed this, he would be put on suspension by the end of the week and would probably be fired at the end of the semester.

## E. World History

There is a single theme for all of human history after the fall of man: the transition from wrath to grace. The basis of grace is the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the offer of redemption to individuals and institutions. Wherever sin is present, the gospel offers redemption. Sin is present in every institution. Sin is present in every society. Mankind and mankind's works are under sin, and therefore mankind and mankind's works are subject to redemption by the grace of God.

This view of history is anathema to humanist historians. It testifies to God's providential control over history. It also testifies to a final judgment. Humanist historians prefer to argue that history has no structure. However, if mankind's history has no structure, then there is no such thing as a universal history. There can be regional histories, up to and including Western civilization, but there cannot be a universal history.

A major problem with this argument today is this: Western civilization is now spreading across the face of the earth. Western concepts of reason, science, economics, and progress have influenced the whole world since the end of World War II in 1945. This is what the church from the beginning expected would happen. The gospel would spread across the face of the earth. It would transform civilizations. It would lay the foundation for the kingdom of God in history, which is another way of saying the civilization of God.

It is not surprising that Croce was adamant that there is no such thing as universal history. This was consistent with his denial of any kind of moral order governing history.

The idea of so-called “universal history” has arisen from this demand for the impossible. It seeks, precisely, to embrace the totality of history, and in its consequential and logical, if mythological, form, a Universal History was at one time expected to include the future as well, finishing with the anticipated account of the end of the world. Such “universal history,” however, remains an idea and not a fact, because when executed the universal histories are either just compilations, manuals, and historical repertoires, or else under the name of universal histories are really particular (universal-particular) histories, like every genuine history (p. 268).

Today, we see this universal history beginning to take shape across the world. It is not self-consciously Christian, but it is the historical outcome of the biblical view of the world. Croce recognized this. He wrote that “a Universal History was at one time expected to include the future as well, finishing with the anticipated account of the end of the world.” He was dismissive of Christianity’s view of history.

## F. War of the Worldviews

My book is about the debate between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers over the foundation of history, the understanding of history, the laws of history, the meaning of history, the scope of history, and the future of history. Covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers have radically different views on these issues. That is because they have radically different worldviews. That is because they have radically different definitions of God, man, law, sanctions, and time. They operate in terms of rival covenantal structures.

Most covenant-keepers are naïve about the irreconcilable warfare between the covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Covenant-keepers have adopted the official doctrine of the covenant-breakers: *the myth of neutrality*. Jesus was clear that there can be no neutrality regarding Him. “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30). Despite this declaration, covenant-breakers have successfully infiltrated almost every area of academia by means of the myth of neutrality. The myth of neutrality becomes the justification for tax funding of education, from kindergarten through graduate school. Cove-

nant-breakers extract tax money from covenant-keepers, and then they use this money to indoctrinate the children of covenant-keepers in the worldview of covenant-breakers. This has gone on successfully in the West for over two centuries. Covenant-breakers in classrooms have taught the children of covenant-keepers the humanistic content of their covenant. Most covenant-keepers generally remain content to send their children into the schools run by covenant-breakers.

There is beginning to be resistance. That is because covenant-breakers are becoming more open about the implications of their God-hating worldview. They steadily move the curriculum toward nonsense and degeneracy. The content of the curriculum materials in the public schools is becoming more straightforwardly antithetical to Christianity. In the name of neutrality, the courts have forbidden state-run or tax-funded schools to teach Christianity, but the schools then teach a highly religious worldview: the worldview of humanism. The courts not only uphold this, they encourage it. They mandate it.

This is why it is imperative that Christians develop comprehensive alternatives academically. They should give up any attempt to compromise with the humanists with respect to the content of the curriculum. The courts have made it clear that no compromise by humanists is allowed. The humanists are in control of the tax-funded schools. They have been in control of tax-funded schools in the United States ever since the development of tax-funded public education in the state of Massachusetts in the late 1830s. It has been the same all over the world.

This book is my contribution to the reclaiming of history and historiography by Christians. There have been lots of Christians who have taught history. There have been almost no Christians who have taught an explicitly Christian history. They have taught some compromise version of humanism's narratives of historical development. They were certified as teachers in institutions that were accredited by humanists. These institutions taught a specifically humanistic view of historical causation. Christian teachers went into Christian schools to teach some variant of the humanists' historical narratives. *The war of the worldviews has always been a war of historical narratives.* It is therefore the moral obligation of Christians to begin to replace the humanists' narratives with narratives that are based on the Bible's concepts of sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and succession.

## G. The War of the Narratives

I go into details on this issue in the appendix on narratives. Here, I sketch briefly the nature of the conflict. Humanists are evolutionists. They do not believe in the sovereignty of God. They have constructed a narrative of the history of the universe that explicitly denies any purpose whatsoever. Cosmic evolution is purposeless. It has no design. Out of the cosmos came life about 4.5 billion years ago, we are assured. Then came mankind about 2.5 million years ago. Only since the evolution of man has purpose appeared in the universe. *Humanists have substituted their doctrine of the sovereignty of man for the Bible's doctrine of the sovereignty of God.* This underlies all of their historical narratives. There are major conflicting humanistic historical narratives, but they all agree on this point: man proposes, and man disposes.

Humanists have understood that narratives are central to society. There is no society that is not heavily reliant on specific narratives about the origin of the universe, life, mankind, and the society. Humanists have understood that they must be in control of the narratives. If they do not control the narratives, they cannot control the thinking, the voting, and the decision-making of the vast majority of individuals in any society. They have been self-conscious about taking control of the educational system that teaches the narratives to each generation.

The great barrier to this program has always been the church. Weekly sermons are sources of the Christian worldview. The Bible is structured mostly in terms of historical narratives. Constant preaching and teaching of these historical narratives has been basic to the establishment of Christian civilization. Therefore, it has been the policy of humanists to offset the effects of one or two sermons a week with 30 hours a week of lessons in schools controlled by humanists. Control over the content of historical narratives has been basic to the humanists' agenda from the beginning.

One humanist who pursued this substitution systematically was Andrew Dickson White. He was the first president of the American Historical Association in 1884–85. He was the first president of Cornell College. He wrote one of the most important humanist books designed to undermine respect for Christianity: *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896). He was a Protestant theological liberal. He hated any form of Protestantism that affirmed the final authority of the Bible. In the



Introduction to his book, he described how he viewed his career as a college president. "My hope is to aid—even if it be but a little—in the gradual and healthful dissolving away of this mass of unreason, that the stream of 'religion pure and undefiled' may flow on broad and clear, a blessing to humanity." He described his academic opponents, meaning Bible-believing Christians, as vicious. "Our purpose was to establish in the State of New York an institution for advanced instruction and research, in which science, pure and applied, should have an equal place with literature; in which the study of literature, ancient and modern, should be emancipated as much as possible from pedantry; and which should be free from various useless trammels and vicious methods which at that period hampered many, if not most, of the American universities and colleges." He bragged about the success of humanists in replacing preachers as presidents of Christian colleges. In the final paragraph of the Introduction, he wrote this:

The ideas for which so bitter a struggle was made at its foundation have triumphed. Its faculty, numbering over one hundred and fifty; its students, numbering but little short of two thousand; its noble buildings and equipment; the munificent gifts, now amounting to millions of dollars, which it has received from public-spirited men and women; the evidences of public confidence on all sides; and, above all, the adoption of its cardinal principles and main features by various institutions of learning in other States, show this abundantly. But there has been a triumph far greater and wider. Everywhere among the leading modern nations the same general tendency is seen. During the quarter-century just past the control of public instruction, not only in America but in the leading nations of Europe, has passed more and more from the clergy to the laity. Not only are the presidents of the larger universities in the United States, with but one or two exceptions, laymen, but the same thing is seen in the old European strongholds of metaphysical theology. At my first visit to Oxford and Cambridge, forty years ago, they were entirely under ecclesiastical control. Now, all this is changed.

The academic enemies of Christianity have generally not been open about what their agenda is. White was quite open about it. Christians should take him seriously. His agenda has been systematically implemented in every area of higher education in the West.



Christians need a comparable agenda. They should understand that they cannot beat something with nothing. They must beat something entrenched with something far better. This book is my attempt to show that Christians have something far better.

## **Conclusion**

This book is dedicated to changing education back to where it was in the mid-nineteenth century America: funded by Christians, run by Christians, in order to educate successive generations of Christians. But the redesigned curriculum must be far better. It must not in any way be corrupted by the humanists' myth of neutrality.

Christian historians should adhere to the selection of evidence in terms of what the Bible says about sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and succession. They must write compelling narratives. They must work systematically to replace all of the humanists' historical narratives. This is a requirement of the Great Commission. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19–20). Christian historians should observe what the Bible says about history. They should write their historical narratives accordingly.



**Part 1**  
**Christian Analytical**  
**Categories of History**



# INTRODUCTION

## TO PART 1

My thesis regarding the structure of history is based on my understanding of the biblical covenant model. God has established five covenants with mankind: the dominion covenant, the personal covenant, the family covenant, the church covenant, and the civil covenant. They are all established by a covenantal oath before God. The dominion covenant defines mankind. This is God's command to Adam and Eve to exercise dominion over the earth. It is found in the first chapter of Genesis, verses 26–28.

Each of the five covenants is structured in terms of a sequential five-point system. There are numerous ways of describing it. Point 1 is the transcendence of God. This transcendence also includes His presence. He is not part of the world, but He is present with it. He is totally sovereign. He is over the world, not part of it. Christianity teaches that God became man. God dwelt among us.

The second point of the covenant is man's authority over the creation. This is delegated authority. We can also discuss the second point as hierarchy: God is over man, and man is over the creation. Judicially, point 2 is a system of representation. Man represents God to the creation, and he represents the creation to God.

The third point of the covenant is law. Every covenant has a system of law. These laws establish legal and moral boundaries on people's actions. They serve as guides to men's actions. Men know what they are supposed to do. They have guidance from God about what to do. More important, they know what not to do.

The fourth point of the covenant is sanctions. Every system of law has an accompanying system of sanctions. In biblical covenantalism, there is consistency between a law and the punishment for violating it. The punishment fits the crime. In civil government, the sanctions are exclusively negative. In the family and the church, there can be positive sanctions. So, covenantal sanctions here can be either positive or negative. We can call them blessings and cursings. These sanctions are governed by the ethical system that undergirds the system of laws. The combination of permanent

ethical laws and predictable sanctions is what gives history its predictability. It also shapes the direction in which history is moving.

Fifth, there is succession. People become more skilled as they develop their talents. They must be replaced when they move to positions of greater responsibility. This was true before the fall. Post-fall, there is another reason for succession: people die. They have to be replaced. Institutions also disappear. They have to be replaced. Because of God's ethical system of laws, and because of His system of sanctions, there is a progressive element in the development of history. Things get better over time because God rewards those who obey Him, and He punishes those who disobey Him. His sanctions shape the future.

This five-point covenant model is developed in the book by Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*. My Institute for Christian Economics published this book in 1987. I wrote a short introductory book on this: *God's Covenants* (2020). I wrote a detailed study: *The Covenantal Structure of Christian Economics* (2018). I wrote two practical books: *The Five Pillars of Biblical Success* (2008) and *The Five Pillars of Biblical Leadership* (2021). In short, I have found the five-point biblical model to be both theoretically compelling and highly useful in real-world applications.

The five points of this structure are found in all varieties of social theory. Every social theory has to have all five points: sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and succession. Not all social theorists are self-conscious about the inherent structure of what they are studying, but if they are thorough in their presentation, you will find all five points, although rarely in the biblical sequence.

In Part 1, I show that this structure of history is revealed in the Bible. It is revealed in five sequential points.

The first concept of biblical history is the doctrine of God's creation of the universe out of nothing. This was an historical event. It began history. Genesis 1 provides the account. Genesis 1 reveals that God is totally transcendent. He is completely separate from the universe. He spoke it into existence. It was not an emanation from His being. Having spoken it into existence, He is sovereign over it. He had a purpose for it. He had a plan for it. He had a decree for it. He will carry out His decree in history. In short, history is providential. It is personal. The whole universe reflects the God who created it. Therefore, the structure of history is governed by the principle of *cosmic personalism*. Nothing in the universe is outside of God's providence. Everything reflects God's personhood (Romans 1:18–22).

The second concept of biblical history is the doctrine of the image of God in man. Man was created to represent God in history. God holds him responsible for this. This task of dominion defines mankind. It will define mankind throughout history, and it will define mankind in eternity. Mankind is God's covenantal agent in history. People are personal because God is personal.

The third concept of biblical history is God's law. God has established a law-order that governs all creation. In society, this law-order announces a series of laws governing institutions and individuals. These laws are ethical. They have established the criteria of right and wrong. The essence of decision-making is ethical. Ethics governs the historical process.

The fourth point of biblical history is sanctions. This has to do with judgments in history. God is sovereign, so His judgments are authoritative. His judgments establish the standards of human judgment. He evaluates people's behavior. He evaluates their motivations. He evaluates everything in terms of His standards. He enforces these standards by imposing sanctions. His enforcement of His laws provides predictability in history. At the end of the creation week, God pronounced the world to be very good. His work during the week met His standards of creation. He said so repeatedly. The technical theological word for this is *imputation*. God imputes value and meaning to everything.

The fifth point of biblical history is inheritance. God has established that the meek will inherit the earth. The psalmist announced this (Psalm 37:11). Jesus announced this (Matthew 5:5). *The meek are people who are meek before God*. They are therefore active toward extending the kingdom of God in history. With respect to history, meaning an era in which sin is still present, those who have been redeemed by Christ exercise increasing dominion. The world is their inheritance. This is made clear in 1 Corinthians 15. (See Chapter 5.) Jesus also announced this to Peter: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Hell is on the defensive. Gates are defensive tools, not tools of offense.

Humanist historians offer a rival five-point model. In summary, it is this: evolution, autonomy, relativism, nominalism, and entropy. I explain these terms in Part 2. I show how they shape the humanists' view of history. The essence of their view is this: there is no providential God who directs history. The only source of direction in history, and the only source

of meaning in history, is man. Their problem is this: they cannot decide whether they mean mankind collectively (the state) or individuals. They do not know who imputes authoritative meaning to the world: collective mankind or individual people. Therefore, they cannot come to a conclusion about the structure of history. They do not even agree if there is any meaning to history.

In Part 3, I discuss Christian historiography. I explain how the five points of biblical history should shape the way that Christians write history. There are five elements in Christian historiography: purpose, representation, civilization, justice, and progress.

All of this may seem overly complex. Actually, it is not complex. It provides a handy way to understand the biblical structure of history, the humanists' interpretation of the structure of history, and the way that Christians should write about history. You can count each system on the fingers of one hand. Well, not quite. You can count them on four fingers and your thumb. Keep reading. I will show you how to do this.



# 1

## CREATION

*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Colossians 1:16–17).*

### A. Covenant Model, Point 1

Point 1 of the biblical covenant model is God’s transcendence. God is separate from the creation. There is a fundamental Creator-creature distinction. This is taught in Genesis 1. God spoke the universe into existence. It was not an extension of His being.

The biblical doctrine of transcendence is accompanied by the biblical doctrine of God’s presence. He is present with the creation, but He is not part of it. This is taught in Genesis 2. He spoke face to face with Adam. It is also taught in Genesis 3. He spoke face to face with Adam, Eve, and the serpent.

Point 1 of biblical social theory is sovereignty. God is absolutely sovereign by reason of His creation of the world and His providential sustaining of it.

Point 1 of biblical history is God’s creation of the universe out of nothing by the power of His word. He spoke the world into existence. He sustains it by His providence.

### B. Analysis

Colossians 1:16–17 relates Christ’s creation of the cosmos to the concept of the sovereignty of God. First, the passage identifies Christ as the source of creation. So does John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the begin-

ning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1–3). So does the Epistle to the Hebrews.

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:

They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail (Hebrews 1:8–12).

Second, the passage asserts that Christ sustains the cosmos: “by him all things consist” (v. 17). Hebrews 1 asserts a similar claim: “And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up” (v. 12). The New Testament’s doctrine of creation is not limited to a one-time event: the creation week (Genesis 1). It extends through history. That is to say, *the doctrine of God’s creation of the universe out of nothing is accompanied by the doctrine of God’s providence*. They are inextricably intertwined.

The Old Testament makes the same connection. In Job 38–41, God announces His sovereignty by a series of rhetorical questions about the creation. Here is one: “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof” (Job 38:1–6).

Conclusion: *God is sovereign*. No one lawfully calls His judgment into question. “Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?” (Job 40:6–8). Job had already announced this to his critics. “But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in

all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:7–10).

Isaiah 45 is a detailed assertion of God’s sovereignty, which rests on His creation.

I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded (Isaiah 45:5–12).

This passage also declares God’s purpose in creating the cosmos: “For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:18).

## **C. Genesis 1**

The text of Genesis 1 is important for understanding the fundamentals of the structure of history. Genesis 1:1 informs us that God created the universe. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (v. 1). The remainder of Genesis 1 provides the starting point for an understanding of the structure of history. Any Christian who wants to understand the structure of history should begin with a consideration of Genesis 1.

Genesis 1 describes a sequence of six days of creation, followed by a seventh day of rest by God. Each day took time. Theologians debate whether the Hebrew word *yom* here means 24 hours, but this debate is recent. It exists because Christians want to compromise with some version of the evolutionary timescale. The word means *day*. We think of a day as a 24-hour day. Down through the ages, this is how Bible-believers understood “day.” Creation took time, but not much time. This is the beginning of a Christian concept of history. *The universe was not the product of one declaration or one act by God.* There was a day-by-day sequence. Each sequence took time.

God had standards for each day. We know this because of this announcement at the end of days three through five: “and God saw that it was good.” Then came day six. “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” (v. 31). This meant that there was perfect correspondence between His standards at the beginning of the day and the results of the end of the day. He passed judgment on His own work. Another way of saying this is that *He imputed excellence to His work.* Imputation means declaration. Each daily imputation was subjective, because God is personal. It was also objective, because God is sovereign. *This combination of objective truth and subjective truth is the basis for all evaluation in history.* Christians evaluate subjectively, but they do so in terms of a presupposition, namely, that there are objective standards of truth. This presupposition is confirmed in the first chapter of Genesis.

God spoke. This was not a monologue, according to Christian doctrine. There were three Persons involved in the evaluation of the work of the Second Person of the Trinity. There was agreement among them. This reveals to us that individual agreement can be consistent with collective agreement. The doctrine of the Trinity is the solution to the perennial philosophical problem of the seeming disparity between the one and the many. The problem is reconciled in the Trinitarian God.

God spoke in a language. This language was designed by God for communication. There was communication within the Godhead. It was based on language. On day six, when God created man, He spoke to man. Man understood. *There was coherence between the mind of God and the mind of man.* This coherence was revealed by the existence of language. Adam understood God. Eve understood Adam. Adam revealed God’s revelation to Eve. There is continuity from God’s announcement on day six and His

reconfirmation in Genesis 2. *There is coherence over time.* Men can communicate truth across time.

The sequence of six days testifies to the existence of memory. God did not forget on day six what had taken place in the previous five days. There was coherence between what had taken place on each day and His memory of what had taken place. That is to say, *there was continuity based on memory.* Memory is a reliable tool of understanding. Indeed, without it, there cannot be understanding. Memory binds the past to the future by way of the present.

Memory makes possible progress in history. If men forgot everything that happened the day before, civilization would collapse. If every innovation that has brought benefits to an individual, a community, or a civilization were forgotten in a month or a year, there could be no progress. Memory is perfect only in the mind of God. God will bring final judgment at the end of time (Matthew 25). His understanding of history is perfect now, and it will be perfect then. He will evaluate the correspondence between His ethical standards and men's performance. He will then announce the results of his evaluations. His announcement will determine where each person spends eternity. We do not find this doctrine in Genesis 1, but we find it in Matthew 25. The concepts of standards, evaluation, imputation, and declaration that we see in Genesis 1 extend through history. They are the basis of history.

## D. Providence

The doctrine of creation implies the doctrine of providence, meaning God's full-time sustaining of the creation. "By him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17). God watches over and cares for the universe in a personal way. He sees everything. He knows everything: *omniscience*. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). He has total control over the cosmos: *omnipotence*. "He hath made the earth by his power; he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion" (Jeremiah 10:12). He is everywhere: *omnipresence*. "If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" (Psalm 139:8). It is through the power of God that the earth is sustained. God also sustains the universe. It is not autonomous. In short: *no God—no universe.*

The biblical doctrine of providence is in complete opposition to the humanistic concept of chance. Nothing that takes place is random. This includes human actions. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:35). All events take place within an overarching system of God's guidance. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). This includes seemingly insignificant factors in history. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6–7).

*The doctrine of providence sustains the doctrine of historical causation.* The biblical doctrine of historical causation is based on divine law. It is based on a specific law-order. (See Chapter 3.) The laws of development are not impersonal. They are not evolutionary. Obviously, they are not mechanical. Machines do not develop. So, this means that the two most prominent metaphors of change, mechanical change and biological change, do not apply to the biblical doctrine of providence. Both are part of the humanistic worldview. They are in conflict with each other, and both are also in conflict with the biblical doctrine of providence.

Paul on Mars Hill in Athens told his listeners about God, the Creator: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply [it happen] they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:26–28). Paul affirmed the existence of a cosmic order. There is providence undergirding the creation. All things work together, yet not mechanically. The universe is not a gigantic clock that was wound up in the distant past by a watchmaker God. Then in what way does the structure of creation work as a unit? To achieve this purpose: to guarantee good things for all those who are called according to God's purpose. There is an overarching coherence in the creation. Creation is good for those called according to God's purpose.

Creation is structured by God in terms of this. History must be understood in terms of this.

### **E. Purpose**

God the Father had a purpose for His creation, Paul declared. This purpose preceded the creation. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:3–5). His original purpose is visible in the lives of the redeemed. Paul continued:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:4–10).

The Bible’s doctrine of creation includes God’s original purpose, His plan for history, and His providential decree. His purpose cannot be thwarted. Paul declared:

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory (Romans 9:20–23).

This declaration is the theological foundation of Paul's affirmation regarding the beneficiaries of God's sovereign purpose.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:28–31).

This declaration is the basis of a *theologically mandatory historical optimism* of covenant-keepers. This declaration of God's providential support of covenant-keepers in history is comprehensive: “. . . all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (v. 28). God expects Christians to believe this. The trials and tribulations of life have a purpose. That is to say, they are neither random nor aspects of God's condemnation of His elect. They are part of a process of *personal progressive sanctification*. Paul testified to this in his own life. “Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Corinthians 11:25–27). Peter also described this process. “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5–8).

Thus, the Bible's doctrine of creation is more than an assertion of cosmic origins. It declares the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, which includes His providential sustaining of all things through history. It also asserts that God is supremely purposeful. God looks to the future. He brings the



future into existence sequentially, moment by undefinable moment. Past, present, and future find coherence and meaning in God's purposeful decree.

R. J. Rushdoony described some of the implications of this view of time in his book, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (1967). "The movement of time, according to the Bible, is from eternity, since it is created by God and moves out of and in terms of His eternal decree. Because time moves in terms of the eternal decree, when its function is finished there shall be time no more (Rev. 10:6). Because time is predestined, and because it is beginning and end are already established, time does not develop in evolutionary fashion from past to present to future" (p. 11).

## F. Cosmic Personalism

The biblical doctrine of creation affirms a specific view of the world: *cosmic personalism*. I have written about this in detail in Chapter 1 of my economic commentary on Genesis, *Sovereignty and Dominion* (2012). In Section A, "Creation and Personalism," I wrote this:

From beginning to end, the created world bears the mark of God's handiwork. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). God did not create a self-sustaining universe that is now left to operate in terms of autonomous laws of nature. The universe is not a giant mechanism, like a clock, which God created and wound up at the beginning of time. Ours is not a mechanistic world, nor is it an autonomous biological entity, growing according to some genetic code of the cosmos. Ours is a world which is actively sustained by God on a full-time basis (Job 38–41). All creation is inescapably personal and theocentric. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead . . ." (Rom. 1:20).

If the universe is inescapably personal, then there can be no phenomenon or event in the creation that is independent from God. No phenomenon can be said to exist apart from God's all-inclusive plan for the ages. There is no uninterpreted "brute factuality." Nothing in the universe is autonomous, an English word derived from two Greek words that are transliterated *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law). Nothing in the creation generates its own

conditions of existence, including the law structure under which something operates or is operated upon. Every fact in the universe, from beginning to end, is exhaustively interpreted by God in terms of His being, plan, and power.

In Section C, “Biblical Personalism,” I wrote this: “The Bible’s doctrine of cosmic purpose is in opposition to all forms of Darwinism. Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection was self-consciously opposed to all varieties of cosmic purpose prior to the appearance of man. There is purpose in the universe. God is in charge of this purpose, and He directed this purpose toward mankind, who is made in His image (v. 26).”

How is this related to a correct understanding of history? I wrote:

No fact (datum) of the universe is independent of God and His plan. No man can assert his own autonomy and then legitimately claim to know anything exhaustively, for to know anything exhaustively requires that the knower understand everything exhaustively. Any fact (datum) in the universe may conceivably have some influence on any other fact. This is why Christians must assert that *all truth is exhaustively interrelated in God’s single system of interpretation*. It is God, and God alone, who possesses this exhaustive system of interpretation.

The quest for exhaustive knowledge is demonic. It tempts man to surpass the limits of his creaturely status. It is the lure of Satan, namely, to become “as God.” This is why we need God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible to achieve accurate, though not exhaustive, knowledge of His creation. *The Bible provides the necessary corrective information, an interpretative context for studying and understanding the creation*. The Bible’s revelation keeps us from “going off the deep end” in endless speculation about the inconceivable—inconceivable for man, that is.

Cornelius Van Til returned to this theme again and again in his voluminous writings. He insisted that we can have true knowledge without having exhaustive knowledge. We can never have exhaustive knowledge. God alone is omniscient. Omniscience is an incommunicable attribute of God. Basic to our existence as creatures is the limitation of our knowledge. We are to strive for greater knowledge and more accurate knowledge, but we must

do so with this in mind: *our goal is not exhaustive knowledge*. The more knowledge we gain, the more that we are exposed to our own limitations. Whenever we answer one question, we discover numerous additional questions. This is not a limitation based on history. This is our eternal condition as finite creatures made in the image of God. Finitude imposes an inherent limitation on our knowledge.

The study of history is the study of events that happened in the past. We are in a huge sea of historical facts. These facts are not autonomous. They are not impersonal. They are not beyond the understanding of God. On the contrary, this sea of facts is the result of the comprehensive providence of God within a framework of comprehensive purpose. The universe is inherently purposeful. That is because it is the creation of God.

All historical causality is inherently purposeful. Every fact of the universe is a fact only within the framework of God's omniscience and His comprehensive purpose and plan. *There is no such thing as brute factuality*. There is only interpreted factuality. God's interpretation is perfect because God's plan is both perfect and comprehensive. Van Til said this again and again.

## G. Trinity

The Creator God is unity in diversity: one God, three Persons. He operates as an individual operates, but He is also corporate and interpersonal. Christianity is the only religion that teaches this doctrine. *This is the defining characteristic of Christianity*. The issue was settled by the first three church councils: Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), and Chalcedon (451).

Van Til placed the Creator/creature distinction at the center of his philosophical defense of the faith. He said that there is a fundamental separation between God and the creation. The cosmos is not an extension of God's being. God is wholly transcendent. But Van Til insisted that God is present with His creation. He is not distant either geographically or chronologically. This was made manifest in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, who was both man and God. The Nicene Creed put it this way: "... one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." He is the God of history: "Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us

under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end." These doctrines are involved in the doctrine of Christ: incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, temporal judgment, and final judgment. *This is the outline of history's grand narrative.*

Van Til emphasized another aspect of the Trinity. It is the cosmological solution to the recurring philosophical problem of the one and the many, unity and diversity. This problem affects all thought, every institution, and every academic discipline. The humanists have no solution to it. In Western philosophy, this is the dualism between timeless logic and constant change. Without logic, there is no coherence, no pattern in history. Without change, there is no individuality. But in what ways are timeless human logic and time-bound changes reconciled? What is the point of contact? This is the irreconcilable dualism between Parmenides' timeless logic and Heraclitus' constant change. Cosmic impersonalism leads men into blind alleys. Van Til put it this way:

In seeking for an answer to the one-and-many question, philosophers have admittedly experienced great difficulty. The *many* must be brought into contact with one another. But how do we know that they can be brought into contact with one another? How do we know that the many do not simply exist as unrelated particulars? The answer given is that in such a case we should know nothing of them; they would be abstracted from the body of knowledge that we have; they would be *abstract* particulars. On the other hand, how is it possible that we should obtain a unity that does not destroy the particulars? We seem to get our unity by generalizing, by abstracting from the particulars in order to include them into larger unities. If we keep up this process of generalization till we exclude all particulars, granted they can all be excluded, have we then not stripped these particulars of their particularity? Have we then obtained anything but an *abstract* universal? (*The Defense of the Faith*, 4<sup>TH</sup> ed., p. 48)

To understand this, think about yourself. You are constantly changing. Your cells are constantly being replaced. Yet you are the same person. You

get older. You will not be recognized in old age as the youthful person in the photographs. Yet you are the same person. What constitutes “you”? The inner you? But what is the inner you? The Christian answer is this: your creation by God, and His providential sustaining of your life. Isaiah declared this: “And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength” (Isaiah 49:5). *God imputes meaning to your life.* He judges you, day by day. “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

There are two aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity: the equality of the Persons (ontological Trinity) and the hierarchical division of labor in relation to the creation (economic Trinity). What about this hierarchy? Jesus said: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:28–30). Jesus was the Father’s spokesman, i.e., His representative, on earth. “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). Then there is the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). God the Father sent Him. So did God the Son. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). So, there is both equality and hierarchy in the Trinity.

As images of Jesus, the perfect man, we can and should represent Him in history. We can and should tell His story. His story is the grand narrative. All individual stories have meaning within this grand narrative. God, who is both one and many, imputes meaning to all of the mini-stories in terms of His plan for the ages: the transition from wrath to grace. God’s imputed coherence establishes the meaning of the facts of history. “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matthew 6:26).

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christians can pursue their

economic occupations and their spiritual callings in life. They know that there is a coherence in this world. This coherence is provided by God, who is the sovereign Creator and providential Sustainer of the universe. He is in control. He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He knows what is going on because He controls what is going on. We have access to His revelation in the Bible, which explains historically how He has dealt with covenant-keeping mankind. We have minds because we are made in His image. We have redeemed minds because we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). We can make sense of the world because it is His world. The Christian historian possesses advantages that the non-Christian historian does not possess. He is responsible before God for putting these advantages to productive use in building the kingdom of God.

## Conclusion

The Bible's doctrine of God's creation of the universe out of nothing through the power of His word is unique. No other ancient cosmology proposed such a doctrine. No other contemporary cosmology proposes such a doctrine.

The Christian historian who believes the Bible's interconnected doctrines of God's creation, providence, purpose, and decree has an enormous competitive advantage over all other historians. God does not call him to dedicate himself to understanding historical causation within a realm of seemingly infinite brute historical facts. God also does not call him to comprehend history in terms of some impersonal principle of interpretation. There is no impersonal principle of interpretation, any more than there is brute impersonal factuality. The Christian historian does not have to devote himself to discovering or inventing an impersonal principle of interpretation. He can make sense of the world without such a principle. He cannot make perfect sense of the world, but he can make accurate sense of it.

Without confidence in the omniscient and omnipotent God of the Bible, the historian is adrift in what appears to be a sea of factuality. He sees it as his task to connect the dots. But there are too many dots. He also does not have a reliable impersonal principle of interpretation that will allow him to connect the dots. *Cosmic impersonalism is a philosophy of despair.*

In contrast, cosmic personalism is a philosophy of dominion. It tells men that they need not attain perfection in their work in order to attain sig-

nificance. They need not understand everything correctly in order to understand anything correctly. They need not understand anything exhaustively because such understanding is impossible. In an interconnected world that is devoid of cosmic personalism, anything might conceivably cause something else. This is known as the butterfly effect. In its popular form, we are told that the flapping wings of a butterfly might conceivably create a series of events that could create catastrophe far away from the butterfly. Problem: there are too many butterflies flapping their wings for anyone to be secure in his environment. When anything can conceivably cause something else, life becomes cosmically threatening.

The doctrine of creation delivers covenant-keepers from a psychology of ultimate despair. The world is not threatening to a covenant-keeper. It is not threatening, therefore, to a covenant-keeping researcher who seeks to understand some aspect of the past.

## 2

### IMAGE

*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Genesis 1:26–28).*

#### A. Covenant Model, Point 2

Point 2 of the biblical covenant model is hierarchy. God was above Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were above the creation.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, was subordinate to God the Father in God's relation to the creation. He represented the Father covenantally. The New Testament also teaches that the Holy Ghost is sent by both the Father and the Son. (Eastern Orthodoxy denies this.)

Point 2 of biblical social theory is authority. All authority is delegated.

Point 2 of biblical history is man as the image of God. He is able to think God's thoughts after Him. To do this, he has to have memory.

#### B. Analysis

##### ***1. God Speaks. Men Should Listen.***

We are told that God spoke. He spoke in the plural: "Let us." This plurality is confirmed by the phrase: "in our likeness." This is the first indication in the Bible of the concept of the Trinity: one God with multiple Persons. This is a uniquely Christian doctrine.



We have already learned from earlier sections of Genesis 1 that God spoke the cosmos into existence. This means that there is a fundamental distinction between God and the creation. In this sense, the universe is personal. It is the product of the God who speaks. Language existed before the cosmos. God thought by means of language. He spoke the cosmos into existence by means of language.

In this passage, we learn that God spoke to Adam and Eve: "God said unto to them." He revealed to them that they were made in His image. They reflected Him. One of the ways in which they reflected God is that they understood God's language. They could understand what He told them. This made them responsible to Him.

The passage says that God blessed them before He gave them their assignment. This sequence reveals a fundamental biblical principle: *grace precedes law*. We are not told specifically in what way He blessed them. Certainly, one of the blessings was that He gave them life. Second, He made them in His image. This was a great honor. This equipped them to perform their assignment.

In drawing these conclusions, I speak as an historian. I am making judgments regarding the nature of the blessing. I am deducing these judgments by means of the text's historical sequence. The sequence is this: blessing, assignment. We are told that God created them. Surely, this is not a curse. I say *surely* because I can read and understand the text. I can make judgments about the text. These judgments are in part historical judgments. I deduce from the first two chapters of the Bible that Adam and Eve were under God's grace. Life was not initially cursed. In the third chapter, we learn about their rebellion against God. We also learn about the negative sanctions imposed on them by God. These were curses. They were the result of their disobedience. They were not built into the creation initially. Our understanding of this narrative depends on our knowledge of sequence. But this understanding also depends on our ability to make judgments regarding what is not explicitly said in the text regarding blessings. If we do not understand this procedure for making historical judgments, we will not understand the nature of history and the writing of history, i.e., historiography.

Historiography involves making judgments about the past in terms of information that we have been given by God. He expects us to make judgments regarding the past in terms of the information that He has given us regarding the past. We are required by God to fill in the gaps in the historical

record. This requires creativity and imagination. This creativity reflects our condition as creatures made in the image of God. God is *originally* creative. We learn this in the first chapter of Genesis. Therefore, we are *derivatively* creative. We also learn this in the first chapter of Genesis.

## ***2. The Bible's Principle of Historical Interpretation***

The first three chapters of the Bible provide us with the fundamental integrating theme of all history: *the transition from grace to wrath, followed by the transition from wrath to grace*. (I first heard this formulation from Van Til. He used it repeatedly in his writings.) Christianity rests on revelation in the New Testament. The final book in the Bible is the Book of Revelation. The final two chapters of the Book of Revelation provide a description of the restoration of the world without wrath after the final judgment. This will be the culmination of the story of mankind from the third chapter of Genesis until the end of time: the transition from wrath to grace. *This principle of interpretation governs Christian historiography*. Historiography that is faithful to the Bible and to the Bible's account of history must reinforce, illustrate, and document this transition from wrath to grace. It is the job of the Christian historian to fulfill this task of interpretation self-consciously. History is not theologically neutral. Historiography therefore is not theologically neutral. *All of history from the fall of man until the final judgment reflects the transition from wrath to grace*. To the extent that Christians operate in terms of any other assumption regarding the primary meaning of history and the narrative of history, to that extent they are not remaining faithful to the Bible's account of history. They have compromised their confession of faith by misunderstanding God's original assignment to mankind, which we read in Genesis 1.

The final two chapters of Revelation are post-judgment. They are post-historical. They describe eternity. They are descriptive of a world without sin and therefore without God's wrath. God's wrath will be confined cosmically to the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 20:14–15). Revelation 21 and 22 represent a restoration of the world before the fall of man. That future world will be vastly improved over the pre-fall world. Why? Because of historical progress, there will be a steady fulfillment of the dominion covenant. There will be an increase in people's creativity and also an increase in their rendering of accurate judgments. There will be a multiplication of mankind and

the living beings that are under man's jurisdiction. Despite sin, history is the fulfillment of the covenantal assignment that God gave mankind in Genesis 1:26–28. There will be covenantal continuity between history and the new heaven and the new earth. This continuity will be visible retroactively at the marriage supper of the lamb: Christ and His church (Revelation 19:6–9).

I am claiming that there is a grand narrative for all of history. I make this claim because I also claim that there is a Grand Narrator: the Trinitarian God of the Bible. God has revealed Himself in the Bible. This Grand Narrator is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He has structured all of history in terms of His providential purposes for history. His decree perfectly implements His plan for the ages, moment by moment. He passes judgment on His work continually, bringing His judgments in history. This grand narrative ends in Revelation 20. Then will come the culmination of the kingdom of God, referred to in both testaments as the new heaven and the new earth: eternity for covenant-keepers.

I argue in this book that without these presuppositions regarding history as providential, historians are blind. They have no legitimate epistemological way to affirm their claims that they can understand the past. They affirm that they can interpret the past individually, but when pressed, they deny the foundations for understanding how the facts of the past can be understood by the records that survive. They deny that historians can successfully impute an agreed-upon coherence to the past. (See Chapter 9.)

## C. Apprenticeship

### 1. *God Spoke to Adam Face to Face*

Genesis 2 provides an account of the first day of man's existence. Immediately after having created Adam out of the dust, God spoke to Adam regarding his assignment.

In Genesis 1, God gave Adam his dominion assignment, which was a covenant. Eve was not yet created. Yet it says that God spoke to both of them. In what sense did God speak to Eve when Eve did not yet exist? *He spoke to her covenantally through Adam.* Adam was given the dominion covenant, and sometime after this, God created Eve. Adam informed her of this assignment. He was Eve's teacher. More to the point, he was Eve's historian. He told her what God had told him regarding both of them and also

their heirs. This was an historical account. I cannot prove that Adam spoke to Eve from a specific verse in the text, but I have concluded this because of the sequence of Adam's first day.

Before God gave Eve to Adam, Adam had to perform a task: naming the animals of the garden. He had to begin to exercise dominion. God also gave mankind an ethical command: do not eat from a tree. Attached to this command was a negative sanction for disobedience: death. This is what made the command a covenant. Every covenant has law: point 3. Every covenant has sanctions: point 4. "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:15–17).

Eve did not hear this. We know this because of the next verse: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (v. 18). But, before God announced this, He made Adam His apprentice. "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (vv 19–20). He worked with Adam side by side and face to face.

To follow orders, Adam had to have a language. God gave him the ability to speak with God. Second, Adam had to understand something of cause and effect in nature. He had to know what to name each of the animal species. Again, I am making a judgment as an historian. I have studied the use of the Hebrew word "to name." Naming is more than providing a sound that is randomly attached to a specific object. The most important example of this in the Old Testament has to do with the rebellion of mankind at the Tower of Babel. "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). Those people were going to name mankind, i.e., define themselves autonomously. They were not going to define themselves as creatures made in the image of God. They vowed to replace God. They would become sovereign in word and deed. This enraged God.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city (vv. 5–8).

Again, we see the use of the plural: “let us go down.” Christians insist that the Old Testament speaks of a unified God who is more than one Person. This is what separates their interpretations of the Bible from monotheistic Jews and Muslims. This is why there can be no common theological ground of interpretation. Conclusion: if there can be no common ground of interpretation among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, all of whom officially profess faith in the authority of the Bible, how can we legitimately expect to discover a common ground of interpretation among Christians and all of the anti-Christian groups that do not accept the authority of the Bible? *Interpretation governs historiography*. Facts do not speak for themselves. Facts are always interpreted facts. They are never brute facts, meaning uninterpreted facts. Historiography is not neutral theologically.

One more time: the people of the tower had one language. This meant that they had one confession of faith. This confession of faith was a declaration of autonomy from God. They would build a tower that rose from the earth to the heavens.

## ***2. Language and Interpretation***

I have provided an historical account of the meaning of the rebellion at the tower. The story had to do with the concept of language, which is an aspect of a confession of faith. Speaking a language is not simply a technical skill that enables people to communicate with each other. A language reflects a worldview. It shapes and reinforces this worldview. Therefore, naming something is more than coming up with syllables that would be easy to remember and then attaching the syllables to things, events, and people. Adam in naming the animals displayed knowledge of biological cause and effect. He also displayed knowledge of the environment. His naming of the

animals displayed extensive knowledge of the world around the animals. Adam was an ecologist. This knowledge had been given to him by God before God assigned him the task of naming the animals. It was an aspect of God's grace to him. But it was also an innate capacity of understanding that enabled him to begin to fulfill the dominion covenant that God gave to both Adam and Eve. He began this assignment before Eve had been created.

I could be incorrect in my interpretation of the meaning of naming. I could also be incorrect with respect to my concept of language as reflecting a confession of faith. But this is the work of every historian. He must interpret the meaning of written documents. That is what I am doing with respect to Genesis 2 and Genesis 11. You may think that you have a better historical interpretation of the facts. But it will still be an interpretation. If you are a Christian, you should attempt to apply the revelation in Genesis regarding the early development of mankind. You have a moral obligation to try to make sense of Genesis. You must give thought to its meaning. You must give thought to the importance of the narratives in Genesis. This is the task of historiography. Historiography is an inescapable concept.

Christians become apprentices in the field of historiography at a young age. Our parents tell us Bible stories. In the case of the Israelites, God required them to tell to their children the story of the exodus. We find this account in Exodus 12.

For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.

And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped (Exodus 12:23–27).

The story of the exodus from Egypt was a matter of confession of faith. This story became central in the life of the Israelites, even in periods of

rebellion. The prophets called them back to faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but from a liturgical standpoint, the God also of Moses. The Passover was to be celebrated annually. It was an act of national covenant renewal. It was basic to the culture of Israel. It was central to the worldview of Israel. Theologically, the doctrine of creation was more important, but liturgically, Passover was most important. Israel did not celebrate the creation week, because that was exclusively the work of God. The exodus was a joint event shared by God and His people.

## **D. From Journeyman to Tradesman**

### ***1. Man's Transition to Independence***

An apprentice is under the direct supervision of a master. For as long as he remains an apprentice, he must do as he is told. He does this in order to keep his job and thereby gain the skills necessary to begin his career as an independent tradesman. Adam was an apprentice in Genesis 2.

At the end of the contractual agreement, he is released from the legal obligation to obey the master. He legally becomes an independent tradesman. The master may even make him a partner in the organization. The former apprentice would profit from a business that he did not create. This is common when a master is ready to retire. He wants to step down from the direct management of the firm. He looks for a reliable former apprentice to whom he can now delegate administrative control. The journeyman thereby becomes a steward. He represents his former master economically.

The journeyman has limited skills. That was what Adam and Eve possessed in the garden in Genesis 3. They were not yet ready for the world outside the garden. They were not yet ready for full independence as stewards. (The New Testament pattern of stewardship is found in Matthew 25 and Luke 19: the parables of the stewards.)

In Genesis 3, God has departed for a time. Adam and Eve are left alone to dress and defend the garden. In Genesis 2, God gave this assignment to Adam: "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (v. 15). Dressing it meant arranging it. This would be an aesthetic task: gardening. Adam was a journeyman within the geographical confines of the garden. He was also to keep it. That was an as-



pect of ownership. It was God's garden, but Adam could use any of it, except for one tree. Adam even had access to the tree of life (Genesis 2:9).

Ownership is always partially defensive: the legal right to exclude others from access to some item. Therefore, he who owns something must defend it from invaders, thieves, and destroyers. That was Adam's task. It was also Eve's task. This is why Adam had to tell Eve about their joint responsibility. In Genesis 3, God was absent. He had spoken to Adam. He had worked alongside Adam. He had created Eve for Adam. Then He departed. He left them alone in order to see how well they would care for and defend His property. They had become journeymen.

## ***2. Conflicting Historical Testimonies***

Here was the historical setting of the great temptation. First, Satan had an agent: the serpent. The serpent spoke on behalf of Satan, in the same way that Eve spoke on behalf of Adam, and Adam had spoken on behalf of God. There is no indication that it was a fallen angel, let alone the supreme fallen angel. It was a beast of the field. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" (Genesis 3:1a). This beast could talk. It spoke the same language that Adam and Eve spoke. It was able to communicate with Eve. It was able to argue with Eve. It had the power of logic. It had the power of observation. We might say that it had a very high IQ. But this high intelligence did it no good, for it was evil. As Van Til used to say, smart people who hate God are like buzz saws that are set at a crooked angle. It does not matter how sharp they are, they cannot cut straight.

Second, the serpent knew what God had said to Adam. We are not told how it knew this, but it knew. As an historian, how do I know this? Because its argument invoked the words of God. The words were not what God had said, but they were close. The serpent asked the most perverse question that any covenant-breaker can ask: "Hath God said?"

And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.



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  
(Genesis 3:1b–5).

How did Eve know what God had said? There is nothing in the Bible that indicates that God had spoken to her separately from Adam. This leads me to a conclusion: Adam had told her what God had said. Adam had been in the presence of God. God had spoken to him face to face. Adam remembered what God had said to him. He warned Eve to obey God's words. She learned what she was not to do from Adam's historical narrative of his encounter with God. But then she made a mistake. She added something of her own: God had said not to touch the fruit. Had Adam told her this? We do not know. But it was something in addition to God's original warning. It may have seemed a harmless addition. It was not harmless. The issue was eating, not touching. It had to do with a communion meal. This was a covenantally significant tree. Her verbal addition left her vulnerable. She knew that she risked dying if she violated God's command. But she was not quite certain of God's command. She added something extra. Then the serpent told her that God had not said that they would die. She believed him. She touched the fruit. She ate.

The apostle Paul wrote: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam's transgression was far more self-conscious than Eve's was. Eve was operating from second-hand information about what God had said. Adam was not. Adam was operating from his own memory. Eve had only the memory of what Adam had told her that God had said. Eve had accurate knowledge. It was sufficient for her to make a judgment about the proper response to the serpent: a refusal to believe it and a refusal to eat. She did not have perfect information, but she had adequate information. She was therefore responsible. She had been deceived, but she should not have been deceived.

### ***3. Testing the Sovereign Word***

Then, having been deceived, she lured her husband into transgression. He knew better. I believe that he was using her as an empirical test of God's word. God had said that on the day that they ate from the tree, they would

surely die. She had just eaten of it. Would she die or not? Was God's word accurate or not? We do not know how long Adam waited to see whether his wife would die, but it is clear that he had already made up his mind regarding the reliability of God's word. It was not absolute. No one in his right mind would have risked death by violating the command of an absolute God. Adam assumed that his word was better than God's word. In doing this, he assumed that his wife's word was also better than God's word. Therefore, he assumed that the serpent's word was better than God's word. He decided that he would be the judge between God and the serpent. He would determine who was telling the truth. He would decide whose word is reliable and whose word is not reliable.

The judgment of God came on all three transgressors. God determined whose word was reliable. God imposed the sanction that He had promised: death. On that day, they definitively died. They moved from life to death. They moved from grace to wrath. But, in His grace, God did not execute them on that day. They were definitively dead. They were judicially dead. That is to say, *they were covenantally dead*. But they were not yet physically dead.

Then God gave them hope. He did this in the context of His curse of the serpent. "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:14–15). This was a declaration to Satan, who was represented by the serpent. Christians believe that this prophecy refers to the coming of Jesus Christ in history: His life, His death, His bodily resurrection, and His bodily ascension to the right hand of God. Christians do not believe that Jesus literally stomped on the head of Satan at the resurrection. This prophecy used a metaphor to get across a covenantal point. Jesus would covenantally crush the head of the serpent. Why? Because the serpent was the covenantal representative of Satan. Satan had only this hope: through his covenantal representatives, he would bite the heel of Christ in history by biting the heels of His followers. He would make trouble for Jesus by making trouble for His followers. That was what the temptation of Adam and Eve was all about. Satan hoped to disrupt the plans of God.

#### **4. Sanctions**

What should Eve have done in response to the temptation? She could have picked up a stone and hit it in the head. She could have called on her husband to join her. Here was an invader of the garden. This invader was tempting her to revolt against the God who owned the garden. Because it tempted her to commit a capital crime, it deserved death. She had the lawful authority to impose this sanction. God had given mankind control over the beasts. She knew this because Adam had told her. God had spoken to her through her husband. The serpent was a beast. It was under her jurisdiction. By tempting her, it had risked death.

God imposed negative sanctions on Adam, Eve, and the serpent. They had all violated His sovereign word. There was a price to pay for rebellion. Adam and Eve either would impose negative sanctions on the serpent or else God would impose negative sanctions on all of them. The serpent was doomed either way: “damned if they did, damned if they didn’t.” This was the inescapable judicial price of becoming a covenantal agent of Satan.

I did not derive all this from Genesis 3. I derived it from my understanding of chapters that followed. As an historian of the fall of man, I make use of subsequent historical information and subsequent revelation from God regarding the meaning of the fall. This information is part of the biblical story: the transition from wrath to grace. I can make sense of subsequent biblical revelation because I understand this principle of interpretation. It is biblical interpretation and therefore also historical interpretation. We call a principle of interpretation a hermeneutic. The word comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes, known as the messenger god.

### **E. Hermeneutics**

#### **1. An Inescapable Concept**

Every historian operates in terms of a hermeneutic: a principle of interpretation. He interprets facts in terms of a general principle of interpretation. In a world of seemingly unlimited facts, he must select from among them in his quest to understand the overall historical process. Without a principle of interpretation, he cannot make sense of the enormous quantity of historical data that confronts him. He cannot tell his story without a principle of interpretation.

Every hermeneutic is based on a set of presuppositions about God, man, law, sanctions, and time. I wrote a book on this framework: *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program of Victory* (2010). These presuppositions are accepted on faith. They are not self-evident. They cannot be proven by some higher principle of logic. Even if they could be proven this way, then the principle of logic would be a matter of faith. This was why the historian Charles A. Beard selected this title for his 1933 presidential address to the American Historical Association: "Written History as an Act of Faith." (See Chapter 9.)

I have asserted that the principle of historical interpretation that is explicitly taught in the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, is this one: the transition from grace to wrath, followed by the transition from wrath to grace. This overarching theme should govern Christians who are attempting to understand the past. When they read any historical document, they should always keep in mind the fact that God is sovereign over history, and that the Bible testifies to the reality of a specific hermeneutic. There is no escape from this hermeneutic for Christians. There is also no escape from this hermeneutic for non-Christians, but they do not acknowledge its existence, and they probably are unaware of it. After all, Christian historians are generally unaware of it. Most Christian historians do not use a specific principle of interpretation in their historical investigations and published results of their findings.

A Christian who understands this hermeneutic, and who systematically uses it when examining historical records, has a tremendous advantage over those historians who do not understand it and who do not use it in their research. This hermeneutic provides coherence to the story of mankind. Without some principle of coherence, the historian is overwhelmed by the magnitude of his task. There are too many facts available to interpret. He thinks of his task as connecting the historical dots, but there are too many dots to connect, and too many missing dots that he has not yet discovered.

## ***2. A Faithful Steward***

The principle of stewardship is fundamental to understanding the relationship between God and man. It was established by the dominion covenant in Genesis 1:26–28. God has provided mankind with the resources necessary for fulfilling this covenant. People have a moral obligation to fulfill it. This is a covenantal obligation.

God holds each person responsible for fulfilling his or her tiny aspect of this covenant. But, because God holds people responsible, He provides them with the tools and resources necessary for their completion of their tasks. It is the responsibility of each of us to recognize the limits of the task, the tools available for the task, and the economic resources associated with the task. This includes intellectual tasks. Among these intellectual tasks is historiography. We need not write down all of our interpretations of the past, but we cannot escape the task of interpretation when we are making judgments about our responsibilities in the present in relation to the future. We must put our capital to productive uses. Again, we are back to these five points: God, man, law, sanctions, and time.

Men do not have exhaustive knowledge. The attempt to attain such knowledge is inherently demonic. God not only does not require exhaustive knowledge, He forbids the quest. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). From this verse we should draw a conclusion: *we do not need exhaustive knowledge in order to have reliable knowledge*. We do not need perfect historical knowledge in order to have reliable historical knowledge. We do not need to know everything perfectly in order to know something accurately. God possesses such knowledge, but we do not.

Eve did not have to have perfect knowledge of what God had told Adam. She had sufficient knowledge to make a God-honoring interpretation of the lies of the serpent. God held her responsible to do this. This is true of all of our labors. It is surely true of the historian's labors.

A faithful steward should not allow himself to become paralyzed in his quest for ever-greater knowledge of ever-narrower fields of knowledge and the accompanying responsibilities. He can legitimately pursue greater specialization. He will become better equipped to speak authoritatively with respect to a few fields of knowledge, including historical knowledge. But he should be humble with his specialized knowledge. He should not assume that his success in understanding a narrow area of life provides him with the knowledge to speak authoritatively outside of his fields of expertise. He can offer his opinions, of course. His opinions should be well-informed. But they can never be opinions based on his exhaustive knowledge. He must rely on God to provide him with missing data and better interpretations.

In every field, Christians should be open to new interpretations based

on superior evidence. They should allow the Holy Spirit to speak to them in these areas. This is especially true if they are pioneers in a field of interpretation. They should be judicious. They should assume that God will provide them with the required information to make better decisions in specialized areas for which God holds them responsible. They should listen to the opinions of others. "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14)

The division of labor operates in every area of life. This includes the division of intellectual labor. A faithful steward acknowledges the limitations on his knowledge. He searches for better knowledge, especially from other Christians who have successfully applied principles of biblical interpretation to their specific fields. This applies to the calling of historiography.

A diligent Christian should be confident in his ability to be a faithful steward in the area of knowledge, including historical knowledge. Paul offered this affirmation: "Or who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Paul said "we." This is a collective. It is basic to Christian civilization. *Through the intellectual division of labor, Christians extend the kingdom of God in history.* That is to say, they extend the civilization of God in history.

If Eve had not been certain what to do in response to the serpent's lies and temptation, she should have asked her husband. The division of intellectual labor would have helped them both to make a better judgment. But she did not ask Adam. She ate. Then she offered her judgment of the fruit. It tasted good. He imitated her. She was in rebellion, and he was in rebellion. Neither of them subordinated themselves to the revelation of God. They did not honor Adam's memory of what God had said. Such insubordination has been the story of mankind ever since. Because men have failed to obey the commands of God, which have been preserved in the Bible as a historical record, they have chosen to imitate our covenantal parents. They have dismissed the historical revelation provided in the Bible. They have suffered the consequences. This has retarded the corporate transition from wrath to grace. Nevertheless, this transition continues. It is inescapable.

## Conclusion

As we mature in the faith, we are supposed to improve our understanding of the historical narratives that we find in the Bible. God requires us

to make judgments about how these narratives are connected. We should ask questions. "What principles of interpretation enable us to understand what holds them together? What has God revealed in each narrative about the transition from wrath to grace?" We should search for principles of interpretation that are fixed. They must be logical. They must be theological. They will enable us to understand what would otherwise be a gigantic collection of facts that do not reflect God's written revelation of the history of the transition from wrath to grace.

What I wrote in the previous paragraph also applies to our study of the non-biblical past, which is usually presented in the form of narratives. To make these points clear, I now repeat them. God requires us to make judgments about how these narratives are connected. We should ask questions. "What principles of interpretation enable us to understand what holds them together? What has God revealed in each narrative about the transition from wrath to grace?" We should search for principles of interpretation that are fixed. They must be logical. They must be theological. They will enable us to understand what would otherwise be a gigantic collection of facts that do not reflect God's written revelation of the history of the transition from wrath to grace.

# 3

## LAW

*And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:13–18).*

### A. Covenant Model, Point 3

Point 3 of the biblical covenant model is ethics. God governs the world in terms of His law-order, which is ethical: right vs. wrong. This law-order is revealed in the Ten Commandments and also in the specific laws found in the other books of the Pentateuch. These laws are interpreted by the New Testament.

Point 3 of biblical social theory is law. This includes Christian historical theory.

### B. Analysis

In Deuteronomy, Moses was speaking to the generation that had been born in the wilderness. Deuteronomy is a recapitulation of God's law. God expected the conquest generation to understand His law-order in preparation for the conquest of Canaan.



There is continuity of God's law in history. *There can be no continuity in history if there is no continuity in law.* Obviously, there is consistency of certain forms of laws of nature. Gravity is a constant. But there must also be constant laws governing social institutions. Men cannot tolerate living in chaos. When people are threatened with chaos, they are willing to put up with tyranny in order to reduce the threat of chaos.

People want to know what is expected of them. Christianity presents a specific view of the relationship between law and success in history. Biblical law is an integrated system—a law-order—in which there are positive and negative sanctions associated with each of the laws of God. If you obey the law, you will receive positive sanctions. If you disobey the law, you will receive negative sanctions. People understand this with respect to a military hierarchy. They understand it with respect to police forces. Moses was reminding the generation of the conquest that God rules over them by means of a system of law. This law-order is primarily ethical. It is encapsulated in what we call the Ten Commandments: the Decalogue. We find these commandments in Exodus 20, revealed by God shortly after the exodus from Egypt. Moses recapitulated them in Deuteronomy 5.

In Deuteronomy 8, Moses made it clear to the listeners that the system of law governing Israel as a nation was part of a covenant. It was God's covenant with Israel, which was established in Exodus 19. That covenant remained in force, Moses announced. Moses said that if they will obey God's law, He will bless them economically. "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (v. 18). The message is clear: God is the source of their wealth. This wealth has a purpose for covenant-keepers. What is this purpose? To confirm His covenant with them.

Here is the pattern that is implied by the passage. The Israelites had been protected during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The early section of this chapter announced this fact. Now, they are about to enter the long-promised land. They are about to be victorious. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—metaphors of wealth. It is a land with large supplies of natural resources. The message was clear: if they obey God's law, they are going to prosper. But this prosperity would have a purpose. It was designed by God to re-confirm the covenant. It was to increase their trust in God. It was to increase their covenantal faithfulness to God. It was to

increase their obedience to God's revealed law. If they obeyed, Moses said, they would get even richer. What is the purpose of these riches? *To confirm the covenant*. So, the implication here is that God's covenant blessings on them in the form of wealth were specifically designed to increase their covenantal faithfulness. Wealth is a confirmation of the goodness of God, the reliability of God, and the benefits associated with obeying God's law.

In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, Moses presented a list of positive sanctions for obeying the law, and he presented a much longer list of negative sanctions for disobeying the law. The point was clear: their success or failure will be determined by the degree of their adherence as a nation to God's law. *There is coherence in this world*. This coherence is covenantal. Here was a promise: they could safely rely on the promise of God to bless them if they obeyed His law. Wealth in this covenantal administration is a great benefit. It is legitimate to pursue it. But those who pursue it must understand the rules associated with attaining additional wealth. These rules are ethical. They are part of a covenantal legal order that is governed by specific ethical standards. These standards are encapsulated by means of specific laws, most notably those that appear in Exodus 21 through 23. These are *case laws*: laws illustrating the correct applications of the Ten Commandments.

People want predictability in their lives. They also want greater wealth. This passage promises both. Predictability has to do with the covenantal connections between obedience and wealth. If people want greater wealth, they must obey God's law. They must acknowledge that God is the source of their wealth.

This passage affirms the *legitimacy* of long-term economic growth. It also affirms the *possibility* of long-term economic growth. No other worldview in the ancient Near East was specific in this regard. Mediterranean worldviews in the days of Moses were cyclical. *There could be no long-term progress because history repeats itself*. This outlook was basic to classical Greece and classical Rome. The Bible does not teach such a view. The Bible teaches linear history. But, more than this, the Bible teaches the possibility of progress in history. It is not just that progress is possible; it is morally imperative. That is because progress is specifically tied to conformity to God's law. It is therefore ethical. It is covenantal.

### C. The Quest for Historical Laws

Throughout history, people have wanted to believe that there are both continuity and coherence in the world around them. They want to believe that they live in a universe that is not random. They want to believe that history is moving in a positive direction—positive for them. They also want to believe that they have chosen a worldview and also a lifestyle that are consistent with the laws of historical development. They want to believe that they are on the morally right side of history.

Buddhism and Hinduism are committed to a concept of final existence that is separated from historical process: a meaningless, formless unity of being. There will be no individuality. The proper goal of life is said to be an escape from the historical process. Hinduism regards history as *maya*: an illusion. These religions are committed also to a concept of reincarnation: the doctrine of karma. People are born again literally after death, and their new lives initially reflect what they were ethically in their previous lives. So, there is cause-and-effect ethically in history. A person moves through history either upward or downward in terms of ethical behavior. The ultimate upward move is deliverance from history, but with respect to the attainment of that ultimate bliss, history is rigorously, unbreakably structured. You cannot escape your destiny. Whatever you do in this life will establish your starting point in the next life.

The Bible in the second chapter of Genesis describes success and failure in history in terms of ethical conformity to God's revealed law. Deuteronomy 8 and Deuteronomy 28 present this outlook in its most comprehensive form. *History is structured in terms of ethics*. The New Testament clearly teaches that what someone does in history has consequences beyond history. This is the doctrine of the final judgment as presented in Matthew 25.

The biblical account goes beyond personal damnation and salvation. Deuteronomy 8 and 28 specifically refer to Israel as a covenanted nation. The blessings and cursings are corporate. God has made a covenant with Israel as a nation, and Israel is therefore bound by oath to God's law. Israel covenanted with God publicly in Exodus 19. God delivered the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Moses presented the specific case law applications of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 21–23.

There is continuity judicially between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This means that the dominion covenant is still in force. Men are

still required to exercise dominion in history on behalf of God. This covenant defines mankind. It was not abrogated in Genesis 3. It was also not abrogated with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. God transferred that covenantal arrangement from Israel to the church. Jesus said this to the Pharisees: "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:42b–43). This is the background of what Christians call the Great Commission. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18–20).

There has not been a radical discontinuity between the ethical pattern of historical development under the Mosaic covenant and the ethical pattern of historical development under the New Covenant. *Ethics is still at the center of historical development.* Historical sanctions, both personal and corporate, are governed by the system of law that God set forth in the Pentateuch. Historical success is not based on power; it is based on obedience to the law of God. This is the lesson of the story of the exodus. The Pharaoh was a believer in the power religion. Moses was a believer in the ethics religion, which is a judicial religion. The Pharaoh would not allow Moses to take the people three days out to worship God. He attempted to bring final sanctions against the Israelites when he pursued them across the path between the divided Red Sea. God brought final sanctions against him and his army in the Red Sea. (I discuss this in detail in Volume 1 of my 2012 commentary on Exodus: *Representation and Dominion*.)

The most notable modern theory of history is Marxism. Marx denied the ethical component of history. He explained historical development in terms of what he called the mode of production. History develops in terms of stages of technological and economic development. He dismissed all ethics as class-based. In any given period of history, the prevailing ethical system is developed and enforced by the ruling class. There is no constant ethical system through history. Ethics changes with each mode of production. There is progress in history, but not in terms of ethics. Progress is based

on innovations in the mode of production. There are stages of history, and these stages are marked by revolutionary periods in which the leading class of the next mode of production replaces the leading class of the present mode of production. History is moving inevitably toward the final stage of communism. History is linear. It is also progressive.

The popularity of the Marxist system was not based on widespread commitment to the detailed historical arguments in *Das Kapital* (1867). It was based on his theory of inevitable progress towards communism: historical stages that will inevitably bring victory to the proletariat. Marxism had a positive eschatology. (The most detailed study of this eschatology was written by Francis N. Lee: *Communist Eschatology* [1974].)

By the mid-twentieth century, most non-Marxist academic historians had abandoned any theory of fixed stages of development. They had also abandoned all theories of inevitable progress. They had lost faith in any overarching pattern of historical development. They rejected the legitimacy of every proposed system of historical development that claimed that any society, let alone the whole world, is headed in a particular direction. In short, they rejected teleology. The last major historian to offer such a theory was Arnold J. Toynbee. He wrote a 10-volume set, *A Study of History*, from 1934 to 1954. He surveyed 21 civilizations. This project was an immense undertaking. It had almost no influence among academic historians. It has been out of print for decades.

As I argue in this chapter, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5, the Bible teaches that there will be progress in history. This is inevitable. This is not because progress is built into the historical system. It is because of God's providential control over the processes of history. History moves forward because God looks forward. History is inherently future-oriented. It is not just that individuals are future-oriented. It is that the historical process itself is governed by God's providence, and God looks forward in history in order to achieve certain goals. The primary goal is the expansion of His kingdom in history, replacing the kingdoms of men. There is an eschatology associated with biblical law (point 5). There is also a system of covenant sanctions associated with biblical law (point 4). Because history is covenantal, it is governed by a comprehensive, coherent, integrated, self-reinforcing ethical system. Humanists no longer believe that there is such a system governing history, but they are incorrect. (See Chapter 8.)

The issue here is historical continuity.

## D. Continuity

### 1. *The Biblical Covenant*

I argued in Chapter 2 that all of history can be summarized in this phrase: *the transition from grace to wrath, and the transition from wrath to grace*. This is the ultimate continuity in history. It is marked by a discontinuity: the fall of man. The transition from grace to wrath took place in the third chapter of Genesis. The transition from wrath to grace will be completed at the marriage supper of the lamb, which follows the final judgment.

It is not sufficient to know about the existence of these two transitions. We must also know what the criteria are for the transition from wrath to grace. These criteria are ethical. We call them ethical laws. They are laws in the sense that they govern the process of history, both individually and corporately. They are the basis of predictability in history. They provide ways for men to make reasonable forecasts about their success or failure in life.

God's covenants are based on biblical law. Without biblical law, and without sanctions associated with this law, there is no covenant. As someone said long ago, if there are no sanctions associated with the Ten Commandments, then they are merely the ten suggestions.

People want to believe that they live in a coherent world. They want to believe that they will achieve success in life if they follow certain rules. In some societies, these rules are primarily liturgical. They have to do with ritual. But biblical religion has always been based on ethics. The rules are ethical. There are a few rituals, but rituals are subordinate to ethics. The prophet Micah announced this: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:6–8).

### 2. *Parmenides vs. Heraclitus*

In Western philosophy, a debate has gone on ever since the pre-Socratics in Greece in the fifth century B.C. In order to make sense of the changing

world, Greek philosophers looked for elements of continuity. They looked for laws that govern historical change. This quest goes back to the philosophy of Parmenides [ParMENi deez]. He believed that continuity is based on logic. He believed that logic is the sole source of meaningful investigations. His rival was Heraclitus [HeraCLITEus], who is famous for the phrase “a person does not stick his foot into the same river twice.” Heraclitus believed that discontinuity and change are the essence of history. He died sometime around 475 B.C., which was when Parmenides was at his peak intellectual influence.

Van Til believed that the history of Western philosophy is an extension of the original dualism between timeless logic and constant, unpredictable changes. Western philosophy has been marked by a series of attempts to reconcile these two irreconcilable concepts. He discussed the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in terms of this original dualism. This can be called form-matter dualism. The forms (“Ideas”) were timeless and unchanging. But matter is time-bound and changing. Philosophers have found no logical way to connect the two realms. Logic is static. Matter is not. Van Til discussed the philosophy of Immanuel Kant in terms of the dualism between Kant’s phenomenal realm of science and his noumenal realm of ethics and freedom. He described this as the science (predictable)-personality (unpredictable) dualism. He also described it as the nature (predictable)-freedom (unpredictable) dualism.

Western philosophy is dialectical: the inevitable back-and-forth mixture between static logic and random historical change. There is no resolution of this dualism in terms of the presuppositions of autonomous man. Dualism repeats itself again and again. It comes to no final conclusion. Van Til argued that it cannot come to a final conclusion. To avoid the impersonal deterministic loss of freedom imposed by logic and scientific law, men invoke the indeterminism of random change. At the same time, they invoke the predictability of logic and scientific law in order to preserve some degree of coherence in the otherwise random universe around them. In one of his analogies, Van Til said that this arrangement is like a pair of washerwomen who take in each other’s laundry in order to make a living.

Humanist social theorists invoke some variation of the dualism between fixed law and random change. Humanist philosophy does not enable humanists to reconcile these conflicting assertions about the nature of reality, meaning metaphysics. This is why humanist systems move in the direction



of dialectic philosophy, just as Plato's did. Humanism rests on the presupposition of cosmic impersonalism. Humanism denies that a sovereign God provides ethics-based continuity over time, yet He also allows for individualistic change. Humanists deny providence. Then they seek the blessings of providence, namely, a coherent reconciliation of law and change. They seek to make sense of the world by means of impersonal law, but they also seek not to obliterate the relevance of individual facts, which includes their lives.

An increasing pessimism among humanistic historians regarding the meaning of history has led most historians to deny the existence of laws of historical development. They want continuity of law, but they also insist on discontinuity: the discontinuity of individual factuality. They regard man's freedom as based on individual factuality: people's autonomous decisions.

### E. Discontinuity

New facts keep arriving. Everything in our lives keeps changing. And yet there is sufficient continuity to enable us to make sense out of the change around us. Progress requires change. We want progress in our lives. But this means that we have to pursue change in our lives. If change were not governed by some overarching system of cause-and-effect, then whirl would be king. Chaos would rule. We would not be able to make sense of the world around us.

Because the Bible is based on God's covenant, and because this covenant is inherently ethical, we live in a world that makes sense. The final judgment will reveal the reliability of God, who will impose specific sanctions on specific kinds of behavior. In legal theory, we say this: *the punishment should fit the crime*. This is a fundamental principle of biblical law. It culminates in the final judgment, which will be perfect. God's punishments will eternally fit covenant-breakers' crimes in history.

Historical facts are not random. They are governed by the providence of God. God is not random. Therefore, as a multitude of new situations arises continually, Christians who believe in God's five covenants—dominion, individual, family, church, and civil—and who are familiar with the laws of these covenants have an advantage over people who do not know about these laws. They can make better sense of the world around them. They can make better plans to deal with the world around them. They can become the beneficiaries of God's positive sanctions to covenant-keepers who obey God's laws.



The correlation between righteousness and prosperity is not perfectly predictable. The story of Job is an example. He was a righteous man, but he was afflicted with negative sanctions for a time. This experience was not confined to Job. The psalmist wrote the following:

Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Psalm 73:1–12).

This was troubling to the psalmist. It seemed as though historical causation is ethically perverse. But then he thought through the implications of what he had described. When covenant-breakers do evil things and receive rewards, they continue to do evil things. This leads them into destruction.

When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image (vv. 16–20).

This is the biblical imagery of the slippery slope. The slope leads downward to destruction. “For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee” (v. 27).

Christianity offers a resolution to the ancient dualism between law and

facts: Parmenides vs. Heraclitus. For them, impersonal timeless logic could not be brought into correlation with impersonal random change. It was always logic versus facts. The biblical answer is the covenant. There is continuity ethically. There is continuity judicially. Because of this continuity, covenant-keepers have a competitive advantage. If they obey God's law systematically, and if they make their plans in terms of the coherence between covenant-keeping and wealth, they will prosper. Solomon made this declaration: "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Proverbs 13:22).

## F. The Work of the Law

Paul wrote that the work of the law is written on the heart of every person.

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) (Romans 2:12–15).

He did not say that the law of God is written in every man's heart. This ethical condition is an aspect of regeneration, i.e., an aspect of *special grace*. This is soul-saving grace. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied regarding a new covenant which would be written on the hearts of God's people.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their

hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

This has been fulfilled by the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. At the time of a person's regeneration, he becomes the recipient of this promised blessing. The law of God is at that point in time written on his heart definitively. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:8–13).

Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (Hebrews 10:15–17).

This is not what Paul was speaking about in Romans 2. What Paul described in Romans 2 is God's common grace of the human conscience, which leads to a common condemnation by God at the final judgment. Paul said that the work of the law, not the law itself, is written on every man's

heart. Men's consciences testify as witnesses to the existence of the work of the law. Men know by conscience what they are not supposed to do outwardly. They know which acts are condemned by God. They know, but they do not always obey.

### G. Knowledge of the Law

How is the knowledge of the work of God's law different from the knowledge of the law itself? Paul did not say. We know from Jeremiah and the Epistle to the Hebrews that having the law of God written in covenant-keeping men's hearts is the fulfillment of prophecy. This is not a universal condition of mankind. Paul said that having the work of the law written in the heart is the common condition of mankind. There has to be a distinction between these two forms of legal knowledge, but Romans 2 does not identify what the distinction is. Van Til wrote:

It is true that they have the law written in their hearts. Their own make-up as image-bearers of God tells them, as it were, in the imperative voice, that they must act as such. All of God's revelation to man is law to man. But here we deal with man's response as an ethical being to this revelation of God. All men, says Paul, to some extent, do the *works* of the law. He says that they have the *works* of the law written in their hearts. Without a true motive, without a true purpose, they may still do that which externally appears as acts of obedience to God's law. God continues to press his demands upon man, and man is good "after a fashion" just as he knows "after a fashion." (*Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 2nd edition, [1961] 2007, p. 184.)

Some people have not heard about God's Bible-revealed law. Paul said, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law." They will perish. Why? If they have no knowledge of God's law, why does God hold them responsible for having broken His law? Paul's answer: because they are not without knowledge of the work of the law, this knowledge is sufficient to condemn them. Everyone possesses this knowledge in his or her nature as God's image. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves" (v. 14).

## Conclusion

Covenant-breakers recognize the existence of benefits from the enforcement of specific biblical laws. Because of the image of God in every person, all people can and do perceive the benefits of obeying God's law. They can see the positive results of God's law, meaning God's positive corporate sanctions for obeying God's civil laws. As we have seen, the Bible teaches this correlation. But covenant-breakers suppress this internal testimony. Israel did, too. People in their rebellion deny to themselves that God's law is valid. They deny that its benefits offset its costs. Nevertheless, God restrains men's rebellion against His law, just as He restrains rebellion against false worship. He does not allow covenant-breakers to become completely consistent in their rebellion. This restraint is an aspect of His common grace.

Because there is a shared perception among all the sons of Adam, due to God's image, it is possible for a civil government to pass laws against certain forms of public evil. These laws produce society-wide benefits. Evil-doers lose in this arrangement. This is one of the law's major benefits. Paul said that this is God's purpose for all civil law. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:3–4). The disutility produced by biblical civil sanctions in the life of the evil-doer is a benefit to society. His loss is society's gain. Through inner revelation, covenant-breaking men know that this is the case, even though they partially suppress this truth.

This is why Christians benefit from the work of covenant-breakers. This is why there is a division of labor. God grants non-saving common grace to covenant-breakers in order to keep them from being consistent with their confessions of faith as autonomous men. The more consistent they become to their worldview, the more impotent they become. They wind up as the Pharaoh of the exodus did: destroyed. This is why covenant-breakers cannot gain and long maintain power over covenant-keepers in history. The sanctions of the historical covenant are structured to defeat them.

# 4

## IMPUTATION

*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? (Genesis 3:6–9).*

### A. Covenant Model, Point 4

Point 4 of the biblical covenant is oath. A covenant is established by a formal oath under God. There are sanctions attached to a covenant oath.

Point 4 of biblical social theory is sanctions.

Point 4 of biblical history is imputation: God's and man's. God imputes either guilt or innocence to all people. He then applies sanctions to them in history and eternity. He evaluates history in terms of people's obedience or disobedience to His law. His system of evaluation is the standard for historians.

### B. Analysis

#### 1. Judgment

In Chapter 2, I discussed the nature of the temptation. The serpent, acting as a covenantal agent of Satan, misled Eve, who was acting as a covenantal agent of her husband, who was acting as a covenantal agent of God. She knew what God had told her husband. Her memory may not have been

perfect. She told the serpent that God had told them not to touch the fruit. God had said only not to eat it. But her memory was good enough for her to know to reject the serpent's version of what God had said. The serpent persuaded her that God had not said that they would die on the day that they ate the fruit. He said that they would become wise, knowing good and evil.

Eve had to make a decision. She had to exercise judgment. She had to decide whether she should believe her husband's account of what God had told him, or whether she should believe the serpent's account of what God had told Adam. She could have asked Adam for his advice. Or she could have smashed the serpent's head with a large stone. Instead, she accepted the serpent's version of God's words, and she ate. She then persuaded Adam to eat. This meant that Adam believed that the serpent's version of God's words was probably accurate. God's word was probably inaccurate. Adam decided that he would complete the test of the reliability of God's word, a test that his wife had already begun and had survived. Would they die on that day? Maybe not!

We come now to the biblical account of the story of God's imposition of negative sanctions against Adam, Eve, and the serpent. It is the story of a criminal investigation. God knew that there had been a series of criminal violations of His law. But He did not initially announce His verdict to the criminals. Instead, He conducted an investigation. We can call this a forensic investigation. It had to do with suspected violations of the law.

God brought a covenant lawsuit against Adam and Eve. He served as investigator, jury, judge, and executioner. But remember: God is a Trinity. There were two witnesses to confirm the investigation by the Second Person of the Trinity, the Creator. "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death" (Deuteronomy 17:6).

He asked them a series of questions. He knew the correct answers because He is omniscient. Nevertheless, He followed a specific judicial procedure. In doing so, He set forth the biblical model for civil justice. This procedure has these factors: observation, investigation, interrogation, evaluation of evidence, a public verbal announcement of guilt or innocence, and the imposition of negative sanctions in the case of guilt.

This judicial procedure is the covenantal setting for the ninth commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:17). This commandment is the fourth commandment in the second

set of ten commandments. The first five are priestly laws (church). The second five are kingly laws (state). (I presented the case for this dual witness of the Ten Commandments in Volume 2 of my economic commentary on Exodus, *Authority and Dominion* [2012]. Volume 2 is titled *Decalogue and Dominion*.)

Immediately after their joint meal at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve felt shame. They saw that they were naked. This was their first insight into the knowledge of good and evil. They recognized one of the consequences of their own guilt. They had not perceived this before because they had been innocent. God had not warned Adam about this consequence. This was something new. It was something unpleasant. They attempted to reduce their sense of shame by sewing fig leaves to cover their nakedness. In other words, they attempted to solve their sin problem on their own initiative. They came up with a procedure that they believed would be successful in reducing their sense of shame.

At this point, they had become covenant-breakers. As covenant-breakers, they wanted to provide their own coverings. Had they been more self-conscious in their rebellion, they would have immediately eaten from the tree of life. Why? Because God had promised the sanction of death against them if they ate of the forbidden tree. The tree of life would have protected them biologically. But they were distracted by their sense of shame. Their nakedness bothered them far more than their fear of God did. They wasted precious time. This is characteristic of covenant-breakers. They imagine that they have sufficient time before God imposes the final sanction. God knew that they eventually would figure this out, which is why He placed a flaming sword at the entrance of what must have been a walled-in garden (Genesis 3:24).

## **2. Interrogation**

First, God asked Adam where he was. He did not ask Eve. His focus of concern was Adam. Adam was His covenantal agent. Eve was Adam's covenantal agent. Adam therefore had greater responsibility than Eve did. Adam replied: "And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (v. 10). Adam's response indicated the extent of his rebellion. He was not afraid of God, despite the fact that God had told him that He would impose the negative sanction of death on them



if they ate from the tree. But this threat was not Adam's main fear. Adam was afraid because he was naked. He should have been afraid of death. He should have been terrified. He should have been terrified before he ate. But he was not. He was still testing God's word. Logically, he could only do that if he was confident that he had the authority to test God's word versus the serpent's word. He had already discounted God's word. Now he was worried because he was naked. He had completely misunderstood the immediate threat that he and his wife faced.

God asked Adam two more questions. "And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (v. 11). The first question was a rhetorical question. God knew that nobody had told Adam about his nakedness. Adam had figured this out for himself without any prompting. So had Eve. God then followed with the second question: did Adam eat of the forbidden tree? This reminded Adam about the prohibition against eating from the tree. In other words, he quoted the law to Adam. He did not do this because He imagined that Adam was forgetful. Adam's problem was not a poor memory. Adam's memory was as sharp as his ability to categorize and name the animals. His problem was sin, not a faulty memory. His problem was that he did not believe what he remembered. He had already decided that the serpent's word was more probable than God's word. He had made an error of judgment. This error was not based on a faulty memory.

Adam did not deny that he had broken God's commandment. Instead, he shifted blame to his wife. "And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (v. 12). The unstated implication here was this: all this was really God's fault. God had given Eve to him. Eve was faulty. If God had given him a better wife, this would never have happened. All that Adam needed to be faithful was a better environment. God had short-changed him.

Adam had made a serious accusation against his wife. So, God continued the interrogation. What did she have to say for herself? She followed Adam's lead. She shifted blame. "And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (v. 13). Again, Adam's unstated assumption undergirded her response. God had provided a faulty environment. If only He had not allowed the serpent to come into the garden, none of this would have happened.

God had providentially arranged all of this in terms of the original dominion covenant. Adam and Eve were to serve as His covenantal agents in history. They were to police the garden. It was their responsibility to deal with the serpent. It was their responsibility to try, convict, and impose negative sanctions against the serpent. God had left them alone to see how well they would administer the judicial authority that He had transferred to them. But, as soon as He had left their presence, they fell into sin.

God did not continue the interrogation. He did not ask the serpent any questions. He imposed negative sanctions on it. These were sanctions that Adam and Eve were not in a position to impose. They should have smashed its head. Instead, God took away its legs. This would force the serpent to eat dust (v. 14). He also pronounced this judgment: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (v. 15). This was metaphoric language to describe a new era of history: *the transition from wrath to grace*. The transition from grace to wrath was now behind Adam, Eve, and the serpent. There would be no saving grace for the serpent. There might be saving grace for Adam, Eve, and their heirs.

Then God imposed additional negative sanctions. Against Eve, there was a negative sanction of pain in childbirth. Against Adam, there was the negative sanction of thorns springing up from the ground, inhibiting Adam's labor. Against them both was the sanction of death: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (v. 19). Yet this was a positive sanction. They would not die that day. They would have time to repent. They would continue to exercise dominion over nature. They would continue to be under the terms of the dominion covenant. They would continue to act as God's covenantal agents: either self-consciously or not.

That did not end the positive sanctions. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (v. 21). They would no longer rely on fig leaves to cover their nakedness. They would also have better protection against nature. To accomplish this, God killed animals. He shed their blood. They died so that Adam and Eve would not die yet. He took away their lives in order to extend the lives of Adam and Eve.

So, accompanying the curses against them there were blessings. This is the nature of grace in history. Until a person dies, even the curses that God

brings against him contain some blessings. This is what theologians call *common grace*. Men do not deserve these blessings, but God grants them anyway. People have work to do: to exercise dominion.

### 3. *The Tree of Life*

God then placed a flaming sword at the entrance to the garden. “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (vv. 22–24). Man could no longer attain eternal life on his own terms. For a brief period of time, Adam and Eve could have achieved this by having a communion meal at the tree of life. But they wasted precious time sewing fig leaves. They refused to think covenantally. They dismissed God’s word. Again.

The sword eliminated this problem: eternal life after the fall would have been eternal life in sin. They had transgressed the law. They were now covenant-breakers. The tree of life would have provided them with permanent biological extension. It would not have dealt with their sin. For that, they needed saving grace. For that, they needed God’s forgiveness. For that, they needed confession of sin. Eating from the tree of life would have gained them unlimited time as covenant-breakers.

Eating from the tree of life would also have violated the terms of the dominion covenant. They would no longer have been acting on God’s behalf. They would have been acting on their own behalf. Covenantally, they would have been acting on Satan’s behalf as his agents. They had just eaten a covenant meal in the presence of Satan’s agent. Unlimited temporal extension was a threat to them spiritually. They would no longer fear death. They would have become worse than the people at the tower of Babel, who at least feared death. God closed that door by means of the flaming sword. This was supernatural. When the garden disappeared from history, no later than the flood, the tree of life disappeared with it.

### C. The Meaning of Imputation

God imputes either guilt or innocence to people based on their actions. Imputation means evaluation, determination, and declaration. It is subjective.

The first examples of imputation that we have in the Bible are in Genesis 1. When God evaluated His work at the end of a day by declaring that it is good, He was imputing value to His work. He was imputing perfect coherence between His standards and His performance in history. In the garden of Eden, God evaluated the performance of Adam and Eve. He compared their performance with His original standard. He had told them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They violated His standard. He conducted an investigation of what they had done. Then He made a public declaration of their guilt. Then He imposed negative sanctions. His evaluation was subjective, but His standard of performance was objective. God is perfect. He is also omniscient. Nothing escapes His observations. So, imputation is simultaneously subjective and objective. In the case of God, imputation is perfect. God does not make mistakes. His declarations are final.

The final judgment will be a testimony to God's imputation of guilt and innocence. At the final judgment, He will judge the performance of all people throughout history in terms of His fixed ethical standards. Then He will declare the guilt and innocence of each person. Then He will impose eternal sanctions. The eternal sanctions are objective. Men's sins are objective. God's declaration will be objective.

Without a doctrine of imputation by God, men's imputations conflict with each other. People disagree with each other about what the standards are. Many of them assert that the standards change over time. This is ethical relativism. Each person makes his own judgment about the nature of the standards and how the standards should apply in specific cases to specific individuals. There is no way to reconcile the conflicting imputations of individuals regarding their legal status and the legal status of everyone else.

Imputation applies to everything. What is the meaning of history? That depends on what the standards of history are. Are there standards governing historic development? Modern historians have denied that this is the case. But if there are no standards of success and failure in history, then the doctrine of progress disappears. *There is no way logically to affirm the doctrine of progress if there are no standards of success and failure.*

Modern historians have abandoned faith in the meaning of history and

therefore the significance of their work as historians. They have found no way to identify permanent standards in history. They do not believe that history moves forward in terms of such standards. Most of them do not believe that there are any laws of historical development. Marxists are a major exception, but there are not many of them still writing. Marxist theory was abandoned rapidly after the fall of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991.

Because Christians affirm that God is sovereign, and because they affirm that God's ethics do not change in history, they are in a position to become superior historians. (See Chapter 14.) They affirm their faith in the final judgment. They therefore affirm that God has both the legal authority and the power to impose sanctions in history and eternity in terms of His evaluation, meaning His imputation, of men's performance in history. They affirm that God provides standards of evaluation. They affirm that history is meaningful because God imputes meaning to history. This enables them to impute accurate meaning in history. They are made in God's image.

God would declare all people guilty as charged were it not for the grace that He extends to some sinners. Soul-saving grace—special grace—is judicially based on Jesus' atonement at Calvary. But His grace also extends to all covenant-breakers. They get more than they deserve in history. This is common grace. This grace is the means of their dominion.

## **D. Dominion and Grace**

### ***1. Defining Grace***

Grace is easy to define: *a benefit granted to an undeserving recipient*. In the case of Adam and Eve after their rebellion, the benefit was an extension of temporal life. They did not deserve this. God had warned them that they would die on the day that they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Judicially, they did die. Their covenantal status moved from life to death. That is because their judicial status moved from covenant-keeping to covenant-breaking.

God had extended grace to Adam and Eve by creating them. They were images of God Himself. This was a great honor. He gave them control over the earth. They could benefit from their exercise of dominion. This was also an undeserved benefit. They did not earn this benefit. They did not deserve it. God was in no way in their debt.

There is a fundamental biblical principle: *grace precedes law*. Adam was given life before he was given an assignment to exercise dominion. He was given life before he was given a commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was a matter of responsibility. There would be a law-order governing mankind. One law had to do with the responsibilities associated with representing God in history. Man would exercise dominion on behalf of God. But Adam was given life before he was given this responsibility. He received grace before he came under law. In the case of the world before the fall, this grace had no negative sanctions. There was the threat of negative sanctions, but they had not yet been imposed. That is because Adam and Eve had not yet disobeyed God.

## ***2. Special Grace and Common Grace***

Special grace is redemption. That became necessary after the fall of man. Man could not save himself by his own actions. Adam and Eve thought they could, and so they sewed fig leaves. This did them some good. This occupied them for some time, which meant that they did not go immediately to the tree of life. Had they eaten from the tree of life, they would have guaranteed for themselves eternal biological extension, but this would not have saved their souls. They would have remained covenant-breakers. They would have been in covenant with Satan. That would have been a curse. Temporal extension of life would have seemed to be a benefit, but in fact it would have been a damning curse.

God gave them life. He killed animals to dress them in skins that would protect them from the elements. They did not deserve this. This would not save their souls, but it would save their lives. They did not deserve this.

Why did God do this? He did it in order to create a new agenda for mankind: *the transition from wrath to grace*. He had planned to do this from the beginning. Paul wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:3–7).

### ***3. The Witness of Common Grace***

God has revealed to all men what they must do to gain His positive sanctions in eternity: trust and obey. God has also given them sufficient revelation in nature to distinguish good laws from bad laws. God's Bible-revealed laws are good laws that some covenant-breakers do recognize as beneficial. Moses told the generation of the conquest: "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?" (Deuteronomy 4:5–8).

The fact that some covenant-breakers can and do recognize the beneficial corporate results of God's laws, including His civil laws, does not mean that they will adopt these laws or enforce them faithfully whenever they do adopt them. No foreign nation around Israel ever adopted Israel's legal system, although the people of Nineveh did repent temporarily from their most blatant personal sins (Jonah 3). The Queen of Sheba did come for specific counsel from Solomon (1 Kings 10:1–10). These incidents in Israel's history indicate that, on specific issues, covenant-breakers do recognize the wisdom of God's law. A covenant-breaking society may adopt certain aspects of God's law in personal ethics or even social ethics, but it will not adopt biblical law as a comprehensive system of justice. Apart from God's gift to a society of widespread, soul-saving special grace, God does not empower a society to maintain its commitment to those few biblical laws that it may have adopted. Eventually, covenant-breakers rebel, just as Nineveh rebelled before Assyria invaded Israel. *Common grace requires special grace in order to overcome mankind's ethical rebellion.*



There was another crucial aspect of the extension of common grace to Adam and Eve and their heirs. Mankind was still defined in terms of the dominion covenant. Man was still made in the image of God. Man was still required to exercise dominion on God's behalf. Satan attempted to disrupt God's plan. He attempted to overthrow the dominion covenant by luring Adam and Eve into rebellion. If God had killed them physically to match their judicial status of being covenantally dead, Satan would have congratulated himself for having destroyed God's plan for mankind. He would have accomplished this simply by sending a serpent to tempt them into rebellion. God did not give Satan this satisfaction. He extended the lives of Adam and Eve so that they could begin to exercise dominion, despite the fact that they were now in a state of rebellion against Him.

So, there was an element of special grace associated with temporal extension. God from the beginning had chosen some people to be redeemed by the blood of Christ. The others would continue to exercise dominion, leaving the world visibly under God's control. The world would testify to the ever-expanding dominion of man in history.

There are therefore two families of God. One of them is disinherited eternally. These are covenant-breakers who will be destroyed forever on the day of judgment. There is also an adopted family. These people are adopted by God as a way of showing His special grace in history and eternity. John wrote of Jesus Christ: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11–13). This confirmed what Paul wrote: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Ephesians 1:5). (In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of the principle of inheritance in a world in which there are two families: disinherited and adopted.)

#### ***4. Biblical Law and Common Grace***

The work of God's law in men's hearts and men's ability to obey it temporarily are the primary forms of common grace. The law is written in the hearts of believers, we read in Hebrews 8 and 10, but the work of the law is written in the heart of everyone (Romans 2:14–15). Thus, the work of



the law is universal—common. This common access to God's law is mankind's foundation for fulfilling the universal dominion covenant to subdue the earth. The command was given to all men through Adam. This command was reaffirmed by God with the family of Noah (Genesis 9:1–7). *God's promises of external blessings are conditional on man's fulfillment of external laws.* The reason why men can gain the external blessings is because the knowledge of the work of the law is common. This is why there can be outward cooperation between Christians and non-Christians for certain earthly ends.

From time to time, unbelievers are enabled by God to adhere more closely to the work of the law that is written in their hearts. These periods of cultural adherence can last for centuries, at least with respect to some aspects of human culture (the arts, science, philosophy). The Greeks maintained a high level of culture inside the limited confines of the Greek city-states for a few centuries. (They were under Roman law after B.C. 146.) The Chinese maintained their culture until it grew stagnant, in response to Confucian philosophy, in what we call the West's Middle Ages. But, in the West, the ability of the unregenerate to act in closer conformity to the work of the law written in their hearts has been the result of the historical leadership provided by the cultural triumph of Christianity. Special grace increased in the West, leading to an extension of common grace throughout Western culture.

### 5. *Van Til and Kline*

Van Til rejected both the dualism and the dialecticism of Western philosophy. He saw in Christianity the reconciliation of unchangeable law and changing facts in the sovereignty of God. God is the cosmic law-giver. He is omniscient. He controls all facts. He has revealed Himself and His laws in the Bible. Covenant-keepers can understand the world because they are made in God's image. They have been redeemed. They have the mind of Christ.

But there was a major problem in his theological system. He believed that by obeying God's law, covenant-keepers will get weaker culturally. He never said this openly, but this position implies the following: by disobeying God's laws, covenant-breakers become more powerful. Van Til sided with those who proclaim that Satan's kingdom wins in history. He made

this plain in his book on *Common Grace* (1947). He referred to the final judgment as the crack of doom: the end of history.

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for “the day of grace,” the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development (p. 85).

His doctrine of common grace was structured in terms of his pessimistic theory of history. As history develops, he wrote, covenant-breakers will exercise greater influence and power over the world. They will self-consciously persecute Christians. This is why Christians in every era should rejoice that they live today and not tomorrow or next year or next century. God has tilted the “playing field” of history in favor of covenant-breakers. As history progresses, the field becomes ever-more tilted against covenant-keepers. This interpretation of history is the opposite of what the Bible teaches. He saw the inheritance in history going to covenant-breakers. This denies what Solomon wrote: “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Proverbs 13:22). This denies when Jesus said: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). (I critiqued his concept of common grace in Chapter 4 of my 1987 book, *Dominion and Common Grace*.)

His colleague at Westminster Seminary was Meredith G. Kline. He was less pessimistic than Van Til. He offered a different assessment of the relation between obedience to God’s law and historical sanctions. He said that the kingdom outcomes of both obedience and disobedience to God’s law are inscrutable. He wrote a critique of Greg Bahnsen’s book, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1974), which was published in *The Westminster Theological Journal* (Fall 1978). He wrote: “And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and ad-

versity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways” (p. 184). In short, covenant-keepers should not rely on the Mosaic law’s promises of continuity between covenant-keeping and success. I responded in 1989 in *Political Polytheism*: “Biblical case laws are still morally and judicially binding today. . . . Kline’s theology explicitly denies this. Second, Kline’s argument also means the denial of God’s sanctions—blessing and cursing—in New Testament history. It is the denial of any long-term cause-and-effect relationship between covenantal faithfulness and external blessings—positive feedback between covenant-keeping and visible blessings. It is also the denial of any long-term cause-and-effect relationship between covenantal unfaithfulness and external cursings” (p. 49). (Bahnsen responded to Kline’s article in a long, detailed article that I published in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* [Winter, 1979-80]. <https://bit.ly/Bahnsen-Kline>)

## Conclusion

The basis of man’s ability to impute meaning and purpose to the universe is based on God’s original imputation of meaning and purpose to the universe. God created it. God evaluated it. In the first week of history, God sequentially created aspects of the world, and then He evaluated His work. This is the model for human evaluation. People are made in the image of God. They therefore have the ability to impute meaning and purpose to the world around them.

God commanded Adam and Eve to extend dominion across the face of the earth. But, as a test of their willingness to be faithful to His word, He placed a judicial barrier around a single tree in the garden. They failed this test. They refused to impute meaning to His word based on what He had said. They imputed a different meaning to His words. Then they acted in accordance with their autonomous imputation of meaning. This brought them under judgment. This brought all mankind under judgment.

This rebellion was the end of the first phase of history, which was marked by this theme: the transition from grace to wrath. It inaugurated the next phase of history: the transition from wrath to grace. God extends common grace to covenant-breakers for the sake of fulfilling the dominion covenant. Covenant-keepers become beneficiaries of the discoveries, cap-

ital, and efforts of covenant-breakers. The direction of history is toward the fulfillment of the dominion covenant and the extension of God's special grace in history. That is to say, the direction of history is toward the fulfillment of what we call the Great Commission. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18–20). This was a recapitulation of the dominion covenant specifically for covenant-keepers. This is the dominion covenant for the adopted family of God. History reflects the extension of God's inheritance to this adopted family. I cover this aspect of the structure of history in Chapter 5.

# 5

## INHERITANCE

*The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head (Psalm 110:1–7).*

### A. Covenant Model, Point 5

Point 5 of the biblical covenant model is succession. There is change over time. People improve their skills. As they extend their dominion in history, others replace them. In the post-fall world, death removes people. They are replaced.

Point 5 of biblical social theory is inheritance. At the death of the testator, the testament identifies the heirs and each heir's inheritance.

Point 5 of biblical history is the same as point 5 of biblical social theory: inheritance.

### B. Analysis

Psalm 110 is quoted directly or referred to indirectly more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage: at least 27 times, according to James Montgomery Boice. The psalm is short and to the point: God (the Lord) told a civil ruler who represented Him in Zion that Zion will be victorious in history. He will rule over his enemies as if they were a foot-

stool, meaning total victory. He will possess political power: “the day of thy power.” Yet this ruler was a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not Levi. He is a priest who exercised civil power.

How could this be? Civil power was through Judah. David was the model. The Mosaic priesthood was through Levi. One thing is certain: *no one under the Old Covenant fulfilled this prophecy*. Yet it must be fulfilled. “The Lord hath sworn and will not repent.” Therefore, it has to be fulfilled in the New Testament era of history—not the world after the final judgment. No agent of God will rule over the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14–15), i.e., “the heathen” who are enemies of God. This leader will reign over kingdoms as a man who places his feet on a footstool in rest. This is “footstool theology.”

The language of civil power is inescapable. “He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.” This civil rule is international. If this language does not refer to comprehensive political power, it is meaningless. Also, if it does not refer to history, where death still exists, it is meaningless. It is worse than meaningless. It is deliberately misleading. It conveys a list of prophecies that will never be fulfilled in history.

This civil ruler is identified as a priest after the order of Melchizedek. We know who this ruler is: Jesus Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews identifies Him. “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (Hebrews 7:22). Chapter 7 is devoted to a discussion of this new priesthood. His is a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (vv. 11–17).

Jesus Christ is the prophesied priest of Psalm 110. “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore” (vv. 26–28).

We also know who sits at the right hand of God: Jesus Christ. “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?” (Hebrews 1:13). Therefore, part of the prophecy of Psalm 110 has been fulfilled literally in history. Jesus is the priest after the order of Melchizedek. He sits at God’s right hand. Luke announced: “Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69). Peter wrote of Christ: “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Peter 3:22).

What about the remainder of the prophecies in Psalm 110? These will be fulfilled literally as surely as those prophecies that referred to a priest after the order of Melchizedek were fulfilled literally, and as surely as the prophecy of a man sitting at God’s right hand was fulfilled literally. To spiritualize away these literal prophecies is a violation of the biblical hermeneutic. These prophecies did not refer to a spiritual kingdom that has no power over God’s enemies in history. They surely do not refer to a kingdom that is under the rule of covenant-breakers. *The kingdom of God at the end of history will not be the footstool of covenant-breakers.*

## C. 1 Corinthians 15

Paul cited this psalm to justify his theory of Christ’s comprehensive triumph in history.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the

kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:20–28).

To understand this passage, we must pay attention to the sequence of the comprehensive victory of Christ in history. First, He rose from the dead. In this sense, He was the firstfruits, which was a mandatory offering every year in Mosaic Israel (Leviticus 23:10–14). His resurrection was literal. Paul insisted on this point: “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (v. 14). Second, there will be a resurrection of those people who have been redeemed by Christ. This resurrection will be literal, just as Christ’s resurrection was literal. It is not figurative. This has to refer to the final judgment. “Then cometh the end” (v. 24a).

We come now to a crucial point in the biblical philosophy of history. The biblical view of history is linear: creation, development, and final judgment. History is not cyclical. I have argued that this development has two themes: the transition from grace to wrath, which ended in Genesis 3, and the transition from wrath to grace, which ends in Revelation 20. Then comes the end of time: final judgment. “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14–15). Revelation 21 and 22 are therefore post-historical.

First Corinthians 15 deals with eschatology: the doctrine of the last things. I have mentioned Paul’s first two points of eschatology in this passage: the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of His people. This brings me to the third point: “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (vv. 24–25). The progressive victory of Christ’s kingdom in history will come through His representative agents, not through His bodily presence in history. Christ’s bodily resurrection was



literal. The resurrection of His followers will be literal. The extension of His kingdom in history and rule over covenant-breakers is literal. The fourth point is death. It is also literal. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet” (vv. 26–27). This has to refer to the final judgment.

The only things that are not literal in this passage are Christ’s feet. This language is allegorical. It was also allegorical in Psalm 110. The image of Christ putting His feet on the whole world and then resting is allegorical of His comprehensive rule in history. The imagery makes no sense if the footstool does not represent the kingdoms of this world. If the kingdoms of this world are not represented by the footstool, then the footstool represents the church. Then it is Satan who puts his feet on the footstool. Christians are under his domination. Satan rests victorious. This is not what Paul taught.

The Christian view of history is linear. Humanist historians have made this observation for generations. I am arguing more than this. I am arguing that history has revealed and will continue to reveal an increasing influence of Christianity in every area of life. In other words, I interpret 1 Corinthians 15 literally—except for the feet.

## **D. Bridegroom and Bride**

Matthew 25 is devoted to the final judgment. It offers two parables: the parable of the ten virgins (vv. 1–13) and the parable of the three stewards (vv. 14–30). It ends with a description of the final judgment: the separation of the sheep from the goats (vv. 31–45). Here is the parable of the ten virgins.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:

but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh (Matthew 25:1–13).

It is clear that the bridegroom is Jesus Christ. In other New Testament passages, Christ is described as the bridegroom. John the Baptist was baptizing people when Jesus' ministry began. His disciples came to him "and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:26b–30). Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25–27). Christ is the bridegroom. The church is the bride. John wrote of the world beyond the grave: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1–2). This follows the wedding celebration or marriage supper of the lamb: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:7–9).

Jesus' role as the bridegroom of the church is central to His role as Re-

deemer. God selects the members of Christ's church. Then He redeems them by grace. "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:6–10).

The bridegroom has a bride. The bride is the church. The history of mankind ever since the fall of man has been the story of the purification of the church. This purification is ethical. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:1–2). This is what he meant when he wrote of the church as "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27). There is a process of ethical sanctification here. Theologians call this progressive sanctification. This process leads to final sanctification. This will take place at the end of time: the wedding supper of the lamb, which will follow the final judgment.

### **E. Bride Price and Dowry**

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul presented information on the final judgment. This judgment comes only after Christ has extended dominion across the face of the earth. He has subdued His enemies (vv. 24–28). Paul did not say what takes place next. But it is obvious what will take place next. We know from the Book of Revelation what follows: the marriage supper of the Lamb. But this must be preceded by Christ's payment of the bride price to God the Father. What Paul described is the bride price. It is the whole world, and this world is redeemed. It is the whole world after the last enemy has been defeated: death. This has to be a description of the final judgment. This is the completion of the dominion covenant for history. This is marked by the bride price.

Parts of this section appear in Chapter 22 of *Authority and Dominion*: "Wives and Concubines." My discussion is far more detailed there.

### ***1. Ransom as Bride Price***

The death of Christ on the cross paid a ransom. “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:5–6). “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19). Jesus did not pay this ransom to Satan. He paid it to God the Father. It was paid in full at Calvary. It was definitive. This definitive payment has led to a progressive expansion of the final inheritance of the church as the church accumulates wealth, especially wisdom, the most valuable of assets. This expansion will continue until Christ’s final payment to God takes place at the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:24–28). In the meantime, God is owed all of the productivity of mankind. This is an implication of the dominion covenant. It is taught in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) and the parable of the minas (Luke 19:11–27). These are stewardship parables. They are also what I call pocketbook parables. Jesus taught general principles of ethics by means of economic examples, which people understand. The parables were not limited to wealth. They referred to dominion in the broadest sense.

What has Christ’s payment of the ransom to God got to do with the Old Covenant’s bride price system? It has to do with the recipient of grace. The recipient of the bride price will be the church. The church, meaning all redeemed people, survives in history only because of Christ’s payment of the ransom at Calvary. The church is called the bride of Christ. It is this office of bride that is the basis of the connection between the payment of the ransom and the payment of the bride price.

### ***2. Bride Price and Responsibility***

There was a covenantal reason in the Old Testament for this economic obligation on the part of a bridegroom. The father of the prospective bride represented God to his daughter. This covenantal authority before God—his position as God’s covenantal representative to his daughter—had to be

lawfully transferred from the father to the bridegroom. By paying the bride price to her father, the bridegroom ritually swore to a lifetime of faithfulness to his wife as God's representative over her, faithfulness comparable to what her father's faithfulness to her had been. This is precisely what Jesus swore to God the Father in His role as the cosmic Bridegroom. He paid the price at Calvary. God then transferred all authority over heaven and earth to Christ as His lawful representative (Matthew 28:18–20).

By the payment of the bride price, the groom was also acknowledging that he was capable of being as good a supporter of the girl as her father had been. He needed to assure her family of her future economic protection, thereby releasing her father and brothers from this legal responsibility. His ability to follow through on this covenantal guarantee was revealed by his ability to pay the bride price. The bride price was therefore an economic screening device for the family of the girl. The bridegroom's ability to pay a bride price was evidence of his outward faithfulness to the terms of God's covenant. The parents were transferring legal responsibility to a new covenantal head. They were participating in the establishment of a new family. Thus, the in-laws had to serve as God's covenantal agents in this transfer of authority over their daughter.

The bride price was also a sign of the bridegroom's future-orientation and self-discipline. Because Jacob came without capital into Laban's household, he first had to work for Laban as a servant for seven years in order to prove his capacity to lead his own household. To lead covenantally, you must first follow. To rule, you must also have served. Dominion is by covenant, and covenants are always hierarchical.

The bride price compensated the father for the expense of the daughter's dowry. From a purely economic standpoint, the dowry could have been delivered directly from the bridegroom to the daughter. Why did God require this seemingly unnecessary intermediate step, the payment of the bride price to the father? Because the formal transfer of the bride price to her father pointed to the bridegroom's requirement of covenantal subordination to her father. The father gave him permission to marry her.

### ***3. Dowry***

The church needs a dowry. Every bride does. The language of Ezekiel 16 applies to the church. Israel had been an outcast of gentiles. "And as for thy

nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born" (vv. 4–5). God adopted Israel.

Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and brodered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom (vv. 9–13).

Analogously, the New Testament church was the outcast of Israel. The gentiles had been God's outcasts. The church had no wealth of its own that would satisfy God. The church could not provide its own dowry. Whatever blessings the church has ever had, it has had only on the basis of the grace of God. Jesus Christ paid the bride price to God through His death at Calvary. This is the basis of His marriage to the bride, the church. The marriage supper of the Lamb must be preceded by the payment of a bride price. *The church is a betrothed wife*. The church is not a concubine. The concubine had no dowry. The church does have a dowry. But where did it get this dowry? Biblically, it has to come from the father. But the father gets the dowry from the bridegroom. The payment of the dowry marks the bridegroom as the responsible individual who is now taking responsibility for the bride.

What did the father in the Old Testament do with the bride price? He turned it over to the bride. It was the bride's protection. In this case, it is the bride's inheritance. It did not come from the bride. It came from the bridegroom. The bride price for Israel was not paid by Israel's father. Israel's father was an Amorite. He had no legal standing to be a covenantal father. He had abandoned his daughter. The same is true of the many fathers of the bride of the church. From all over the world, members have been adopted.

Jesus' payment of the bride price at Calvary was paid to the Father. The Father holds it in trust for the bride. It is held in trust until the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The New Testament's revelation of Jesus as the bodily incarnation of the Second Person of the Godhead and therefore as the Creator and the Redeemer of Israel is crucial to a proper understanding of redemptive history. The doctrine of the church as the betrothed bride of Christ is the covenantal foundation of the doctrine of the divorce of Old Covenant Israel. Christ is not a bigamist. Therefore, He lawfully divorced Israel.

#### ***4. God Divorced Israel***

This raises a question. What happened to Old Covenant Israel's dowry in A.D. 70? Biblically, the promise of the land of Canaan/Israel ended. Neither Christianity nor Judaism has a legal claim to the land of Palestine that supposedly is lawfully grounded in God's promise to Abraham. The church has a far greater inheritance: the whole earth. Jesus said: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). This means meek before God. This was Jesus' strategy of world conquest. "And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And 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 22:25–30). The kingdom is a realm of judgment. It is clearly a realm of civil law. Jesus spoke of thrones.

Old Covenant Israel used the Roman legal system to execute Jesus. Jesus used the Roman legal system to execute Old Covenant Israel. This was fitting. "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified" (Matthew 27:24–26). The negative sanc-



tions of the Jews' self-maledictory oath to Pilate were imposed on Israel in A.D. 70. The agency of this judgment was the Roman army led by Titus. It surrounded the city, crucified captives, and finally burned the temple. *Old Covenant Israel died*. This is why it was illegitimate for Medieval Christians to seek revenge against Jews in the name of that oath. That oath was no longer covenantally binding after A.D. 70. Nor was the marriage oath between God and Israel. The adulterous partner was executed by the civil government that God had placed in authority over Israel. Israel rebelled militarily, and it did not survive.

As the victimized husband of Israel, Jesus transferred the covenantal dowry from lawfully divorced and lawfully executed Old Covenant Israel to the church. Paul called the church "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16b). This dowry included the written text of the Old Testament. It also involved an extension of the promise of land to Abraham. The boundaries of this land were extended: the whole world. This was the meaning of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). (The best book on this is Kenneth Gentry's *The Greatness of the Great Commission*, 1992.) On what legal basis did Jesus do this? On the legal basis of His status as the Creator. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods" (Psalm 24:1–2).

## F. The Church's Inheritance

The church is filled with former covenant-breakers. In this sense, the church is no different from what Israel had been. God had adopted Israel (Ezekiel 16). God has adopted the church. This was an act of grace.

The Book of Revelation describes the end of history. It uses the language of a marriage supper. It is the marriage supper of the Lamb. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of



God” (Revelation 19:6–9). The remainder of Revelation 19 and Revelation 20 are devoted to the final confrontation between God and Satan, followed by the final judgment. Then comes Revelation 21, the post-resurrection era. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (vv. 1–2). “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (vv. 9–10). This is post-resurrection: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (v. 7). The language is clear. *This is a matter of inheritance*. Covenant-keepers inherit; covenant-breakers are disinherited for eternity.

Paul made it clear that this transfer of payment at the end of time is the completion of the bride price. The initial price was paid at Calvary. In other words, title was transferred to God the Father, but title has to be redeemed by the church in history. This is the meaning of the dominion covenant. *Through the grace of God, the church buys back the world*. But it does so only in the name of Christ. The church works through history to redeem the world, but this is possible only by the grace of God. Jesus has empowered the church, and the Holy Spirit has guided the church. Everything that the church possesses, it possesses only as a steward possesses anything. In the day of reckoning, the stewards must give an account of their stewardship. All of mankind must do this. We know from the parable of the talents and the parable of the minas that God will impose final sanctions. All that Christians do, they do in the name of God and on behalf of God. Jesus is the property owner who does the final reckoning. He collects what is His, but then He transfers wealth to the profitable stewards. This is post-final judgment. The wealth goes to the stewards. The stewards are members of the church. The stewards are part of the bride of Christ.

The combination of the imagery of the stewards and the imagery of the bride provides us with an understanding of the inheritance. The post-judgment inheritance is the whole world, but a world redeemed. It is a world without the presence of covenant-breakers. It is a sin-free world. This is the eternal dowry of the church.

This dowry is valuable. It is the completed development of the capital

that God gave to mankind in the garden of Eden. This is the inheritance of the church and the members of the church, which they will use to extend dominion in the world beyond the final judgment. There will be plenty to do. God is infinite. Men must examine the relationship between an infinite God and the creation. This will be a world of increasing knowledge. But this knowledge must be applied knowledge if it is to be meaningful. It is not knowledge for its own sake. It is knowledge for dominion's sake. It will not end when sin disappears in the post-judgment world. It would not have ended in Eden if the serpent's temptation had been rejected by Adam and Eve. There was lots that could be done. If they instead had participated in a communion meal at the tree of life, that would have been the beginning of the process of dominion. Dominion was not empowered by sin. It was hampered by God's judgment on sin. In the world beyond the final judgment, the process of dominion will no longer be hampered by God's judgment on sin. There will be no sin.

The church is the betrothed bride of Christ. The dowry is held in trust by God the Father, but it has been paid by Jesus Christ. It was paid by His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. Where else could it have come from?

## **G. Stewardship**

Once we understand the economic function of the dowry, and once we understand that the bridegroom pays the Father the money that constitutes the dowry, we begin to understand the importance of eschatology in our understanding of the development of Christendom. The extension of the kingdom of God in history is by evangelism. This leads to comprehensive redemption, meaning the redemption of institutions. It means the transformation of the world through voluntary exchange. The church in the broadest sense does this as God's steward in history. This is both judicial, meaning trusteeship, and economic, meaning stewardship. It is done through the extension of biblical law into every nook and cranny of the world. It is done through the power of the Holy Spirit to transform and educate sinners: special grace.

The parables of the stewards make it clear that, at the end of time, God will evaluate the performance of every individual. He will evaluate the performance of the two branches of His family: the adopted family and the dis-

inherited family. It is clear from the parables of the stewards that the non-performing family will not inherit anything. Everything that they possess, which they received from God, is transferred to the most efficient stewards. Clearly, this refers to the final judgment. The parable of the talents is in the section of Jesus' parables on the final judgment (Matthew 25).

When we combine the two images, meaning the stewardship of the church and Christ's payment of the bride price to the Father, we begin to understand the nature of ownership in history. At the beginning of history, God granted capital to mankind: the uncursed and undeveloped world. This was the arena of the dominion covenant. This covenant is still in force. Men must develop all aspects of this capital, especially wisdom. Then, at the end of time, God evaluates people's performance. The church will be the great beneficiary of its own performance in history, under the guidance of Christ and the Holy Spirit. This reward is indirect. Christ subdues His enemies. Next, He transfers all authority back to the Father. Then the Father transfers this authority of administration back to covenant-keepers. That is the inheritance. That is the transfer of the dowry. *Christ's work in history builds the value of this dowry.* He does not keep it. God the Father does not keep it. It becomes the final inheritance of covenant-keepers. It is their capital which they will use to launch the next phase of dominion in the world beyond the final judgment. All of this is eschatological. It is surely economic.

The Book of Proverbs makes it clear that wisdom is the greatest economic asset. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her" (Proverbs 3:13–15). This tells us that covenant-keepers will gain dominion in history through wisdom and by obedience to the laws of God. To imagine that they will remain the world's economic losers until the end of time, while covenant-breakers extend the kingdom of mammon by means of its laws, only to see the vast productivity of their program of dominion transferred to covenant-keepers at the end of time, is to imagine that the wisdom of the mammon is the source of wealth. This is contrary to the explicit teaching of Moses regarding God, "Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this

wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:16–18).

In the parables of the talents and the minas, we learn that two covenant-keepers are the productive stewards, and the lone covenant-breaker is the unproductive steward. When the owner returns for a final accounting, he is pleased with the covenant-keeping stewards. He casts out the covenant-breaking steward. The performance of the two covenant-keepers in history was a prelude to their endowment by God after the final judgment. Similarly, the performance of the covenant-breaker in history reflects his final disinheritance. There is continuity of performance and reward in both groups, not discontinuity. It is not that the covenant-breaker was the productive steward, whereupon the owner transferred his wealth to impoverished covenant-keepers. The opposite is the case. Our understanding of the parables of the stewards should shape our eschatology. Our eschatology should be consistent with the message of the two parables.

The greater the value of the world at the end of time, the larger the dowry inherited by the church. Part of this dowry will be the forfeited inheritance of the disinherited family of man, represented by one covenant-breaking steward. Most of this dowry will be the developed legacy of the adopted family of man, represented by two stewards.

## **Conclusion**

A Bible-based Christian theory of history rests on a presupposition: there is ethical cause-and-effect in history. This is taught in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. God's blessings come from corporate obedience to biblical law. We can see this in the history of economic development. There is consistency between ethical conformity to the laws of God and economic productivity. There is also consistency between covenant-breaking and long-term impoverishment. We saw this most clearly in the development of the economies of the Soviet Union (1917–1991) and Communist China (1949–1979), both of which led to impoverishment.

Christians need to understand the system of the bride price and the dowry in the Old Testament. It no longer exists in the New Testament. This is because daughters are baptized. Baptism is a mark of covenantal authority in both the family and the civil government. This is why women

legitimately have the right to vote. Daughters now have an equal claim with sons with respect to family inheritance. Daughters therefore become covenantally responsible for their parents in the parents' old age. This was not true under the Old Covenant. Only sons were responsible. Daughters were responsible only for their husbands' parents. With their greater family responsibility comes greater financial support. Parents supply dowries in the form of college educations for their daughters because they have legal and moral claims on future support from daughters.

This alteration of the dowry system does not annul the eschatology of the church's dowry. The bride price system will culminate in Jesus' transfer of the bride price to God the Father at the end of history. God the Father will then transfer this dowry—Christian civilization—to the church. Understanding this eschatological arrangement helps Christians to understand the meaning of the two parables of the stewards: talents and minas. The bride price/dowry system and the parables of the stewards point to the church's enormous inheritance at the end of history.

## CONCLUSION TO PART 1

You now know the biblical narrative of history: *the transition from grace to wrath, followed by the transition from wrath to grace*. You also know the biblical structure of history: creation, image of God in man, biblical law, the sanctions that God imposes to uphold those who obey His law, and the church's inheritance in history.

Maybe you reject one or more parts of this structure. If so, you need a Bible-based substitute for these parts. Which of the five don't you accept? What is your alternative? How does your substitute point or points fit into the rest of the structure that I have presented? Here is your problem: *you can't change just one thing*. If you make a substitution, are you ready to begin invest time and intellectual effort to develop an equally integrated replacement structure of history?

You may not care, one way or the other. Most people do not care. They do not worry about the structure of history. They may think there is no structure of history. They will spend their lives unconcerned about the structure of history. But they will still be affected by the structure of history. God will still impose sanctions in history in terms of His law. Covenant-breakers deny this, of course.

O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.

Yet they say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it (Psalm 94:1–7).

There are Christians who think just as these law-breakers did. They think that God does not enforce His law. They may even think that God re-

wards those who deny His authority. They think God will bring the church under the domination of these scoffers. They think this will continue until the end of time. So, they reject point 5 of the biblical structure of history: inheritance. They think that covenant-breakers progressively will inherit the earth, and covenant-keepers will participate on the sidelines of history. The historical process works against them. Satan will progressively use the church as his footstool. This was Van Til's belief.

I assume that you accept my description of the five-point structure of history. You now have a tremendous advantage. You have a sense of where you are in this providential chronological structure. You know where history is heading. You know that you are an active participant in building the kingdom of God. You are made in God's image, and you are a trustee for God. This defines who you are. Because you accept the biblical structure of history, you now have a better idea of why you are where you are and when you are. You have a better idea of what God expects you to do.

Most Christians never understand this. They do not see themselves in terms of a systematic development of history over which God is totally in charge. They do not see the way in which God has intended that history play out over time. They do not see that there is an inheritance at stake. They do not understand the extent to which they have been the inheritors of a portion of this legacy, and for which they are responsible to God for increasing before they die. Why? So that they can leave a larger kingdom-building legacy behind them they received at birth. This is the inescapable conclusion of the biblical doctrine of inheritance. It is a call to lifelong productivity. We are expected to leave behind more than we inherited. This is the basis for the expansion of the kingdom of God in history. This is the capital that the church will use to extend the kingdom. You are a capital asset in the eyes of God. He expects you to increase your net worth to Him through your lifetime. He imputes your value to Him. He expects you to impute your value analogous to His imputation of your value. You cannot do this perfectly, but you can do it accurately.

The five points in the biblical structure of history are sequential. There are also five points in the structure of your personal history. They are also sequential. History began when God created the world out of nothing. Your history began when God created you. "Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the

earth by myself” (Isaiah 44:24). God told Adam to extend God’s dominion over the world. God has told you to extend His dominion over that portion of the world to which He has assigned to you. God has structured institutions in terms of His law. He requires you to obey His law. God offers blessings and cursings to societies in terms of their obedience to His law. He offers blessings and cursings to you in terms of your obedience to His law. God promises to extend His kingdom over time. While you are still alive, you will be a participant in this process.

History is linear: beginning, development, end. The Bible teaches this. But history is more than linear. It is progressive. Things get better over time because there is greater obedience to His ethical laws over time. Covenant-breakers participate in this improvement, but only in terms of 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” (Proverbs 13:22).

The key to progress in history is God’s system of sanctions: positive and negative. He brings positive sanctions to covenant-keepers who obey him. He brings negative sanctions against covenant-breakers who disobey him. This was stated clearly in the Ten Commandments. “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 shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4–6). Moses was speaking of generations. When he said thousands, He meant thousands of generations, just as he meant the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him.

There is a progressive differentiation over time between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Each group gets increasingly consistent with its presuppositions as time rolls on. People in each group better understand the implications of their presuppositions. God’s system of historical sanctions rewards those covenant-keepers whose behavior becomes more consistent with their presuppositions. This is taught in Deuteronomy 28:1–14.

Humanists reject this theory regarding the structure of history. There are two major forms of denial: the power religion and the escape religion. The power religion is based on this faith: victory in history is based on the accumulation of political power. It worships the state. This was the motiva-



tion of the rulers of the Near Eastern empires, Alexander's empire, and the Roman Empire. Daniel taught in three places that each of these empires will perish. The fourth kingdom will be replaced by the fifth and final kingdom. This is God's kingdom. (See Chapter 13:C.) In contrast, the escape religion retreats into obscurity in order to avoid confrontation. We find adherents of the escape religion inside churches.

The biblical worldview is historical. The Bible is mostly historical. There is feedback between the development of the Christian worldview and the developments of history. They are interconnected. They are interconnected because of the biblical structure history. It is sequential. It is covenantal. It is therefore confessional. It has to do with oaths: point 4 of the biblical covenant model.

With this in mind, it is time for you to consider the humanistic structure of history. I present this in Part 2.



**Part 2**  
**Humanistic Analytical**  
**Categories of History**



## INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

Humanists in academia avoid the question of epistemology like a plague. In every academic discipline, scholars avoid discussing the philosophical foundations of their discipline. They do not ask this question: “What do we know, and how can we know it?” This is true even in the department of philosophy. The department may offer a course that surveys various approaches to epistemology, but the course will not raise the question of the epistemology governing how academic philosophy should be taught. It will come to no conclusions about the proper way to defend the legitimacy or even the possibility of the academic discipline of philosophy.

There have never been university courses on epistemology. Students have never been introduced to the issue of epistemology. Why not? Because this topic raises the question of presuppositions. These presuppositions must be taken on faith. The professors do not want to discuss the nature of this faith. Students do not ask them to do this. The university’s administration does not ask them to do it. So, they do not do it.

Occasionally, a department will offer a course on methodology. This will deal with the techniques associated with the discipline. These techniques are what might be called bread-and-butter issues. They ask questions such as these. What are the appropriate methods of research in this field? What is the appropriate format for publishing the results? Which footnoting system is required? What should the bibliography look like? Each department has its own rules. Sometimes, a professor will enforce different rules. Students concern themselves with a kind of academic etiquette. They do not concern themselves with the philosophical foundations of the discipline. In the case of graduate students in the humanities, they do not concern themselves with the legitimacy of the field to which they will devote the rest of their careers. They do not care. They assume that the required methodologies are based on a reliable theory of knowledge. They assume that someone in authority in their field has done the intellectual work of grounding these methodologies on a philosophy of knowledge. This is an incorrect assumption.

Consider the academic discipline of history. Every year, there are annual conventions of historical societies. Historians write papers that they read to a partially filled room of historians. When the person organizing the convention is deciding on topics of potential interest, he will not schedule a session on epistemology. He will not call for papers on the presuppositions of historical research. If he did, he would have trouble finding historians to deliver such a paper. If he did, and there were three presenters, the three papers would not list the same presuppositions. This is because there is no agreement within the field of history regarding the fundamental presuppositions that make possible the study of history. Also, hardly anyone would attend this session.

So, when I discuss the presuppositions of humanistic historical study, I am doing so on this basis: I use the five points of biblical history as guides. Humanists have to deal with the same issues. But they are not self-conscious about this. They do not have the five points in the back of their minds. If you were to ask some historian about any of them except the fifth—entropy—he would assure you that he agrees with it. He might not want to talk about the implications for historical research of the doctrine of evolution, but he would deny that the biblical doctrine of creation has anything to do with the study of history, except as a peculiar hypothesis of Judaism and Christianity. He might discuss the sociology of the doctrine of creation, but he would not examine that doctrine as a guide for understanding history

If you ask him about historical relativism, he may have heard of Thomas Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). He probably has not read it, but he will be aware of the phrase that Kuhn made popular: "paradigm shift." He may be vaguely aware of Kuhn's thesis, namely, that the history of science did not develop as a series of step-by-step discoveries. He will know that there have been major scientific breakthroughs that were not predictable, and were not part of a familiar program of research. He may be aware of the fact that similar breakthroughs have taken place in the field of historiography. He will deny there is such a thing as scientific history. He will affirm that there are lots of opinions about the same historical event. In other words, he will affirm some form of relativism. He may not call it that, but he will affirm it. But if he is a postmodernist, he will enthusiastically affirm it.

In Part 2, I survey five presuppositions: evolution, autonomy, relativism, nominalism, and entropy. In each of the first four, I analyze a major defender

of the position. I survey his arguments. I show why these arguments contradict each other. I show that his presentation is unclear. (This is the easy part.) I show that each of them had not thought through the issue of epistemology: what historians know about the past, and how they can know it.

What is amazing is this: none of them discussed how the field of history rests on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant was the key modern philosopher. He reshaped philosophy. All philosophy since 1800 has been a commentary on his writings. He offered an irreconcilable dualism between the unbreakable causation of science versus non-determined free will. This argument raised a series of questions. How can men have free will in a world that is governed by impersonal cause and effect? How do we know that the world of science even exists? Kant concluded that the unchanging categories of man's mind—Parmenides lives!—creates the world of science. Man has no way to understand how the impersonal universe operates as an autonomous realm—a thing in itself. Kant argued that the categories of human thought structure the world we perceive. But he could not explain how or why the non-scientific realm of freedom exists. He also could not explain how this realm interacts with the realm of science. Van Til called this dualism the nature-freedom dualism. He also called it the science-personality dualism. There is no reconciliation. It is at the core of modern man's inability to develop an epistemology that preserves scientific cause-and-effect and also preserves freedom. Scientists prefer to avoid the question. So do historians.

As you read my analysis of the historians, you may conclude this: these people were not clear about the issues they were dealing with. Their presentations do not make sense. You will begin to understand the extent to which the best and brightest in the field of history have been incapable of explaining what they do for a living, how they can do it, and why it is meaningful. They are confident that Christianity does not have answers to the problems they face. Rather than consider the providence of an omniscient, omnipotent Creator God as the solution to their philosophical dilemmas, they prefer to avoid thinking about the issues that are inescapably fundamental to their life's work. They would rather consider their life's work as meaningless if the only alternative is faith that God imputes meaning to their work, and finds that their work fails to meet His standards because it fails to honor Him.

## 6

### EVOLUTION

*History is a fragment of biology: the life of man is a portion of the vicissitudes of organisms on land and sea. . . . Therefore the laws of biology are the fundamental lessons of history. We are subject to the processes and trials of evolution, to the struggle for existence in the survival of the fittest to survive. If some of us seem to escape the strife or the trials is because our group protects us; but that group itself must meet the tests of survival. So the first biological lesson in of history is that life is competition. . . . The second biological lesson of history is that life is selection. In the competition for food or mates or power some organisms succeed and some fail. In the struggle for existence some individuals are better equipped than others to meet the tests of survival. – Will and Ariel Durant, 1968.*

#### A. Covenant Model, Point 1

Point 1 of the biblical covenant model is God's transcendence. This includes His presence with the creation.

Point 1 of the biblical covenant model for social theory is the sovereignty of God.

Point 1 of the humanist covenant model is evolution. The theory of cosmic evolution is the humanists' explanation of coherence. They deny that a personal God created the universe. They deny that He sustains it providentially. They identify a purposeless universe as the source of its own coherence. The universe is autonomous. It is not providential. It is impersonal. They offer no theory of the origin of matter-energy. They offer only a theory of the Big Bang, 13.7 billion years ago (give or take). I ask: "Where did the stuff that blew up come from?" Here is the cosmologists' answer, paraphrasing Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "The universe just grewed." Big! Humanism announces retroactively: "Despise not the day of infinitesimal beginnings."



Point 1 of humanist social theory is sovereignty. Humanists initially identify the universe as sovereign. This eliminates the sovereignty of God. But then they offer the doctrine of man. Life evolved out of a lifeless cosmos about 4.5 billion years ago. Man evolved out of purposeless life about 2.5 million years ago. Man has purpose. He is the only known (by man) source of purpose. Man thereby became sovereign. He can plan. He manipulates portions of the universe. He exercises dominion over nature. For now. Not forever. (See Chapter 10.)

I focus on the Durants in this chapter because they invoked the doctrine of evolution as the basis of historical development. Most historians remain silent on cosmic origins. As humanists, they assume that the cosmos is governed by laws of evolution, but they remain silent on the implications of this faith for their philosophy of history. They have no self-conscious philosophy of history.

## **B. Denying Fixed Morality**

### ***1. A Mass Audience***

The Durants were the most successful historians in history, if book sales are the criteria of success. Will Durant wrote the first six volumes, *The Story of Civilization*. Together, they wrote the final five volumes. The first volume came out in 1935. The eleventh volume came out in 1975. Each volume was over 1,000 pages long. Each book was heavily footnoted. The public bought these books by the millions. At the time of the authors' separate, unrelated deaths in late 1981, books in the series had sold at least two million copies in nine languages. The books have remained in print ever since. The series was legendary for its finely crafted prose. The Durants could tell stories as few historians ever have, and no historian has ever told more stories than they told.

By training, Will Durant was a philosopher. He received a Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1917. Sales of his 1926 book, *The Story of Philosophy*, helped make Simon & Schuster a major publisher. The book sold so well that book royalties enabled the Durants to spend the rest of their days working on their series.

In 1968, before they completed the series, they wrote a short book, *The Lessons of History*. The brief chapters include these: "Biology and History,"

“Race and History,” “Character and History,” “Morals and History,” “Religion and History,” “Economics and history,” and several more. In these brief chapters, the authors provided nothing resembling a theory of comprehensive cause and effect in history.

Today, the Durants would be considered politically incorrect. In their chapter, “Biology and History,” which provides the citation with which I began this chapter, they argued that inequality spreads as civilization progresses. It is a natural process. Problem: there are no natural processes for societies, according to the vast majority of historians.

Inequality is not only natural and inborn, it grows with the complexity of civilization. Hereditary inequalities breed social and artificial inequalities; every invention or discovery is made or seized by the exceptional individual, and makes the strong stronger, the weak relatively weaker, than before. Economic development specializes functions, differentiates abilities, and makes men unequally valuable to their group. If we knew our fellow men thoroughly we could select thirty percent of them whose combined ability would equal that of all the rest. Life and history do precisely that, with a sublime injustice reminiscent of Calvin’s God (p. 20).

It is clear from this paragraph who their real enemy was: Calvin’s God. They correctly identified this enemy by name. Calvin’s God is the God of providence and predestination. They did not believe in either providence or predestination. They believed wholeheartedly in this phrase: *the survival of the fittest*. This was not Darwin’s phrase originally. It was Herbert Spencer’s phrase, but Darwin incorporated it in later editions of *The Origin of Species*.

## ***2. Philosophy of History***

In the first volume, Durant made it clear that he had a philosophy of history. In this regard, he was different from professional historians in the twentieth century. He believed that historical change, and ultimately historical progress, is based on constant conflicts between supernatural religion and men’s attempt to escape from the confines of traditional religion. This was the outlook of the Enlightenment.

Hence a certain tension between religion and society marks the higher stages of every civilization. Religion begins by offering magical aid to harassed and bewildered men; it culminates by giving to a people that unity of morals and belief which seems so favorable to statesmanship and art; it ends by fighting suicidally in the lost cause of the past. For as knowledge grows or alters continually, it clashes with mythology and theology, which change with geological leisureliness. Priestly control of arts and letters is then felt as a galling shackle or hateful barrier, and intellectual history takes on the character of a "conflict between science and religion." Institutions which were at first in the hands of the clergy, like law and punishment, education and morals, marriage and divorce, tend to escape from ecclesiastical control, and become secular, perhaps profane. The intellectual classes abandon the ancient theology and—after some hesitation—the moral code allied with it; literature and philosophy become anticlerical. The movement of liberation rises to an exuberant worship of reason, and falls to a paralyzing disillusionment with every dogma and every idea. Conduct, deprived of its religious supports, deteriorates into epicurean chaos; and life itself, shorn of consoling faith, becomes a burden alike to conscious poverty and to weary wealth. In the end a society and its religion tend to fall together, like body and soul, in a harmonious death. Meanwhile, among the oppressed another myth arises, gives new form to human hope, new courage to human effort, and after centuries of chaos builds another civilization (*The Story of Civilization*, vol. 1, p. 71).

There is no resolution to this conflict, he believed. There are no permanent ethical standards that would tell anyone whether a traditional religion is right or wrong, or whether a secular development is right or wrong. Society will go on warring between traditional religion and secular libertarianism. This, it seemed to Durant, is a law of history. Its outcome is problematic.

In 1968, they perceived an increase in moral laxity. This was in the midst of the student revolution that was sweeping the United States and the West, including Japan. They wrote this: "So we cannot be sure that the moral laxity of our times is a herald of decay rather than a painful or delightful transition between a moral code that has lost its agricultural basis and another that are industrial civilization has yet to forge into social order

and normality.” They remained cautiously optimistic: “Meanwhile history assures us that civilizations decay quite leisurely” (p. 41).

They were atheists. “Does history support belief in God? If by God we mean not the creative vitality of nature but a supreme being intelligent and benevolent, the answer must be a reluctant negative. Like other departments of biology, history remains at bottom a natural selection of the fittest individuals and groups in the struggle wherein goodness receives no favors, misfortunes abound, and the final test is the ability to survive” (p. 46).

They adopted one of the favorite arguments of humanists. Man, they said, is a mere speck in the cosmos. There has always been a subversive strategy behind this argument. If humanists could reduce man to a speck, they could make God cosmically irrelevant. Man is made in the image of God, Christianity teaches. So, if man is a mere speck, then God is irrelevant: barely a pebble. The Durants were aware of this logical sequence. They wrote:

The growing awareness of man’s minuscule place in the cosmos has furthered the impairment of religious belief. In Christendom we may date the beginning of the decline from Copernicus (1543). The process was slow, but by 1611, John Donne was mourning that the earth had become a mere “suburb” in the world, and that “new philosophy calls all in doubt”; and Francis Bacon, while tipping his hat occasionally to the bishops, was proclaiming science as the religion of modern emancipated man. In that generation began the “death of God” as an external deity (pp. 46–47).

They understood that there are limits to the development of atheism. For them, there were no absolutes. But there was a pattern: “Puritanism and paganism—the repression and the expression of the senses and desires—alternate in mutual reaction in history.” When the state is weak, religion and Puritanism prevail, they said. “. . . laws are feeble, and morals must bear the burden of maintaining social order.” In contrast, skepticism and paganism advance “as the rising power of law government permits the decline of the church, the family, and morality without basically endangering the stability of the state. In our time the strength of the state is united with the several forces listed above to relax faith and morals, and to allow paganism to resume its natural sway.” They warned: “Probably our excesses will bring another reaction; moral disorder may generate a religious revival; atheists may again (as in France after the debacle of 1870) send their children to Catholic

schools to give them the discipline of religious belief” (p. 50). They spoke in terms similar to those that Robert Nisbet surveyed a dozen years later in his book, *History of the Idea of Progress*. (See Chapter 10.)

Did they represent the outlook of professional historians generally? Their presentation of something resembling a theory of historical development in terms of the conflict between religion and secularism was not characteristic of professional historians after World War I. But their hostility to supernatural religion, and especially towards Christianity, has been characteristic of the professoriate since at least 1900. This includes historians.

They refused to pursue the implications of cosmic evolution. They did not discuss the second law of thermodynamics. They did not discuss entropy. They did not discuss the heat death of the universe in which all life will end. (See Chapter 10.) Their silence reflects the silence of historians generally. Modern man says that evolution began with the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago. Life did not appear on the scene until about 4.5 billion years ago. All of it was purposeless. There was no purpose in the universe prior to the evolution of man, perhaps 2.5 million years ago. There will be no purpose after entropy has killed all life on earth. Man’s reign will come to an end. Humanists are generally silent about this. They prefer to ignore it.

The Durants reached millions of readers by means of the quality of their prose. They told wonderful stories. But they refused to carry the story of man into the distant future. Evolution will not favor mankind indefinitely. (See Chapter 10.)

The Durants’ remains are buried in Westwood Memorial Park, located in West Los Angeles. So is Marilyn Monroe. So is Hugh Hefner, who anonymously launched *Playboy* magazine in 1953 with a nude photograph of Monroe. It is one of those oddities of history that R. J. Rushdoony began preaching in that mortuary every Sunday morning, beginning in 1965, and did so for the next decade. He left before the Durants’ remains arrived, but Marilyn’s remains were there.

### C. Denying Natural Law

In his 1967 book, *The Biblical Philosophy of History*, Rushdoony commented on the impact of Charles Darwin’s concept of biological evolution through impersonal natural selection. It undermined the concept of natural law, which had been dominant in Western thought for two millennia.

When, however, Nature was subjected to evolutionary theory, the concept of an infallible nature, natural law, and a divine decree within nature, was shattered. Nature represented simply, in Darwinism, chance and natural selection. Darwin tried to read a decree into this operation, but the damage was done. Another locale for the divine decree was necessary: nature was another dead God gone down the drain.

In terms of the new perspective of evolution, truth and meaning do not exist in the universe. In other words, there is no decree inherent in the universe or behind the universe. Man is alone, an accident of being, in a cold and alien universe which is the product of the fortuitous concourse of atoms. In this situation, man feels that he must do two things to survive. *First*, he must renounce the luxury and insanity of assuming that a God or gods exist. He must face the universe of brute factuality coldly and starkly. *Second*, truth and meaning are purely human categories of thought. They are man's creations and must be imposed on the universe. Man must now control and guide evolution; he must use the universe and master himself as well. A decree is necessary, and it does not exist in or behind the universe: man must therefore promulgate his own divine decree and impose it upon human society and upon all creation (pp. 46–47).

By the early twentieth century, faith in natural law had generally departed from the academic community. Darwinism by the late 1880s had steadily begun selecting against those scholars who still maintained the old Roman Stoic doctrine of universal natural law, which had buttressed the multi-ethnic Roman Empire. This doctrine did not exist in pre-empire Greek philosophy.

Rushdoony understood what humanists have always ignored: the concept of cosmic evolution by way of random astronomical events and random biological mutations is an extension of the chaos cult thinking of ancient paganism. It is an extension of paganism's religion of revolution. He wrote this in a booklet, *The Religion of Revolution*, which was published in 1965.

A sophisticated modern development of the ancient chaos cult is the theory of evolution, which is the religion of modern scientists.

All things supposedly developed out of an original chaos of being, and the process of evolution is the assumption of a continuous act of chaos against present order. The current idea of evolution by mutations is held in the face of the known fact that mutations are at the least almost all deleterious and destructive. More basic, the evolutionist sees nature and man and all being as one continuous whole; there is no supernatural and no distinction between created being, and uncreated being, God. Evolutionists speak of their universe as open, i.e., evolving, but their universe is actually closed and self-sufficient. The closed universe means that the life of man is wholly comprehended, as are all things, within the order of nature, since nothing transcends nature. As a result, ultimate authority and proximate authority are made one. There is no law beyond man and nature, and, since man and nature are both evolving, there is no fixed or eternal law, no absolute right and wrong. There is thus for the evolutionist no supreme court of appeal to God against evil, no power in law or in righteousness, no unchanging revelation on which to stand. There is simply evolution, and evolution means change. Change thus becomes man's hope and salvation. Earlier evolutionists saw change as slow and gradual, but, gradually, it came to be "recognized" that man could himself promote change and thus he could further evolution. This guided change is, in every area, revolutionary action, a deliberate disruption of order designed to produce a superior order. It is the ancient use of chaos as the means to true order. The evolutionist looks to chaos as the Christian looks to God. Since the evolutionist, as scientific planner, does not believe in any absolute right or wrong, there is nothing except old "prejudices" to prevent him from using man experimentally and without restraint as a test animal in creating or evolving his scientific social order. Man is thus his guinea pig and tool towards the "brave new world" of science. The more remote men of such science become from Christian faith and morality, the bolder they will be in their "scientific socialism." And it is this freedom from God and morality and this evolutionary belief which constitutes the "science" of Marx's "scientific socialism".

I took this insight seriously. Almost immediately, I began my research for *Marx's Religion of Revolution* (1968).

### D. Denying Purpose

I published the following section in Chapter 2 of my book, *Sovereignty and Dominion* (2012) . That book was first published as *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (1982).

The heart of the Bible's account of the creation is God and His purposeful word, while the heart of modern evolution is the denial of purpose, whichever of the secular cosmologies a man decides to accept: entropy, steady state, or oscillating universe. This fact has not been understood by those conservative Bible expositors who have chosen to rewrite Genesis 1. We must bear in mind that it was Darwin's insistence on the unplanned, purposeless nature of geological and biological change that won him instant success in the world of secular humanism. Darwin denied all the old arguments for divine purpose as a cause of the orderliness of nature. Natural order proves no such thing, he insisted; natural selection of randomly produced biological changes, not supernatural design, accounts for nature's orderliness. Evolutionary scientists accepted Darwin's denial of cosmic purpose long before there was any idea that the universe might be 13 billion years old. The heart of the Darwinian intellectual revolution was not evolution. The heart of the Darwinian intellectual revolution was Darwin's explanation of undesigned order. It was his denial of final purpose, of the universe's ends-orientation, of teleology.

Teleology had served Christian apologists ever since the days of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) as a major pillar of the five supposedly irrefutable proofs of God. Teleological arguments assert that the order of the universe reflects the orderly God who created it. Not only does this order reflect God, as Paul had argued (Rom. 1:18–20), it supposedly also demonstrates logically that such a God must exist. The universe can only be explained in terms of supernatural design. William Paley, writing in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, convinced the majority of his English and American audiences of the logic of the argument from design.

Consider the perspective of a book produced by faculty members of Princeton University in 1945 for students enrolled in a course on American civilization. This book was published five years later by Yale University Press. It is indicative of the outlook of the best universities in the United States, then and today. It is a description of pre-Darwin explanations of nature's regularities, which Christian theologians and social thinkers accepted in the name of the Bible.



In the early years of the nineteenth century, orthodox Protestant Christian thinkers, both in England and in America, absorbed the Deist argument in its rationalistic aspects by harmonizing natural religion with revelation. The one was found to strengthen and confirm the other. . . . Out of this fusion of natural and revealed religion came one of the great arguments for the support of the orthodox faith. This was the doctrine of design. Just as Paley's famous watch bore its own testimony to the activity of the watch-maker, so the universe in all of its marvelous detail sang the praises of its Creator. In an age in which theories of natural law came to permeate social thought, and in which the achievements of applied science were already lending prestige to a rationalistic and materialistic view of things, the argument from design became one of the most useful and widely used defenses for Christianity. Natural religion must of course be supplemented by revealed religion, for each plumbed distinctly incommensurable dimensions. Nevertheless, natural law, as then conceived, was, like the revealed word of God, fixed, absolute, and immutable. The one was clearly apprehended by the intelligence, and the other by the study of Holy Writ (Stow Persons, "Evolution and Theology in America," in Persons [ed.], *Evolutionary Thought in America* [1956], pp. 422–23).

The concept of a mechanistic, self-sufficient system of natural law had not been recognized as a threat to Christian orthodoxy—a denial of cosmic personalism. Nineteenth-century Christians did not recognize the danger of constructing a systematic theology that rested simultaneously on a biblical pillar and a pillar of secular autonomy. The logic of design seemed so sure, so unanswerable. How else could men explain the extraordinary "fit" among all the parts of creation? Does not such an integrated, coherent environment demand men's faith in a cosmic Designer? And is not this Designer the God of the Bible? If the universe was designed, then it has a purpose assigned to it by God. Even the ungodly must acknowledge the logic from design, Christian defenders of the faith insisted. The logic seemed inescapable: order implies design; design implies a Designer; a Designer implies purpose. What could be more logical? Christian apologists gave little or no thought to the intellectual vulnerability of this two-pillar defense. What if the secular pillar collapsed?

Modern secular science, from Darwin to the present, has as its operating presupposition this premise: all causation is autonomous in nature, and no causation is purposive—until the advent of man. The origin of order must be sought in purposeless randomness—the basis of unbreakable scientific law in the nineteenth century, and the acknowledged sovereign in the twentieth—and not in God’s purpose and design.

To overcome the logic of Paley, late-nineteenth-century scientists took the first crucial step: to ascribe the origin of perceived order to random change. *This hypothesis was the major intellectual revolution of the nineteenth century.* The importance of this scientific presupposition cannot be overestimated: it served to free secular science from critics, potential and actual, who might have succeeded in redirecting the work of scientists along biblical lines. But there was a more fundamental aspect of this affirmation of randomness: *to shove God out of the universe, once and for all.* Man wanted to escape the threat of control by a supernatural Creator.

Once that step had been taken, scientists took a second step: to assert the sovereignty of man. Since there is no cosmic purpose in the universe, secularists concluded, man is left free to make his autonomous decisions in terms of his own autonomous plans. Man becomes the source of cosmic purpose. The purposeless forces of random evolutionary change have at long last produced a new, purposeful sovereign—man—and man now asserts his sovereignty over creation. He takes control, by means of science, over the formerly purposeless laws of evolutionary development. The universe needs a god, and man is now this god. (See Chapter 7.)

## E. Kant’s Defunct Grand Narrative

Immanuel Kant changed Western philosophy. Humanist philosophy since Kant has been a series of debates over the issues he raised. He replaced the Greeks in the thinking of humanists. He created a new dualism: the science-personality dualism, also known as the nature-freedom dualism. He abandoned the concept of metaphysical forms that exist separately from history (transcendence) or embedded in history (immanence).

In 1784, Kant published a short essay: “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View.” This was three years after the publication of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and four years prior to the publication of his *Critique of Practical Reason*. It was a product of his mature thinking.

In this essay, he argued that nature has a plan for mankind: the creation of a one-world state. This is the grand narrative of mankind. This was his replacement of the Christian doctrine of God's decree, which governed God's creation of the cosmos out of nothing. In 1755, he had written a defense of cosmic evolution: *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*. He concluded that "the sphere of developed nature is always but an infinitely small part of that totality which has the seed of future worlds in itself, which strives to involve itself out of the crude state of chaos through longer or shorter periods. The creation is never finished or complete. It has indeed once begun, but it will never cease. It is always busy producing new scenes of nature, new objects, and new worlds" (University of Michigan edition, 1969, pp. 145–46).

Kant began his essay with a statement of faith. It was a statement of faith regarding the legitimacy of human freedom, which is somehow determined by universal laws. These are not laws of God. They are laws of nature.

Whatever concept one may hold, from a metaphysical point of view, concerning the freedom of the will, certainly its appearances, which are human actions, like every other natural event are determined by universal laws. However obscure their causes, history, which is concerned with narrating these appearances, permits us to hope that if we attend to the play of freedom of the human will in the large, we may be able to discern a regular movement in it, and that what seems complex and chaotic in the single individual may be seen from the standpoint of the human race as a whole to be a steady and progressive though slow evolution of its original endowment.

We see here the perpetual tension between universal human laws and specific events, in this case actual human actions. These actions are a matter of free will, yet in the aggregate, and in the long run, they move in terms of a grand narrative. This grand narrative is unknown to the masses. ". . . each individual and people, as if following some guiding thread, go toward a natural but to each of them unknown goal; all work toward furthering it, even if they would set a little store by if they did know it."

Kant's theory of the grand narrative rested on a concept of nature which was teleological. Nature is future-oriented, Kant argued. It has purposes. In today's language, this theory would be known as intelligent design. It denied

the fundamental principle of Darwinism: evolution through purposeless natural selection. Kant presented nine theses in defense of his system. Every one of them is denied by today's Darwinian cosmologists.

(1) All natural capacities of a creature are destined to evolve completely to their natural end.

(2) In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural capacities which are directed to the use of his reason are to be fully developed only in the race, not in the individual.

(3) Nature has willed that man should, by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, and that he should partake of no other happiness or perfection than that which he himself, independently of instinct, has created by his own reason.

(4) The means employed by Nature to bring about the development of all of the capacities of men is their antagonism in society, so far as this is, in the end, the cause of a lawful order among men.

(5) The greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which Nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men.

(6) This problem is the most difficult and the last to be solved by mankind.

(7) The problem of establishing a perfect civic constitution is dependent upon the problem of a lawful external relation among states and cannot be solved without a solution of the latter problem.

(8) The history of mankind can be seen, in the large, as the realization of Nature's secret plan to bring forth a perfectly constituted state as the only condition in which the capacities of mankind can be fully developed, and also bring forth that external relation among states which is perfectly adequate to this end.

(9) A philosophical attempt to work out a universal history according to a natural plan directed to achieving the civic union

of the human race must be regarded as possible and, indeed, as contributing to this end of Nature.

His comment on the third thesis is especially revealing. “Nature does nothing in vain, and in the use of means to her goals she is not prodigal. Her giving to man reason and the freedom of the will which depends upon it is clear indication of her purpose. Man accordingly was not to be guided by instinct, not nurtured and instructed with ready-made knowledge; rather, he should bring forth everything out of his own resources.” This is a theory of intelligent design.

In the next to the last paragraph in the essay, he invoked the language of Christianity in order to defend his evolutionary thesis of intelligent design.

Such a justification of nature—or, better, of Providence—is no unimportant reason for choosing a standpoint toward world history. For what is the good of esteeming the majesty and wisdom of Creation in the realm of brute nature and of recommending that we contemplated, if that part of the great stage of supreme wisdom which contains the purpose of all the others—the history of mankind—must remain an unceasing reproach to it? If we are forced to turn our eyes from it in disgust, doubting that we can ever find a perfectly rational purpose in it and hoping for that only in another world? (<https://bit.ly/KantUniversal>)

This was the historical outlook of the most important modern philosopher. His worldview rested on both the direction and the purpose of history as determined by the intelligent design of autonomous nature. This outlook was overturned by Darwin and Darwinism after 1859. Darwinism denies natural law theory. It denies intelligent design. It therefore denies the possibility of a universal history of mankind that is governed by general laws that make history predictable. Today, there are no defenders of anything resembling the grand historical narrative that Kant offered in 1784. The only grand narrative that is consistent with Darwinism and with modern cosmic evolution is the grand narrative of entropy. It is a narrative of the future, not the past. Everything will eventually wind down. Everything is dying. (See Chapter 10).

## Conclusion

Every civilization has a theory of origins. This theory is the source of the civilization's connected theory of law and sanctions. Ever since Darwin, humanists have offered the doctrine of evolution through natural selection as their substitute for the doctrine of God's creation of the universe out of nothing. They have thereby substituted the metaphysics of cosmic impersonalism for cosmic personalism. But they do not hold to this for long.

They adopt a strategy of deception. They use vast quantities of time—13.7 billion years since the Big Bang—to proclaim the vastness of the universe. They argue that man is a speck in this vast universe. This seems to relegate man to the fringes of significance. But then they insist that man alone has purposes. Purpose is an attribute of God. Man thereby becomes humanism's god—a god by default. (I described this strategy in detail in Appendix A of my 2012 economic commentary on the Book of Genesis, *Sovereignty and Dominion: "From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty."* It was in the original edition, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, 1982.)

Humanists have a supreme pedagogical problem. To gain disciples, they must conceal their worldview regarding the direction of history toward a cosmic grave. Man can maintain his purposes for only as long as the species exists. Modern cosmology insists that all species will die in a process called the heat death of the universe. This final state of existence is an implication of the second law of thermodynamics. Life will end sometime in the future. Even time will end. The vast purposelessness of a dead universe will engulf everything that mankind has dreamed of and built. Humanists do not discuss this in their textbooks and monographs. They rarely talk about it at all. But those few who think about cosmology believe it. They believe that cosmic purposelessness prevailed until about 2.5 million years ago: the advent of man. It will prevail again in the death of the universe. (See Chapter 10.)

*At the heart of humanism is cosmic purposelessness.* There is no permanent meaning. This worldview is the result of the humanists' alternative to the New Testament's doctrine of the lake of fire. It is no doubt comforting in comparison with the doctrine of the lake of fire if your covenantal commitment places you in the disinherited family of man, heading toward the lake of fire. Better the heat death of the universe than the eternal heat of the lake of fire. But, by affirming the heat death of the universe, the humanist

destroys the concept of purpose. Humanism places cosmic purposelessness on the throne of cosmic sovereignty. Man is merely a temporary usurper.

Because humanists rarely write about this aspect of their doctrine of cosmic evolution, they have succeeded in maintaining the illusion of man as the only purposeful sovereign agent in the cosmos. They do not discuss the inescapable moral implications of their theory of impersonal origins and their theory of impersonal entropy. But the pessimism of their worldview is inescapable. They prefer not to think about it. They prefer not to teach their students about it. But this pessimism steadily undermines their temporary optimism. This creates a recruiting problem for them. People do not want to commit to a philosophy of life that announces their inevitable defeat in history and beyond the grave.

# 7

## AUTONOMY

*History is thus the self-knowledge of the living mind. For even when the events which the historian studies are events that happened in the distant past, the condition of their being historically known is that they should 'vibrate in the historian's mind', that is to say, that the evidence for them should be here and now before him and intelligible to him. For history is not contained in books or documents; it lives only, as a present interest and pursuit, in the mind of the historian when he criticizes and interprets those documents, and by so doing relives up for himself the states of mind into which he inquires. – R. G. Collingwood (1946).*

### A. Covenant Model, Part 2

Point 2 of the biblical covenant model is hierarchy: God over man over nature.

Point 2 of the biblical covenant model for social theory is authority. Authority is delegated by God. It is hierarchical.

Point 2 of the humanist covenant model is autonomy: man over nature, which includes other men. The humanist believes that the theory of cosmic evolution has eliminated the idea of the Creator God of the Bible. The humanist therefore denies three concepts: the sovereignty of God, the omniscience of God, and the providence of God. This denial creates a challenge: the humanist must make sense of the world without invoking any of these three biblical concepts. He searches for an authoritative theory of causation by which he can gain a correct understanding of the world. There are many conflicting theories of causation, but they all rest on this presupposition: the autonomy of man.



## B. Collingwood's *The Idea of History*

### 1. *Autonomy vs. Objective History*

I began this chapter with the quotation from page 202 of *The Idea of History*. I am going to discuss his theory in detail because it is representative of what the epistemology of historians became no later than the mid-1930s. He was not alone. But, because of his erudition as a philosopher, and because of his willingness to declare in print some of the most audacious conclusions of this position, readers who are interested in history should pay attention to what he wrote.

Oxford University Press published *The Idea of History* in 1946. The author, R. G. Collingwood, had died in 1943. This book was an edited version of the fragments that he had spent years writing in the 1930s. He probably wrote most of it in 1935.

Collingwood was not a practicing historian. He was a philosopher. But his book gained rapid acceptance among historians. There were a few early critics, but the book eventually became a classic. It is still in print. It is still widely cited.

Collingwood's primary thesis was this: the autonomy of the historian. He believed that the creative imagination of the individual (autonomous) historian is the basis of history. He did not say that the historian's creative imagination is the basis of historiography: historical interpretation. That would not have been controversial. He argued something fundamentally different. He said that the creative historian literally creates history. This seems implausible to a non-historian, but his suggestion has gained support from practicing historians over the decades. He argued that the lone historian imputes meaning to the past. There is no objective past. The past is dead and gone. So, there are only subjective interpretations of the past—lots and lots of subjective interpretations. (See Chapter 9.) This is consistent with the idea of the autonomy of man.

The Christian philosophy of history rests on this presupposition: God imputes meaning to the past. This past is objective. Why? Because God has providentially sustained all of it. This past has left a record in God's perfect memory. This objective past will be the context of God's final judgment at the end of history. He continually judges the words and deeds of everyone, and His judgments are irrefutable. (See Chapter 4.) Man, who is made in God's image, possesses an analogous ability (Chapter 2). This is why histor-

ical scholarship has meaning. This is also why there is a covenantal battle over historical interpretation.

In his rebellion, Adam decided to test God's word against the serpent's. Adam remembered what God had told him. There was nothing defective in his memory. This was why he was responsible for his actions. The serpent had offered Eve a different account of God's words. She was deceived. Adam was not. He decided to test God's words. He thereby asserted his autonomy from God. He had to assume the high probability that God had misinformed him about the consequences of his disobedience. This was a life-or-death assumption. He lost. So did we all. He was our covenantal representative (point 2).

Collingwood was Adam's spiritual heir. He made the case for the historian's autonomy. No other book on the philosophy of history is more self-conscious in its assertion of the individual historian's autonomy. But, in making this case, Collingwood had to surrender the idea of objective history (the past) and also objective historiography (writing about the past). He also ignored the crucial issue of competing interpretations. In 334 pages, he never raised this issue. Refusing even to raise the question, he did not suggest an epistemology or a methodology for reconciling competing interpretations.

Then what good is the book? For understanding history, it is useless. For understanding historiography, it is equally useless. But for serving as evidence of the inability of humanism to answer the fundamental questions of both history and historiography, it is a primary source document of great value.

## ***2. Historical Evidence and Its Interpretation***

He talked about historical evidence. This included historical documents. He called this *testimony*. Documents possess no objective value. "History, so far from depending on testimony, has therefore no relation with testimony at all. Testimony is merely chronicle. So far as any one speaks of authorities or of accepting statements or the like, he is talking of chronicle and not of history. History is based on a synthesis of two things which only exist in that synthesis: evidence and criticism. Evidence is only evidence so far as it is used as evidence, that is to say, interpreted on critical principles; and principles are only principles so far as they are put into practice in the work of interpreting evidence" (p. 203).

This raises three questions. First, what are these critical principles? Second, what is the epistemological foundation of these critical principles? Third, how can the historian correctly apply these permanent critical principles (Parmenides) to pass judgment on the validity of evidence regarding historical change (Heraclitus). You might imagine that somewhere in the book, he would have dealt with these three questions, but he did not mention them.

I am not singling out Collingwood as having uniquely failed to explain what he was talking about. In fact, he is representative of the historical guild as a whole after the 1920s. (See Chapters 9 and 10.) Part V of the book is "Epilogomena." It is a long chapter, beginning on page 205 and ending on page 334. Here, he attempted to explain what he was talking about.

In section 2, "The field of historical thought," he took a stand against what he and his peers referred to as positivist historiography. This approach to studying history extended back to the mid-nineteenth century. Positivists believed that, through a careful compilation of documents, and through careful research, historians can discover what had objectively taken place in the past. This is what normal people also suppose is possible. Otherwise, why study history? By the 1930s, almost no professionally trained historian defended such a view. About the only person who held it was Arnold Toynbee, who was the greatest historian of the era—or maybe any era—in terms of volume of research and breadth of knowledge, but he was also the last.

Collingwood distinguished between outside history and inside history. Outside history has to do with documents. The outside of an event has to do with "bodies and their movements" (p. 213). Caesar crossed the Rubicon. A group of senators later assassinated Caesar. Something moved. In contrast, the inside of the event can be described only in terms of the thoughts of the actors. The historian must consider both. He is studying actions, and action is the unity of the outside and inside of the event. He said this of the historian: "... his main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent" (p. 213).

This means that the historian has to be a retroactive mind reader. Collingwood never used this phrase, but he used something similar: "mental science" (p. 224). I understand his point. God is a mind reader. He judges all of the thoughts of everyone. So, I am not dismissing Collingwood's requirement that the historian must understand the motivations of historical actors. What I am saying is this: if you reject the concept of an omni-

scient God, you lose any authoritative way of ascertaining whether you have successfully gotten inside the mind of a past actor. I ask: What repeatable technique would enable you to do this? How would you judge the objective adequacy of this technique? How would you judge the adequacy of your ability to implement this technique in any specific assessment of evidence? Humanistic historians cannot answer these questions. They pretend that they can, but they cannot. They do not agree on what this technique is. One group has said that no such technique exists: postmodernists. They have blown the whistle on the entire profession, so to speak. They are not appreciated by the vast majority of practicing historians, but these historians have not written coherent responses to the postmodernists that invoke any agreed-upon theory of historical investigation and procedure that answers their criticisms. Postmodernists are radical autonomists. They have followed the logic of autonomy to its unpalatable conclusion: *nobody can know anything about the meaning of the past*. Other historians do not want to follow them down this path. (See Chapter 9.)

Collingwood continued: "For history, the object to be discovered is not the mirror event, but the thought expressed in it. To discover that thought is already to understand it. After the historian has ascertained the facts, there is no further process of inquiry into their causes. When he knows what happened, he already knows why it happened" (p. 214). But how does the historian discover this past thought? How does he understand it? How does he ascertain the facts? Once he does, I am sure that "there is no further process of inquiry into their causes." But how can he attain this highly desirable situation? Collingwood never said.

He continued: "The cause of the event, for him, means the thought in the mind of the person by whose agency the event came about: and this is not something other than the event, it is inside the event itself" (pp. 214–15). Thus, he drew a conclusion: "All history is the history of thought" (p. 215). He then asked the right question. "But how does the historian discern the thoughts that he is trying to discover?" Here was his answer: "There is only one way in which it can be done: by rethinking them in his own mind" (p. 215). "The history of thought, and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind" (p. 215). In short, we are back to the historian as a mind reader.

Collingwood was a defender of autonomy for the historian. In a careful review of Collingwood's unfinished book, *Principles of History*, David

Boucher summarized Collingwood's view of evidence: the historian creates it in his mind.

The starting point of history is not the evidence itself but what the historian, knowing the language, takes it to mean. He or she makes his or her own autonomous statement of the fact that the statement has been made. The historian makes the judgment saying that I read this evidence to be saying this rather than that, and it is in this respect that the historian is autonomous in relation to the evidence: 'his evidence is always an experience of his own, an act which he has performed on his own powers and is conscious of having performed by his own powers: the aesthetic act of reading a certain text in a language he knows, and assigning to it a certain sense' [*PH*, 43–44]. The evidence, then, is not found, but instead made in the mind of the historian, which interprets what the evidence says and what it means ("The Significance of R. G. Collingwood's 'Principles of History,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 58 [April 1997], p. 315.)

### 3. *Historical Criticism*

How does the historian do this? Through criticism. Unfortunately, Collingwood never explained how this criticism works. He never presented a methodology by which criticism can be made to work. He did not explain how such a thing as objective criticism can even exist in a subjective world. Nevertheless, he invoked the word. "It is not a passive surrender to the spell of another's mind; it is a labour of active and therefore critical thinking. The historian not only re-enacts past thought, he re-enacts it in the context of his own knowledge and therefore, in re-enacting it, criticizes it, forms his own judgment of its value, corrects whatever errors he can discern in it. This criticism of the thought whose history he traces is not something secondary to tracing the history of it. It is an indispensable condition of the historical knowledge itself" (p. 215). This is an implication of the doctrine of autonomy. The autonomous historian must use his mind to understand the thoughts of somebody decades or millennia ago.

This assumes a constancy of human thought. On what basis can an evolutionist assume this? He has to assume it, but how is it that such continu-

ity exists? The continuity of thought means that human thought does not evolve socially. But how can human thought be rendered immune to the processes of social change? In other words, how can Parmenides defend his kingdom of changeless logic against the constant assault by random historical change? Collingwood was a consistent evolutionist. He later denied in the same chapter what he had to assume in order to make sense of his position. He spelled out in detail the implications of his position.

History, then, is not, as it has so often been mis-described, a story of successive events or an account of change. Unlike the natural scientist, the historian is not concerned with events as such at all. He is only concerned with those events which are the outward expression of thoughts, and is only concerned with these in so far as they express thoughts. At bottom, he is concerned with thoughts alone; with the outward expression in events he is concerned only by the way, in so far as these reveal to him the thoughts of which he is in search (p. 217).

To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through in his own mind; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own (p. 218).

It is the historian himself who stands at the bar of judgement, and there reveals his own mind in its strength and weakness, its virtues and its vices (p. 219).

As I have written, all of this assumes a continuity in human nature and human thought. This is what evolutionism denies. Collingwood was consistent. He also denied it.

To regard such a positive mental science as rising above the sphere of history, and establishing the permanent and unchanging laws of human nature, is therefore possible only to a person who mistakes the transient conditions of a certain historical age for the permanent conditions of human life. It was easy for men of the eighteenth century to make this mistake, because their historical perspective was so short, and their knowledge of cultures other than their own so limited, that they could cheerfully identify the

intellectual habits of a western European in their own day with the intellectual faculties bestowed by God upon Adam and all his progeny (p. 224).

Notice his contempt regarding the idea of God the Creator bestowing Adam and mankind with constant intellectual faculties, meaning constant logic. Collingwood was an evolutionist. He was in revolt against the idea of a Creator God. So were eighteenth-century Enlightenment historians. So were sixteenth-century Renaissance historians. But they accepted the idea of a fixed human nature. Collingwood did not. "The idea of a science of human nature, as entertained in the eighteenth century, belonged to a time when it was still believed that the human species, like every other, was a special creation with unalterable characteristics" (p. 224). We know better today, he assured his readers. I ask: if there is no valid science of human nature, as Collingwood insisted there is not, then what is the meaning of "positive mental science"? He never said.

#### *4. Relativism*

Collingwood at this point had painted himself into a corner: relativism. He did not want to be in that corner. But he had a problem. He was an evolutionist. Social evolution changes people's ideas. This raises a question: how can today's historian accurately—objectively—understand the thoughts of people who made decisions thousands of years ago? Collingwood had to maintain the idea of the continuity of human thought in order to justify the idea of an historian whose mind has a connection with the minds of people long dead. If this connection is not viable, one generation to the next, then there can be no historical truth. He was horrified by this suggestion. So, he denied that evolutionary change applies to human thought. His argument had two parts. Here is part 1: an admission that the intellectual problem exists.

The fallacy inherent in the very idea of a science of human nature is not removed by pointing out that human nature, like every kind of nature, must according to the principles of modern thought be conceived as subject to evolution. Indeed, such a modification of the idea only leads to worse consequences. Evolution, after all, is a natural process, a process of change; and as such it abolishes one



specific form in creating another. The trilobites of the Silurian age may be the ancestors of the mammals of to-day, including ourselves; but a human being is not a kind of wood-louse. The past, in a natural process, is a past superseded and dead. Now suppose the historical process of human thought were in this sense an evolutionary process. It would follow that the ways of thinking characteristic of any given historical period are ways in which people must think then, but in which others, cast at different times in a different mental mould, cannot think at all. If that were the case, there would be no such thing as truth: according to the inference correctly drawn by Herbert Spencer, what we take today for knowledge is merely the fashion of present-day thought, not true but at the most useful in our struggle for existence (p. 225).

We have now arrived at point 3 of the humanists' concept of history: relativism. There is no truth. (See Chapter 8.) But Collingwood, without warning, reversed himself. He denied the logic of this position. This is part 2 of his argument. He said that evolution applies only to a natural process. It does not apply to historical change. The problem he faced was this: he had to show that historical change is not at least as evolutionistic as change in the biological world. To make this argument, he invoked *corporate imputation*. He had spent a hundred pages talking about the autonomy of the historian. But he finally admitted that the autonomous historian faces the problem of the discontinuity of thought over time. There is no way for the historian to be certain that, when he somehow gets inside the dead man's mind, he can understand it correctly. So, Collingwood at this point abandoned the idea of the historian who imputes meaning autonomously. He needs help. "The body of human thought or mental activity is a corporate possession, and almost all the operations which our minds perform are operations which we learned to perform from others who have performed them already. Since mind is what it does, and human nature, if it is a name for anything real, is only a name for human activities, this acquisition of ability to perform determined operations is the acquisition of a determinate human nature. Thus the historical process is a process in which man creates for himself this or that kind of human nature by re-creating in his own thought the past to which he is heir" (p. 226).

In the game of poker, this procedure is described as dealing from the



bottom of the deck. His invocation of corporate mental continuity down through the ages is in opposition to what he had been arguing for: an autonomous historian's imputation of meaning to autonomous human beings in the past. I ask: How did this continuity maintain itself? How can he prove this? People change their opinions. Societies do, too. How can an autonomous historian impute accurate meaning to the past in terms of what actors in the past believed? How can he determine such meaning? In terms of social evolutionism, he cannot do this. In terms of humanist philology, there is no agreed-on theory that answers this problem.

Having made this argument of mental continuity by way of corporate instruction, he reversed himself again. He went back to his original justification of the autonomous historian. He never again raised the issue of corporate imputation, for corporate imputation is a denial of individual autonomy. (See Chapter 9.) He wrote this. (Warning: what you are about to read is incoherent.) "The historical process is itself a process of thought, and it exists only in so far as the minds which are parts of it know themselves for parts of it. By historical thinking, the mind whose self-knowledge is history not only discovers within itself those powers of which historical thought reveals the possession, but actually develops those powers from a latent to an actual state, brings them into effective existence" (p. 226). You cannot make sense of this, can you? That is because it makes no sense. Reread it. It is not going to make any more sense the second time than it did the first time.

Here is a way to spot someone who is in trouble answering a difficult question. For a time, you can follow his arguments. Then, without warning, he becomes incoherent. You can no longer follow his argument. If you try to get inside his mind, you find that his mind is jumbled. This is not because your mind is jumbled. He has failed to maintain logical coherence. This was Collingwood's problem. His theory of history rested on the assumption of the continuity of human thought. But his theory of history did not offer cogent reasons to believe in such a concept. Humanism's theory of autonomy undermines such a concept. Collingwood had to justify his theory of autonomous individual imputation of meaning to the past. He failed. He did not solve the problem raised by the theory of evolution. *The doctrine of evolution undermines every theory of a constant human nature.* Collingwood was in revolt against the concept of God-given human nature. But, to maintain his position, he invoked an unsupported theory of corporate mankind-given continuity of thought. There is such continuity, he said, be-

cause we have been taught ideas by others, who were taught ideas by others, who were taught ideas by others, all the way back to the non-objective past event, "outside and inside." This justification of continuity is implausible. He offered no support for it. He merely asserted it. He never mentioned it again in his book.

Collingwood never finished this book. He started another, which he also did not finish. He never got his system clear in his own mind. He denied God's granting of constancy in human logic. He did so in the name of evolution. But then, having chased God out of the universe by means of the theory of evolution, he found himself defending the autonomous historian who somehow has the ability to get inside the minds of people who have been dead for millennia. He had to assume the constancy of imputed ethical value and the constancy of imputed meaning. But he could not defend his concept of continuity in terms of his theory of autonomous individual imputation. So, he invoked collective imputation. He invoked an undefined system of consistent education down through the ages, which somehow preserves sufficient continuity of meaning for the historian to practice his "mental science."

### ***5. Evolving Principles of Selection***

He asked a good question. "How can we ever satisfy ourselves of the principles on which we think are true, except by going on thinking according to those principles, and seeing whether unanswerable criticisms of them emerge as we work?" (p. 230). *This is pragmatism*. This is the philosophy of "if it works in practice, it is morally and epistemologically valid." But then the humanist needs a theory for determining what works objectively. Collingwood did not offer such a theory.

He wanted liberty, which he defined as autonomy. He therefore did not want any trace of Parmenidean constancy in his theory of history. "History, therefore, cannot be made to square with theories according to which the object of knowledge is abstract and changeless, a logical entity toward which the mind may take up various attitudes" (p. 234). He claimed that he was offering "a Copernican revolution in the theory of history: the discovery that, so far from relying on authority other than himself, to whose statements his thought must conform, the historian is his own authority and his thought at times, self-authorizing, possessed of a criterion to which

his so-called authorities must conform and by reference to which they are criticized" (p. 236).

In the next paragraph, he got to the main point of the entire book. It is the issue associated with the selection of facts and their interpretation. This issue affects every field of thought. It is the essence of the problem of knowledge. If man is not made in the image of God, yet he is still held responsible by someone or something for his thoughts and actions, this raises a question: which facts should he pay attention to at any point in his life? Here is Collingwood's answer.

The autonomy of historical thought is seen at its simplest in the work of selection. The historian tries to work on the common-sense theory, and accurately reproduce what he finds in his authorities, resembles a landscape-painter who tries to work on that theory of art which bids the artist copy nature. He may fancy that he is reproducing in his own medium the actual shapes and colours of natural things; but however hard he tries to do this he is always selecting, simplifying schematizing, leaving out what he thinks unimportant and putting in what he regards as essential. . . . It is he, therefore, and not his authority, that is responsible for what goes on. On that question he is his own master: his thought is to that extent autonomous (pp. 236–37).

The historian autonomously creates the past. "The historian's picture is his subject, whether that subject be a sequence of events or a past state of things, thus appears as a web of imaginative constructions stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of his authorities; and if these points are frequent enough and the threads spun from each to the next are constructed with due care, always by the *a priori* imagination and never by merely arbitrary fancy, the whole picture is constantly verified by appeal to these data, and runs little risk of losing touch with the reality which it represents" (p. 242). Notice his use of the word "if." He based his case for the idea of history on this assumption, never explained: *if* can become *are*. I ask: how can the historian know whether there are enough points? There are always more. Next, how can he know whether he has connected the "threads" with "due care"? What is "due care"? Next, how can the historian distinguish between "the *a priori* imagination" and "arbitrary fancy"? For that matter, how can there be such a thing as an *a priori* imag-

ination in a world of constant flux? The moment that somebody invokes *a priori* anything, he is nestled securely in the arms of Parmenides, who will squeeze him to death if he decides to change his mind about anything. In the world of humanism, when you embrace *a priori*, you must necessarily abandon *a posteriori*: the ability to assess new facts that may lead to new ideas. In short, you lose your liberty.

Collingwood, in the name of autonomy, wrote this: "The *a priori* imagination which does the work of historical construction supplies the means of historical criticism as well" (p. 245). I ask: how does such autonomous imagination supply the means of historical criticism? How does it criticize the means of criticism? In other words, how can the historian's historical construction be evaluated in such a way that he can reach the truth about the past? What are the means of criticism? How does the historian get access to them? How does the historian apply them in specific situations? Are they permanent? Do they evolve? He answered none of these questions. He did not bother to ask them in the book.

At this point, his inner Heraclitus beat the stuffing out of his inner Parmenides.

It is for the same reason then in history, as in all serious matters, no achievement is final. The evidence available for solving any given problem changes with every change of historical method and with every variation in the competence of historians. The principles by which this evidence is interpreted changed too. . . " (p. 248).

. . . every new historian, not content with giving new answers to old questions, must revise the questions themselves; and—since historical thought is a river into which none can step twice—even a single historian working at a single subject for a certain length of time, finds when he tries to reopen an old question that the question has changed (p. 248).

This position produces skepticism. He did not want to be understood as advocating skepticism. So, he denied categorically the implication of what he had just written. "This is not an argument for historical skepticism. It is only the discovery of a second dimension of historical thought, the history of history: the discovery that the historian himself, together with the

here-and-now which forms the total body of evidence available to him, is a part of the process he is studying, has his own place in that process, and can see it only from the point of view which at this present moment he occupies within it" (p. 248). I ask: what is this process? If it is a process, it keeps changing. But if it keeps changing, then the truth keeps changing. If the truth keeps changing, there is no truth across history. If "the process he is studying" keeps changing, this is a philosophy of skepticism. He did not show that this process does not keep changing. Here was his problem: *an evolutionist is beset on all sides by historical processes that keep changing*. This is the curse of Heraclitus.

What happens to historical truth? Collingwood did not say. He attempted to say it, but he did not say it coherently. "But neither the raw material of historical knowledge, the detail of the here-and-now, is given him in perception, not the various endowments that serve him as aids to interpreting this evidence, can give the historian his criterion of historical truth. That criterion is the idea of history itself: the idea of an imaginary picture of the past" (p. 248). I ask: what was his idea of history? He never got around to saying. Instead, he told us about the autonomy of historians in making judgments regarding documents that express dead people's motivations and thoughts. He justified these creative explanations in terms of *a priori* principles that change. He needed to write a book on how *a priori* principles change.

He then wrote what he thought might be inspirational to some budding historian who took seriously his theory of history, whatever it was. This is what the young historian can look forward to. "The historian, however long and faithfully he works, can never say that his work, even in crudest outline or in this or that smallest detail, is done once for all. He can never say that his picture of the past is at any point adequate to the idea of what ought to be. But, however fragmentary and faulty the results of his work may be, the idea which governed his course is clear, rational, and universal. It is the idea of the historical imagination as a self-dependent, self-determining, and self-justifying form of thought" (p. 249). I do not regard this as an inspirational rallying cry to recruit, train, and motivate successive generations of dedicated historians.

### C. Van Til on Collingwood

I have gone through some of the arguments that Collingwood made in defense of the totally autonomous historian. Van Til devoted six pages to an analysis of Collingwood in Part 1 of the syllabus, *Christianity in Conflict* (1962).

Van Til got to the heart of the matter. Collingwood was opposed to the idea of an omniscient God who imputes meaning to his universe. He denied God's sovereignty. "According to Collingwood the sort of philosophy of history involved in orthodox Christianity is to be called theocratic history [p. 15]. In theocratic history humanity is not an agent, but partly an instrument and partly a patient, of the actions recorded. The idea of God's plan back of history as revealed by Christ in history through the Scriptures is said to be pure determination. Collingwood will not think of man as made in the image of God and therefore as an analogue of God" (pp. 10–11). Here was the motivation behind Collingwood's vision of the totally autonomous historian. "For Collingwood, man's thought, to be really his own, must be absolutely his own. Man must be his own ultimate interpreter" (p. 11). This means autonomy.

Van Til then asked a question: "What happens to the 'objective facts of history' on this point of view? The answer is that they gradually disappear into the subject that interprets them. That does not mean that the subject at last creates them in the sense that it produces them.

But it does signify that the meaning to be attached to any objective historical fact is what it is as part of the framework that the subject projects for itself" (p. 11). What Van Til wrote about Collingwood applies to all of the humanists who have offered a philosophy of history. They attribute to the individual historian the ability to impute meaning to historical facts—facts revealed by historical evidence. But this view of imputation means that every man becomes his own historian. This creates cacophony in historiography. There is no way to bring harmony to this cacophony, given the presuppositions of humanism. (See Chapter 9.)

Here was Collingwood's recommendation, Van Til wrote: "Collingwood thinks that the modern historian should follow Vico, the Italian philosopher of history, in holding that *verurn et factum convertuntur* [p. 64] The fabric of human society is created by man out of nothing, and every detail of this fabric is therefore a human factum, eminently knowable to the human mind

as such [p. 65]" (p. 11). Although Van Til did not say this, Vico's vision of the autonomy of man goes back to the Renaissance.

I have devoted this chapter entirely to Collingwood. There is a reason for this. Van Til understood this reason in 1962. "The great virtue of Collingwood's view is that it so plainly rests itself upon the autonomy of man. When he speaks of the autonomy of the historical method he speaks, of course, in opposition to the idea that the historian should narrowly follow the method of the scientist. But more basically he is opposing the idea that the historian should be required to submit to any statement even in his own field as authoritative. The rights of the historian are infringed if he is required to take any statement at face value as being a true account of the facts that have taken place" (p. 15). The implication of this outlook can accurately be described in one word: skepticism.

## Conclusion

Collingwood did not finish the book. He started to write another, but he only wrote four chapters. Then he died.

*The Idea of History* presents one inconsistent theory after another. First, the autonomous historian needs to be able to impute meaning to past events. The past events are dead and gone. They are not objective. Collingwood's theory implicitly assumes that there is no objective history. There is only imputed history, even five minutes after an event. It has become history. The historian needs evidence. But this evidence is not evidence until he imputes meaning to what the evidence points to. He has to be able to read the minds of the people who produced the documents. He also has to read the mind of the person described in the documents. This means that there has to be a source of epistemological continuity from the past to the present, so that he will be able to understand what the dead person was thinking. But, in a world of autonomous imputations of meaning, the existence of such epistemological continuity cannot legitimately be assumed. Also, in a world of evolutionary change, such epistemological continuity seems out of the question. So, Collingwood was forced to invoke collective judgments over time. Somebody taught the historian how to think, and somebody taught the person who taught the historian, back to the historical document. Then he dropped the argument.

Everything is in flux. This includes the principles of historical interpre-

tation. It includes human logic. It includes individual value judgments down through the ages. There has to be continuity in the imputation of meaning, but autonomous man cannot show why this continuity exists or how he can take advantage of it in order to understand the past.

From a philosophical standpoint, Collingwood was among the best and the brightest of the authors who have offered a philosophy of history. He never offered guidelines for writing history: the selection of documents, analyzing documents, and the application of his unexplained critical theory to documents and also interpretations. He was not a practicing historian. But even if he had been, this would have done his theory no good. There have been a lot of practicing humanistic historians who have attempted to provide a philosophical justification for what they do and how they do it. They have been no more successful than he was. I hope to demonstrate this in the next two chapters.



## 8

### RELATIVISM

*Relativism, the modern corollary to skepticism, is the belief that truth is relative to the position of the person making a statement. It has generated a pervasive lack of confidence in the ability to find truth or even to establish that there is such a thing as the truth. Relativism leads directly to a questioning of the ideal of objectivity, because it undermines the belief that people can get outside of themselves in order to get at the truth. If truth depends on the observer standpoint, how can there be any transcendent, universal, or absolute truth, or at least truths that hold for all groups for many generations? – Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, 1994.*

#### A. Covenant Model, Part 3

Point 3 of the biblical covenant model is ethics.

Point 3 of Christian social theory is law.

Point 3 of humanistic thought, including a theory of history, is ethical relativism. The modern form of ethical relativism was developed by eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, above all David Hume. They were pioneers of the idea of unplanned social evolution. Charles Darwin picked up this idea and applied it to biological evolution: unplanned biological evolution through natural impersonal selection. This substitution of unplanned yet coherent biological change led to the intellectuals' widespread abandonment of natural law theory by 1900. Then came Freud's theories of human psychology.

Darwinian evolutionism undermines all standards. There is no way to show that, for an evolving species in an evolving impersonal universe, there are fundamental principles of ethics that must not be broken. Ethical standards are constantly changing, along with society. This means that there can be no legitimate appeal to a fixed source of ethics that shows men exactly which ethical principles are dominant in any given era. The flux of

history undermines the continuity of ethical standards. This is the basis of modern relativism. This is situation ethics.

## B. Relativism in Historiography

In 1994, three outstanding female historians wrote an incisive and yet readable book: *Telling the Truth About History*. All three taught at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA): Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. The book was fairly long: over 300 pages. It covered the debates over scientific history versus modernity. It talked about national histories and how they have shaped national consciousness. It described the breakdown in historians' confidence about the results of their own work and the work of their peers. I began this chapter with their statement on page 7.

The most important statement in the book is on page 257. The authors probably would not regard this as the most important statement, but that is because they are not Christians. Here is the statement: "Objectivity remains with the object. As one contemporary philosopher trenchantly put it, 'Objectivity does not require taking God's perspective, which is impossible.'" (This is their footnote: Mark Johnson, *Body and the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, 1987, p. 212.) Prof. Johnson affirmed the presupposition of modern humanist epistemology regarding objective truth: objectivity does not require taking God's perspective. He had it backwards. *Objectivity is impossible if you do not take God's perspective*. You must accept the idea of a Trinitarian God who providentially controls the world and imputes meaning to it. He is the cosmic judge, and He judges everything. This judgment is objective. Without this as the presupposition of all knowledge, objective knowledge disappears in the cacophony of humanism's conflicting historical interpretations, none of which invokes God as the foundation of objective truth.

The three authors did their best to avoid a complete rejection of the idea of objective history. Yet they had to admit that historians subjectively impute meaning to the past. This imputation is basic to humanism's understanding of history. Men have no access to objective history, assuming it exists, apart from subjective interpretations of the past. This is why, on the basis of their humanism, the three authors failed to make the case for the possibility of objective historiography. They preferred it, but they did not

explain the basis of their preference. They insisted that it can exist, but they did not explain the intellectual foundations of their faith. They did not show how historians' purely subjective interpretations can get back to bedrock objective history. They also did not show how competing views of the past can be reconciled in terms of the presuppositions of humanistic historians regarding history and historiography. They did their best, and it is as good a job as you are likely to read from within the camp of humanist historians, but they failed.

They identified the two most prominent advocates of the concept of historical relativism: Carl Becker and Charles Beard.

As early as the 1930s, the American Progressive historians Carl Becker and Charles Beard raised the clarion call of historical relativism by insisting that every man (their term) would write his own history. They seemed to imply that since every man had his own version of history, history functioned as a cultural myth rather than as an objective account of the past (a position not far from Nietzsche's). They argued that the ideal of a definitive, objective reconstruction of the past was chimerical. Facts did not present themselves directly to the historian; the historian picked and chose among them, guided by his ideological presuppositions. In Beard's words, the historian performed "an act of faith," based on subjective decision not a purely objective discovery. Thus, not long after historians have established their discipline as an autonomous field of study emulating scientific methods of research, belief in its scientific status and capacity for objectivity began to waver (pp. 216–17).

I agree with their assessment of the importance of the statements by Becker and Beard. These were important declarations that have shaped the thinking of historians from the early 1930s until today. For this reason, I analyze Becker's presentation in detail in this chapter. In the next chapter, I analyze Beard's essay in terms of a related issue: nominalism. Nominalism is the philosophical foundation of Becker's relativism and relativism in general. Nominalism denies objective truth. Nominalism is the philosophy of subjective imputation by multiple observers.

Philosophical, ethical, and historical relativism stem from covenant-breaking men's assertion of autonomy. Mankind is not unified. Mankind is

multiple. Every man has his own opinions. Once a man declares his autonomy from God, he must substitute another worldview. Most men do not do this self-consciously, but all men have a deeply religious view of the way the world works. The doctrine of historical relativism is an outworking of covenant-breaking men's assertions of autonomy. I have dealt with autonomy in Chapter 7. It is now time to deal with the issue of relativism.

## **C. Carl Becker's Defense of Historical Relativism**

### ***1. A Turning Point Speech***

Carl Becker's 1931 presidential address to the American Historical Association's annual convention remains the most famous presidential address in the organization's history: "Everyman His Own Historian." The AHA has had a tradition stretching back over a century regarding presidential addresses. At the annual meeting, someone is elected president for the next year. His primary task is to deliver the presidential address at the next convention. The people elected to the position are regarded by their peers as exemplary scholars. It is an honor to be elected. Most AHA presidents write a speech suitable for a general presentation. They rarely write on some narrow topic that would be of interest only to specialists in the presidents' professional niches. They write speeches that they think will be of interest to their peers, and perhaps even gain some influence. The model for such speeches is Becker's speech.

In a symposium held in 1984, two college-level historians and a high school history teacher delivered papers on Becker's influence in the historical profession. One of the papers was by Milton Klein: "Everyman His Own Historian: Carl Becker and Historiography." He began with this observation: "It received a standing ovation and created shock waves in the historical profession that have not yet subsided." (*The History Teacher*, November 1985, p. 101.)

Becker's speech dealt with the important issue of objectivity versus subjectivity. He came down squarely on the side of subjectivism. In doing so, he came down squarely on the side of historical relativism.

## 2. Methodological Dualism

Becker began with a description of his methodology. (I use the pagination of the original article, published in *The American Historical Review* in January 1932). "Once upon a time, long long ago, I learned how to reduce a fraction to its lowest terms. Whether I could still perform that operation is uncertain; but the discipline involved in early training had its uses, since it taught me that in order to understand the essential nature of anything it is well to strip it of all superficial and irrelevant accretions—in short, to reduce it to its lowest terms. That operation I now venture, with some apprehension and all due apologies, to perform on the subject of history" (p. 221).

He was searching for some sort of Parmenidean core of human history, something that can withstand the test of time. The test of time is Heraclitus' flowing river of history. "Panta rhei," he supposedly declared in Greek: "everything flows." But, if everything flows, then whirl is king. There is no hard core of history. Only that which is timeless can survive this onslaught, but only because it has no connection with history.

Then Becker introduced another dualism. This was at the core of his historiography. There is a dualism in his definition of history: the objective events of the past vs. the subjective reconstruction of the past. This dualism is basic to all humanistic theories of history. Becker's definition was in no sense unique. He was challenging the concept of objective past events. He was also challenging the concept of objective historiography. He was rejecting the tradition of positive historiography that became widely accepted among academic historians in the mid-nineteenth century. It was called scientific history. Becker rejected the concept. Why? First, because the past is dead and gone.

I ought first of all to explain that when I use the term history I mean knowledge of history. No doubt throughout all past time there actually occurred a series of events which, whether we know what it was or not, constitutes history in some ultimate sense. Nevertheless, much the greater part of these events we can know nothing about, not even that they occurred; many of them we can know only imperfectly; and even the few events that we think we know for sure we can never be absolutely certain of, since we can never revive them, never observe or test them directly. The event itself once occurred, but as an actual event it has disappeared; so

that in dealing with it the only objective reality we can observe or test is some material trace which the event has left—usually a written document (p. 221).

Second, this raised the issue of the proper use of documentation. This issue in turn raises a series of related issues. He asked a fundamental question: to what extent do documents enable historians to imagine the past?

With these traces of vanished events, these documents, we must be content since they are all we have; from them we infer what the event was, we affirm that it is a fact that the event was so and so. We do not say “Lincoln is assassinated”; we say “it is a fact that Lincoln was assassinated.” The event was, but is no longer; it is only the affirmed fact about the event that is, that persists, and will persist until we discover that our affirmation is wrong or inadequate. Let us then admit that there are two histories: the actual series of events that once occurred; and the ideal series that we affirm and hold in memory. The first is absolute and unchanged—it was what it was whatever we do or say about it; the second is relative, always changing in response to the increase or refinement of knowledge. The two series correspond more or less, it is our aim to make the correspondence as exact as possible; but the actual series of events exists for us only in terms of the ideal series which we affirm and hold in memory. This is why I am forced to identify history with knowledge of history. For all practical purposes history is, for us and for the time being, what we know it to be (pp. 221–22).

Conclusion: *history does not have any independent existence apart from historians’ imaginations*. Becker was arguing for the same concept of history that Collingwood defended in far greater detail four years later. Because he self-consciously repudiated the idea of a sovereign God who rules over all events, imputes meaning to all events, and guides the preservation of historical records, Becker invoked the sovereignty of the historian to provide meaning to the past. But this is a weak sovereignty. “Even the few events that we think we know for sure we can never be absolutely certain of, since we can never revive them, never observe or test them directly.” Then in what sense is there original history? How do we know what happened?

The events are gone. Were they ever objective? Events move from the present to the past instantly. *Everything flows*. A person imputes meaning to the world around him, including the flow of events. There is recent history and ancient history, but it is all imputed history. There are no brute facts, Van Til insisted. There are only interpreted facts. Becker came to the same conclusion. "The event was, but is no longer; it is only the affirmed fact about the event that is, that persists, and will persist until we discover that our affirmation is wrong or inadequate."

### 3. Discarding Objective History

He said there are two histories. "Let us then admit that there are two histories: the actual series of events that once occurred; and the ideal series that we affirm and hold in memory. The first is absolute and unchanged—it was what it was whatever we do or say about it; the second is relative, always changing in response to the increase or refinement of knowledge." But he did not explain how there can be an original, unchanging, objective history. His presentation militated against any concept of objective history. "The two series correspond more or less, it is our aim to make the correspondence as exact as possible; but the actual series of events exists for us only in terms of the ideal series which we affirm and hold in memory." In the context of his epistemology, this is a weasel phrase: "more or less." How much more? How much less? By what standard? How do we discover this standard? How do we apply it accurately to the historical documents? So far, his essay is a muddle of contradictions.

He still had not come up with a definition of history. He listed several. "History is the knowledge of events that have occurred in the past." There is a problem with this definition. What is knowledge? "Resenting a definition that denies me the title of historian, I therefore ask what is most essential to knowledge. Well, memory, I should think (and I mean memory in the broad sense, the memory of events inferred as well as the memory of events observed); other things are necessary too, but memory is fundamental: without memory no knowledge. So our definition becomes, 'History is the memory of events that have occurred in the past'" (p. 222).

Memory is a slippery concept, as he knew. It is subjective. It includes so many events. "An occurrence need not be spectacular to be an event." So, he offered this: "History is the memory of things said and done in the past."

But what is the past? “The word is both misleading and unnecessary,” he immediately added. “Therefore I will omit that word, and our definition becomes, ‘History is the memory of things said and done.’ This is a definition that reduces history to its lowest terms, and yet includes everything that is essential to understanding what it really is” (pp. 222–23).

This got him nowhere. First, whose memory? Everyone has memories. Second, which things were said and done? Third, who said them? Fourth, who did them? Fifth, how accurate are the records? Sixth, whose memory is authoritative? Seventh, why? *Here is the epistemological nightmare of nominalism.* If everyman is his own historian, cacophony drowns out memories of professional historians.

At this point, Becker began his long section on how everyman is his own historian. “If the essence of history is the memory of things said and done, then it is obvious that every normal person, Mr. Everyman, knows some history.”

#### **4. Mr. Everyman**

He then presented a story of a man who wants to find out whether he ordered a shipment of coal. This man goes looking for evidence. Becker filled three pages of his 15-page essay with a discussion of Mr. Everyman and his quest for information about a coal delivery. In this sense, he achieved his stated goal. This surely came close to being the lowest common denominator. “I have tried to reduce history to its lowest terms. . .” (p. 223).

He said that he suspected—he was not sure—that “memory of the past and anticipation of future events work together, go hand in hand as it were in a friendly way without disputing over priority or leadership” (p. 227). This was hardly a sophisticated assessment. He continued:

At all events they go together, so that in a very real sense it is impossible to divorce history from life: Mr. Everyman can not do what he needs or desires to do without recalling past events; he can not recall past events without in some subtle fashion relating them to what he needs or desires to do. This is the natural function of history, of history reduced to its lowest terms, of history conceived as the memory of things said and done: memory of things said and done (whether in our immediate yesterdays or in



the long past of mankind), running hand in hand with the anticipation of things to be said and done, enables us, each to the extent of his knowledge and imagination, to be intelligent, to push back the narrow confines of the fleeting present moment so that what we are doing may be judged in the light of what we have done and what we hope to do. In this sense all living history, as Croce says, is contemporaneous: in so far as we think the past (and otherwise the past, however fully related in documents, is nothing to us) it becomes an integral and living part of our present world of semblance (p. 227).

He invoked judgment, which is itself an aspect of imputation: “. . . what we are doing may be judged in the light of what we have done and what we hope to do.” Judged by whom? There is no God, he believed. How is one person’s judgment better than anyone else’s? If all opinions are equal, then there is no way to judge historical accuracy. Everyone can impute his own meaning to the past. Becker understood that this was the logical implication of his position. So, he challenged his listeners with a task that has no solution in a world without a sovereign God as the judge. They had to find a way to reconcile conflicting interpretations of the past.

It must then be obvious that living history, the ideal series of events that we affirm and hold in memory, since it is so intimately associated with what we are doing and with what we hope to do, can not be precisely the same for all at any given time, or the same for one generation as for another. History in this sense can not be reduced to a verifiable set of statistics or formulated in terms of universally valid mathematical formulas. It is rather an imaginative creation, a personal possession which each one of us, Mr. Everyman, fashions out of his individual experience, adapts to his practical or emotional needs, and adorns as well as may be to suit his aesthetic tastes. In thus creating his own history, there are, nevertheless, limits which Mr. Everyman may not overstep without incurring penalties. The limits are set by his fellows. If Mr. Everyman lived quite alone in an unconditioned world he would be free to affirm and hold in memory any ideal series of events that struck his fancy, and thus create a world of semblance quite in accord with the heart’s desire. Unfortunately, Mr. Everyman has to

live in a world of Browns and Smiths; a sad experience, which has taught him the expediency of recalling certain events with much exactness (pp. 227–28).

Mr. Everyman lives in a world of constant change. He remembers little of it. He lives in a fog of facts. But so do we all, if everyman is an historian.

Daily and hourly, from a thousand unnoted sources, there is lodged in Mr. Everyman's mind a mass of unrelated and related information and misinformation, of impressions and images, out of which he somehow manages, undeliberately for the most part, to fashion a history, a patterned picture of remembered things said and done in past times and distant places. It is not possible, it is not essential, that this picture should be complete or completely true: it is essential that it should be useful to Mr. Everyman; and that it may be useful to him he will hold in memory, of all the things he might hold in memory, those things only which can be related with some reasonable degree of relevance and harmony to his idea of himself and of what he is doing in the world and what he hopes to do (p. 229).

Becker referred to something he called "the specious present." What does specious mean? Here is one definition: "superficially plausible, but actually wrong." It means something other than the objective present. Becker did not believe in an objective present. He wrote: "The extent to which the specious present may thus be enlarged and enriched will depend upon knowledge, the artificial extension of memory, the memory of things said and done in the past and distant places. But not upon knowledge alone; rather upon knowledge directed by purpose. The specious present is an unstable pattern of thought, incessantly changing in response to our immediate perceptions and the purposes that arise therefrom" (pp. 226–27). How can Mr. Everyman make sense of the specious present around him? He must learn to be creative. "In constructing this more remote and far-flung pattern of remembered things, Mr. Everyman works with something of the freedom of a creative artist; the history which he imaginatively recreates as an artificial extension of his personal experience will inevitably be an engaging blend of fact and fancy, a mythical adaptation of that which actually happened. In part it will be true, in part false; as a whole perhaps neither

true nor false, but only the most convenient form of error" (pp. 229–30). In short, Mr. Everyman creates myths. These myths are mixtures of fact and fancy. Becker was steadily moving to a conclusion: *the historian's task is myth-making*. "What then of us, historians by profession? What have we to do with Mr. Everyman, or he with us? More, I venture to believe, than we are apt to think. For each of us is Mr. Everyman too. Each of us is subject to the limitations of time and place; and for each of us, no less than for the Browns and Smiths of the world, the pattern of remembered things said and done will be woven, safeguard the process how we may, at the behest of circumstance and purpose" (p. 230).

Becker based his case for the legitimacy of history and historical writing on nominalism. He did not use the word, but he used the concept. The problem that every nominalist faces is this one: from the point of view of epistemology, it is every man for himself. (See Chapter 9.) Yet Becker was speaking to an assembly of professional historians. They thought of themselves as belonging to a profession. They did not believe that Mr. Everyman was in their league. To believe such a thing would be to commit professional suicide. It would mean giving up the profession and all of the benefits thereof. So, Becker invoked professionalism. But what kind of professionalism?

### 5. *Historians as Myth-Makers*

He reduced historiography to literature. Historians work with what he called "artificial memories."

True it is that although each of us is Mr. Everyman, each is something more than his own historian. Mr. Everyman, being but an informal historian, is under no bond to remember what is irrelevant to his personal affairs. But we are historians by profession. Our profession, less intimately bound up with the practical activities, is to be directly concerned with the ideal series of events that is only of casual or occasional import to others; it is our business in life to be ever preoccupied with that far-flung pattern of artificial memories that encloses and completes the central pattern of individual experience. We are Mr. Everybody's historian as well as our own, since our histories serve the double purpose, which written histories have always served, of keeping alive the recollection of memorable men and events. We are thus of that ancient

and honorable company of wise men of the tribe, of bards and story-tellers and minstrels, of soothsayers and priests, to whom in successive ages has been entrusted the keeping of the useful myths (pp. 230–31).

He reduced historians to bards and storytellers: masters of poetry. In short, professional historians really are the same as Mr. Everyman is. They are creators of myths.

Let not the harmless, necessary word “myth” put us out of countenance. In the history of history a myth is a once valid but now discarded version of the human story, as our now valid versions will in due course be relegated to the category of discarded myths. With our predecessors, the bards and story-tellers and priests, we have therefore this in common: that it is our function, as it was theirs, not to create, but to preserve and perpetuate the social tradition; to harmonize, as well as ignorance and prejudice permit, the actual and the remembered series of events; to enlarge and enrich the specious present common to us all to the end that “society” (the tribe, the nation, or all mankind) may judge of what it is doing in the light of what it has done and what it hopes to do (p. 231).

Yet the word “myth” is not harmless. It is almost invariably used by common people as referring to stories that are not true. But that is exactly what Becker was proclaiming. The present is specious, he said. We construct our historical narratives—our myths—based on the specious world around us. We work with documents from the past. That is to say, we reinterpret the past in terms of our creative attempt to make sense of the specious world around us. It is a world of chaos. There is no God. There is no providence. There is only a series of inherently meaningless events.

On this philosophical basis, in what ways do written records allow historians to differentiate fact from fiction? Men interpret historical documents in terms of their creative imputation of meaning to what Becker called the specious present. He insisted that it is possible to differentiate historical narratives from literary myths. He wrote that “with the increase and refinement of knowledge the historian recognizes that his first duty is to be sure of his facts, let their meaning be what it may” (p. 232). Meaning is

not fixed. Yet he immediately revoked this assertion. “Nevertheless, in every age history is taken to be a story of actual events from which a significant meaning may be derived; and in every age the illusion is that the present version is valid because the related facts are true, whereas former versions are invalid because based upon inaccurate or inadequate facts” (p. 232). He said that “in every age history is taken to be a story of actual events” (p. 232). He used the passive voice. I ask: taken by whom? On what objective basis? He offered no answers. Historians move from illusion to illusion.

It is worth noting at this point that Aristotle believed that poetry is far more important than history. He wrote: “What we have said already makes it further clear that a poet’s object is not to tell what actually happened but what could and would happen either probably or inevitably. The difference between a historian and a poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse—indeed the writings of Herodotus could be put into verse and yet would still be a kind of history, whether written in metre or not. The real difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts” (*Poetics*, 1451a-b). This outlook is anti-biblical to the core. The Bible presents history as the arena of a great covenantal battle between two kingdoms. History has eternal consequences for individuals. Poetry does not. By reducing historiography to poetics, Becker trivialized both history and historiography.

## 6. *Relativism vs. Relativism*

Becker brought his speech to a conclusion. He was a systematic relativist. He told his audience that what he had just said was tentative. At some point, his view will be replaced.

I do not present this view of history as one that is stable and must prevail. Whatever validity it may claim, it is certain, on its own premises, to be supplanted; for its premises, imposed upon us by the climate of opinion in which we live and think, predispose us to regard all things, and all principles of things, as no more than “inconstant modes or fashions,” as but the “concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on

their way." It is the limitation of the genetic approach to human experience that it must be content to transform problems since it can never solve them. However accurately we may determine the "facts" of history, the facts themselves and our interpretations of them, and our interpretation of our own interpretations, will be seen in a different perspective or a less vivid light as mankind moves into the unknown future.

*Everything is up for grabs.* Every successful grab will be matched by a series of myths that defend the grabbing. *There can be no common narrative.*

Regarded historically, as a process of becoming, man and his world can obviously be understood only tentatively, since it is by definition something still in the making, something as yet unfinished. Unfortunately for the "permanent contribution" and the universally valid philosophy, time passes; time, the enemy of man as the Greeks thought; to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow creeps in this petty pace, and all our yesterdays diminish and grow dim: so that, in the lengthening perspective of the centuries, even the most striking events (the Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, the Great War itself; like the Diet of Worms before them, like the signing of the Magna Carta and the coronation of Charlemagne and the crossing of the Rubicon and the battle of Marathon) must inevitably, for posterity, fade away into pale replicas of the original picture, for each succeeding generation losing, as they recede into a more distant past, some significance that once was noted in them, some quality of enchantment that once was theirs (p. 236).

As history continues, the facts that we think are important today will be forgotten. They will disappear because the memories of them will disappear. The extension of history down through the ages guarantees the annulment of what we call history. Mr. Everyman is sovereign, and he has a short memory.

This was a message of extreme pessimism regarding historical understanding. It was greeted with a standing ovation.

### D. Beyond Becker: Postmodernism

Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob commented on the relevance of Becker's lecture today. "Within the context of universities more democratized anything Beard or Becker could imagine, cultural warfare erupted along a front running from history and literature to law and education" (p. 217). They referred to cultural history, also known as multiculturalism. This has been a battleground of conflicting presuppositions and methodologies. They commented: "When swimming in culture, neither causes nor effects could be distinguished. As a consequence, cultural history and the philosophical issues of relativism and skepticism began to intersect and reinforce each other" (p. 223).

They discussed the impact of postmodernism. Postmodernism is radical relativism. It affects all of the cultural and humanistic disciplines. Postmodernists challenge the cultural authority of artifacts, including written texts, in shaping thought and culture. They insist that the texts do not refer to anything beyond themselves. Analysts therefore must confine their comments to a text, not to the meaning imputed to them by the wider culture. I put it this way: *texts are radically autonomous*. The three historians spelled out in detail the implications of such a worldview. "But postmodern theories of interpretation invariably go further than simply insisting on the integrity of the cultural artifact. They challenge all endeavors to relate culture or discourse or text to something outside or beneath it, either to nature or material circumstances, and in so doing they undermine the traditional foundations of knowledge claims in both the natural and human sciences. If postmodern theories are taken seriously, there is [sic] no transhistorical or transcendent grounds for interpretation, and human beings have no unmediated access to the world of things or events" (p. 225).

The authors nowhere discussed what should be obvious: postmodernism's epistemology, if adhered to by historians, would produce cultural Alzheimer's disease. Without transhistorical or transcendent grounds for interpretation, no school of humanist thought, including any school of historical thought, can avoid the implications of postmodernism. The postmodernists are more consistent in spelling out the inevitable implications of a worldview that denies transcendence: *the fragmentation of knowledge*. This leads to skepticism and relativism. The three authors valiantly attempted to defend the concept of historical objectivity against the onslaughts of the postmodernists, but their attempt was in vain. They and their peers, going

back to the Renaissance, have adopted the worldview of the postmodernists, namely, that there is no transcendent appeal beyond history that would enable mankind to identify truth.

## Conclusion

Rushdoony saw the implications of this long before postmodernism appeared on the scene. He wrote this in 1967 in *The Biblical Philosophy of History*.

*First*, by removing God from the universe and making history impersonal, *morality* is removed from history and *process* replaces it. By this simple act man transfers himself, in his thinking, *from a sinner to a victim*. The result is a tremendous “advance” for humanistic man. It removes him from the criminal’s bench and puts him in the role of plaintiff. In the role of criminal, of sinner, man is the object of God’s judgment and legal action. In the role of plaintiff, man is the party who begins in action at law. Man thereby makes himself an accuser of any God who may appear on the scene against him.

*Second*, by removing God from the universe, man gives priority to himself and his own purposes. The universe in history, instead of being under the sovereign purposes of the triune God, are instead open to the attempt of scientific, humanistic man to impose his will and purpose upon them. Man becomes thereby his own god and sovereign. It is to man’s advantage therefore to ridicule the concept of a personal God expressing his wrath and judgment in history. A mindless universe is preferred, because it can beget a man-God to govern that “open” universe (p. 76).

Whenever self-proclaimed autonomous men adapt faith in a mindless universe, they find themselves unable to persuade others of the truths that they hold dear. It is their word against the silence of the impersonal universe. It is their word against entropy: the heat death of the universe. (See Chapter 10.)

“My truth is just as good as yours!” This is the reigning affirmation of nominalists. What they really mean is this: “My truth is better than yours.” But they cannot get other people to accept the truth of their affirmation. This produces relativism.



# 9

## NOMINALISM

*The bits and pieces of records left from the past can be arranged into different and contending pictures. To be more direct, since human society is composed of relationships, many of them carrying implications of power and elements of concealment, one's point of entry into a past moment will always affect one's findings. No workable definition of objectivity can hide the likelihood that students of the human past will always have to deal with more than one version of what has happened. – Appleby, Hunt, and Jacobs (1994).*

### A. Covenant Model, Part 4

Point 4 of the biblical covenant model is oath. A covenantal oath invokes God's sanctions in history, positive and negative.

Point 4 of biblical social theory is sanctions, positive and negative. It implies judgment, which is based on God's imputation: good and evil, right and wrong.

Point 4 of humanist scholarship is nominalism: competing interpretations. These are judgments. There is no known way to reconcile them, for that would imply a uniform standard for settling disputes. Nominalism denies the existence of any such objective standard.

### B. Realism vs. Nominalism

On what basis can men impute value to anything? Humanism has been searching for an answer to this question from the days of the pre-Socratics. Humanism has never found an answer that is consistent with its presuppositions about God, man, law, sanctions, and time.

I began this chapter with a quotation from their 1994 book, *Telling the Truth About History* (p. 262). The three authors made it clear that there is more than one version of what has happened. There are, in fact, so many

versions of what has happened that nobody has a good enough memory to recall all of the competing versions of major events. Anyone who doubts this should try to compile a list of books on the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963. The three authors then asserted that this in no way undermines the coherence and accuracy of historiography. They wrote the following: "The fact that there can be a multiplicity of accurate histories does not turn accuracy into a fugitive from a more confident age; it only points to the expanded necessity of men and women to read the many messages packed into a past event and to follow their different trajectories as that event's consequences concatenation through time" (p. 262). The authors assumed that there are accurate histories out there, somewhere. On what basis philosophically could they legitimately assume this? In the mid-19th century, a few German historians did believe that there can be accurate historiography of objective past events. That faith was almost gone by 1920. It was publicly abandoned in the 1930s. The concept of objective historical accuracy did indeed become "a fugitive from a more confident age." The last defense attorney of that elusive fugitive was Arnold Toynbee. He is forgotten by the general public and most practicing historians.

Men search for objective knowledge. Objective knowledge, by definition, is based on objective facts. Christianity teaches that objectivity is based on God's imputation, which is comprehensive. God created the facts, and He judges them in terms of His permanent standards. He is sovereign over history. His interpretation of history is objective because He has comprehensive knowledge of what has happened in the past, and He is in control of historical causation. He also has a perfect memory.

The humanist denies the existence of such a God. He thereby makes himself responsible for identifying objective facts in every area of life. The humanist historian must identify objective facts in the past. But he does not have comprehensive documentation of the past. How can he make accurate judgments about the objective past? How can he prove that his imputations of historical relevance are correct? What are the objective standards of imputation? There is no agreement among humanist historians regarding this issue, except to deny all objective standards.

I come now to realism vs. nominalism. First, **realism**. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines philosophical realism: "Realism: in philosophy, the viewpoint which accords to things which are known or perceived an existence or nature which is independent of whether anyone is thinking about

or perceiving them.” This definition excludes God, who perceives everything. All facts are interpreted by God. This is the basis of objectivity in every area of life. Deny this, and objectivity disappears—a fugitive in hiding.

In the history of Western philosophy, some humanists have sought objectivity outside of history. Plato sought objectivity in trans-historical conceptual forms. Behind every table in history is a conceptual form of a table that is outside of history. But Plato could not explain how the trans-historical forms are connected to the material realm of history. Aristotle also believed in forms, but he argued that they are embedded in the realm of matter. Both positions are called realism. The forms governing history are either transcendent to history or embedded in history. That is to say, they are either transcendent or immanent. Humanists have been unable to show how changeless transcendent forms are connected with the ceaseless change of history. How do people perceive these forms? This is the problem whose answers divided Parmenides and Heraclitus. Our minds are subject to change. How do we use our supposedly unchanging reason to identify that which is permanent—objectively permanent? There has never been any agreement on the answer.

Second, **nominalism**. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines nominalism: “Nominalism: in philosophy, position taken in the dispute over universals—words that can be applied to individual things having something in common—that flourished especially in late medieval times. Nominalism denied the real being of universals on the ground that the use of a general word (e.g., ‘humanity’) does not imply the existence of a general thing named by it.” This view insists that observers impute meaning to the world around them. There is no inherent meaning in the world. There is no inherent objectivity. Objectivity is a myth. There is no underlying reality. The only thing that matters is what individuals think matters. The problem here is that there are a lot of individuals who have opposing opinions about what really matters. There is no way to reconcile these competing opinions.

The humanist does not invoke the God of the Bible to solve this problem. But God is the solution—the only solution. He interprets reality: objective. He speaks a word of judgment: subjective. He will impose final judgment at the end of time: objective. The humanist invokes mankind. But mankind is not unified. Individual imputations conflict. There is no agreed-upon way among humanists to determine which imputations are correct, and which are incorrect. As humanists have become more consistent with

their philosophical presuppositions regarding human autonomy, there has been less agreement regarding objective reality and its interpretation. This applies to the study of history.

A major defender of nominalism in the writing of history is the French historian

Paul Veyne. His primary work in this field is *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (1984). His main critic is Marcel Gauche, who defends realism. The debate is perpetual. This is because humanism is dualistic. Humanism is also dialectical: the attempt to hold two contradictory positions at one time. Neither Veyne nor Gauche defends a pure version of either nominalism or realism. Again, I quote Van Til, who said that scholars on each side of some irreconcilable humanistic dualism are like two washerwomen who make a living by taking in each other's laundry.

In his important book, *The One and the Many* ([1971] 2007), Rushdoony made this comment on nominalism:

If God has truly causally created all things and is himself sovereign, self-contained, and triune, then no fact is a fact apart from Him, nor can any fact have a valid interpretation in and of itself. God-created factuality means God-interpreted factuality. Apart from God, there is only the concept of brute factuality, facts in and of themselves and without any relationship or meaning in terms of one another, a sea of meaningless and unrelated particulars, or else the absorption of all facts into the ocean of being and their loss of both identity and particular meaning. The first means a world of anarchistic atoms or particulars, and the second means a totalitarian and obliterating unity (p. 16).

With this in mind, consider the 1933 presentation of a dedicated nominalist historian, Charles Beard.

## **C. Charles Beard on Imputed Meaning**

### ***1. Beard's Influence***

Two years after Carl Becker delivered his 1931 speech to the American Historical Association, "Everyman His Own Historian," Charles A. Beard delivered what was essentially a confirmation of Becker's thesis: "Written

History as an Act of Faith.” It was published in the January 1934 issue of *The American Historical Review*, pages 219–32.

Beard was a far more prominent historian than Becker was. He was the most famous and the most prestigious historian within the Progressive movement. In 1913, his book, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, created a sensation. He argued that the Framers in Philadelphia in 1787 promoted a specific kind of ownership, which was not primarily land-based. They were part of the commercial class. They wrote the Constitution to benefit this class. He followed with this book: *An Economic Interpretation of Jeffersonian Democracy* (1915). In 1927, he and his wife wrote what immediately became the most prominent American history textbook in American colleges: *The Rise of American Civilization*. This book and its two sequels remained the dominant American history textbooks for the next two decades. In 1926, he was elected president of the American Political Science Association. This was unheard of: president of both societies. His academic influence was unique.

## 2. *The Centrality of Man in History*

I take seriously the title of the speech, “Written History as an Act of Faith.” This was religious language. Perhaps Beard was trying to be clever. If so, what was he trying to conceal by means of this cleverness? The content of the article indicates that he was struggling to provide answers to a series of epistemological problems that are the inescapable products of humanism’s rejection of Christianity.

The first issue that he dealt with was omniscience. He used the word. He understood its centrality in both history and historiography. Without omniscience, the world becomes incomprehensible: chaotic. He wanted to avoid this result. “The hypothesis of chaos admits of no ordering at all; hence those who operate under it cannot write history, although they may comment on history” (p. 226). He did not explain how people can even comment on history. He rejected the Christian God. He said that all historians had done this. “Contemporary historical thought is, accordingly, returning upon itself and its subject matter. The historian is casting off his servitude to physics and biology, as he formerly cast off the shackles of theology and its metaphysics” (p. 225). What did Beard substitute for an omniscient God? History itself. “What, then, is this manifestation of omniscience

called history? It is, as Croce says, contemporary thought about the past.” This laid the epistemological foundation of his speech, namely, *the authority of human thought*. He invoked the name of Benedetto Croce. Someone else who did this was Collingwood, beginning in 1935. Beard spelled out the implication of Croce’s theory of history: it is created by autonomous individual thought.

History as past actuality includes, to be sure, all that has been done, said, felt, and thought by human beings on this planet since humanity began its long career. History as record embraces the monuments, documents, and symbols which provide such knowledge as we have or can find respecting past actuality. But it is history as thought, not as actuality, record, or specific knowledge, that is really meant when the term history is used in its widest and most general significance. It is thought about past actuality, instructed and delimited by history as record and knowledge—record and knowledge authenticated by criticism and ordered with the help of the scientific method. This is the final, positive, inescapable definition (p. 219).

First, he limited his definition of history to human beings: their thoughts and actions. This limitation points to man as a sovereign. Nothing outside of man was an element of Beard’s definition of history. This idea was widely shared in his day. It was also Collingwood’s view. Second, thought is central to his definition of history, as it was for Collingwood. “But it is history as thought, not as actuality, record, or specific knowledge, that is really meant when the term history is used in its widest and most general significance.” Men think. This was the starting point for Descartes: “I think; therefore, I am.” This is humanism’s substitute for God, who thought before He created the world. This raised a serious problem: nominalism. Without God, there is no authoritative thinker. Men disagree. This leads to epistemological chaos: pure subjectivism.

### ***3. The Need for Imputation***

History is everything that men have ever done. This is beyond human calculation. How can historians provide a coherent narrative? How can they make sense of the immensity of the past? By a careful selection of facts.

"Every student of history knows that his colleagues have been influenced in their selection and ordering of materials by their biases, prejudices, beliefs, affections, general upbringing, and experience, particularly social and economic; and if he has any sense of propriety, to say nothing of humor, he applies the canon to himself, leaving no exceptions to the rule." This evaded the problem: the historians' colleagues do not agree with him or each other.

What he called the *omniscience of history* in all of its complexity becomes *selected facts by historians*. God was once thought to be omniscient, and omnipotent as well. Christians believed that He has provided coherence to history, both objectively and imputationally. He has directed everything. He has imputed meaning to everything. But He is gone in modern humanists' thinking. This puts history in charge. But history is not in charge. It is blind. It is silent. It does not impute meaning. Then what will replace history? Historians. Lots and lots of historians. They will select what they think is important for their peers to remember. They will impute meaning to whatever they have selected. To do this, they must also impute meaning to everything they decided *not* to select.

This introduced subjectivism into the discussion. Beard embraced subjectivism wholeheartedly. "Contemporary thought about history, therefore, repudiates the conception dominant among the schoolmen during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth century—the conception that it is possible to describe the past as it actually was, somewhat as the engineer describes a single machine" (pp. 220–21). This repudiation of realism has created a crisis for historiography. "As Croce and Heussi have demonstrated, so-called neutral or scientific history reached a crisis in its thought before the twentieth century had advanced far on the way" (p. 221). The crisis is spreading. "This crisis in historical thought sprang from internal criticism—from conflicts of thought within historiography itself—and from the movement of history as actuality; for historians are always engaged, more or less, in thinking about their own work and are disturbed, like their fellow citizens, by crises and revolutions occurring in the world about them" (p. 221). Subjectivism is now dominant. "Once more, historians recognize formally the obvious, long known informally, namely, that any written history inevitably reflects the thought of the author in his time and cultural setting" (p. 221).

Beard called history omniscient. This language was deceptive. Historians create history, he argued. He knew that historians are not omniscient.



He had a word for them: *guessers*. "That this crisis in thought presents a distressing dilemma to many historians is beyond question. It is almost a confession of inexpiable sin to admit in academic circles that one is not a man of science working in a scientific manner with things open to deterministic and inexorable treatment, to admit that one is more or less a guesser in this vale of tears. But the only escape from the dust and storm of the present conflict, and from the hazards of taking thought, now before the historian, is silence or refuge in some minute particularity of history as actuality" (pp. 221–22). When omniscience becomes guessers, there is a crisis in men's theory of knowledge.

#### 4. *The Desire for Meaning*

He understood the psychological problem facing him and his peers: "... the historian would be a strange creature if he never asked himself why he regarded these matters as worthy of his labor and love, or why society provides a living for him during his excursions and explorations" (p. 222). I regard Beard as a salesman of an idea: the nominalist view of history. A good salesman knows that one way to sell something is to remind the potential buyer early in the sales pitch that he has a problem. The salesman then offers a solution. Beard was doing his best to bring a message of hope to his fellow-guessers. But what was this hope?

He offered nothing. Not yet. Instead, he kept piling up the problems.

He insisted that there are no laws of history. This was his denial of realism. "Undiscouraged by their inability to bring all history within a single law, such as the law of gravitation, they have gone on working in the belief that the Newtonian trick will be turned some time, if the scientific method is applied long and rigorously enough and facts are heaped up high enough, as the succeeding grists of doctors of philosophy are ground out by the universities, turned loose on 'research projects,' and amply supplied by funds" (p. 223). But without laws of history, there is no science of history, he said. This is a good thing, he said. This protects our liberty from the tyranny of historical laws. He was a junior Heraclitus warning his peers about Parmenides. "If a science of history were achieved, it would, like the science of celestial mechanics, make possible the calculable prediction of the future in history. It would bring the totality of historical occurrences within a single field and reveal the unfolding future to its last end, including all the appar-



ent choices made and to be made. It would be omniscience. The creator of it would possess the attributes ascribed by the theologians to God. The future once revealed, humanity would have nothing to do except to await its doom" (p. 224).

What did he offer as a substitute? Something that sounded suspiciously like historical relativism. That had also been Becker's substitute two years earlier. "Having broken the tyranny of physics and biology, contemporary thought in historiography turns its engines of verification upon the formula of historical relativity—the formula that makes all written history merely relative to time and circumstance, a passing shadow, an illusion." But he immediately dismissed this suggestion. On what basis? Relativism. Relativism will fail—absolutely.

Contemporary criticism shows that the apostle of relativity is destined to be destroyed by the child of his own brain. If all historical conceptions are merely relative to passing events, to transitory phases of ideas and interests, then the conception of relativity is itself relative. When absolutes in history are rejected the absolutism of relativity is also rejected. So we must inquire: To what spirit of the times, to the ideas and interests of what class, group, nation, race, or region does the conception of relativity correspond? As the actuality of history moves forward into the future, the conception of relativity will also pass, as previous conceptions and interpretations of events have passed. Hence, according to the very doctrine of relativity, the skeptic of relativity will disappear in due course, beneath the ever-tossing waves of changing relativities (p. 225).

So, he invoked social evolution to forecast a world somewhere in the distant future that will abandon relativism, at least for a while. Then an absolute will appear, replacing relativism. And what will that absolute be? History!

Contemporary historical thought is, accordingly, returning upon itself and its subject matter. The historian is casting off his servitude to physics and biology, as he formerly cast off the shackles of theology and its metaphysics. He likewise sees the doctrine of relativity crumble in the cold light of historical knowledge. When

he accepts none of the assumptions made by theology, physics, and biology, as applied to history, when he passes out from under the fleeting shadow of relativity, he confronts the absolute in his field—the absolute totality of all historical occurrences past, present, and becoming to the end of all things (p. 235).

When relativism is replaced by its successor, there will be three rival views of history to choose from: (1) history as chaotic; (2) history as cyclical; (3) history “on an upward gradient toward a more ideal order—as imagined by Condorcet, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, or Herbert Spencer” (p. 226). Beard rejected all three (p. 226). He then faced this challenge: you can’t beat something with nothing. What is the missing fourth option? This: the scientific method.

### ***5. Deliverance: The Scientific Method***

He had denied that history is a science, yet he was an apostle for the scientific method, which he did not define or even describe.

But members of the passing generation will ask: Has our work done in the scientific spirit been useless? Must we abandon the scientific method? The answer is an emphatic negative. During the past fifty years historical scholarship, carried on with judicial calm, has wrought achievements of value beyond calculation. Particular phases of history once dark and confused have been illuminated by research, authentication, scrutiny, and the ordering of immediate relevancies. Nor is the empirical or scientific method to be abandoned. It is the only method that can be employed in obtaining accurate knowledge of historical facts, personalities, situations, and movements (p. 226).

The scientific method preserves democracy and liberty. “It has a value in itself—a value high in the hierarchy of values indispensable to the life of a democracy. The inquiring spirit of science, using the scientific method, is the chief safeguard against the tyranny of authority, bureaucracy, and brute power” (p. 227). The scientific method is the barrier separating civilization from barbarism. “The scientific method is, therefore, a precious and indispensable instrument of the human mind; without it society would sink

down into primitive animism and barbarism" (p. 227). Nevertheless, it has limitations. "So the historian is bound by his craft to recognize the nature and limitations of the scientific method and to dispel the illusion that it can produce a science of history embracing the fullness of history, or of any large phase, as past actuality" (p. 227).

Scientific history is the realm of realism. He had abandoned it. Scientific method presumably is in the realm of nominalism: agreement among historians. Yet he spoke of it as something real, something objective. Somehow, these supposedly antithetical concepts—scientific history and scientific method—can and must cooperate. This dualism must somehow become dialectical. First, there must be realism. There must be objective truth. There must be causation, even in the realm of ideas. There really are objective realities to investigate after all. "This means no abandonment of the tireless inquiry into objective realities, especially economic realities and relations; not enough emphasis has been laid upon the conditioning and determining influences of biological and economic necessities or upon researches designed to disclose them in their deepest and widest ramifications. This means no abandonment of the inquiry into the forms and development of ideas as conditioning and determining influences; not enough emphasis has been laid on this phase of history by American scholars" (p. 227). Second, there must also be nominalism: competing interpretations of history. Becker had announced two years earlier: every man an historian. Beard accepted this.

It is that any selection and arrangement of facts pertaining to any large area of history, either local or world, race or class, is controlled inexorably by the frame of reference in the mind of the selector and arranger. This frame of reference includes things deemed necessary, things deemed possible, and things deemed desirable. It may be large, informed by deep knowledge, and illuminated by wide experience; or it may be small, uninformed, and unilluminated (p. 227).

To sum up contemporary thought in historiography, any written history involves the selection of a topic and an arbitrary delimitation of its borders—cutting off connections with the universal. Within the borders arbitrarily established, there is a selection and organization of facts by the processes of thought. This selection

and organization—a single act—will be controlled by the historian's frame of reference composed of things deemed necessary and of things deemed desirable. The frame may be a narrow class, sectional, national, or group conception of history, clear and frank or confused and half conscious, or it may be a large, generous conception, clarified by association with the great spirits of all ages. Whatever its nature the frame is inexorably there, in the mind (p. 228).

This speech was a conceptual mess. He invoked epistemological salvation by an undefined scientific method, yet he warned against scientific history—the historiography of objective truth, of realism.

### **D. Multiple Imputers of Meaning**

Collingwood insisted on the autonomy of the individual historian. The historian has to impute meaning to the past. He has to select from the vast array of historical documents those that are relevant to his narrative. Becker held the same view of imputation. The historian imputes meaning to the past. But he introduced the crucial fact of historiography: there are lots of interpreters. Becker multiplied them like locusts. Every man is his own historian. Beard also sided with subjective imputation as the substitute for objective history.

Here was their problem. Mankind is not united. Humanism declares that mankind is autonomous. But this doctrine of autonomy does not stay bottled up in the concept of collective mankind. It spreads into every area of life. The many interpreters of the past disagree with each other about what was significant in the past. This is the curse of nominalism. The Bible describes it. There was initial agreement at the Tower of Babel, but God divided the people. There was a common confession, but God divided it. There was a common society, but God scattered it. This is nominalism's problem. There is no way to reconcile philosophically the divided declarations of men regarding the past.

There are certain methodological agreements that enable professional historians to evaluate each other's work. But footnotes do not unify historians. Footnotes are not in agreement with each other. Documents are not in agreement. *There is no scientific methodology that enables historians to find*

*objective truth*. Their nominalist philosophy denies the existence of objective truth. This denial leads to relativism. Historians do not want to admit that their competing theories of history promote relativism. Their protests are in vain. Their protests are denied by their subjectivist philosophy of history. They deny the legitimacy of nineteenth-century scientific historiography: realism. They invoke nominalism. But, with nominalism, it is every man for himself. It is every historian's interpretation at war with every other.

Whatever unanimity exists among historians is a matter of convention, not historical truth, according to nominalistic philosophies of history. Historians within the guild band together to outlaw certain historical interpretations. In United States history, the most obvious of all the guild-banned narratives is this one: President Franklin Roosevelt lured the Japanese into the war in December 1941. The premier historian who promoted this view was Beard. In 1948, his final book appeared, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War*. It was published by Yale University Press. In it, he argued that President Roosevelt had adopted measures that deliberately provoked the Japanese government to attack the United States, thereby enabling Roosevelt to take the nation into the war. Instantly, he lost his reputation. He died in September of that year. He became a retroactive pariah after 1948. Had he not died shortly after the book was released, and before the savage reviews of it appeared in professional historical journals, he would have learned that scientific methodology could not save his reputation.

## E. Postmodernism

Postmodernism is an intellectual movement that has extended nominalism far beyond anything envisioned by historians in the 1970s. It is a view dominated by the idea that there is no objective truth. It is dominated by the idea that texts, including historical texts, must be interpreted entirely on the basis of their autonomous internal coherence, not social meaning imputed by self-interested outsiders. This view leads to radical skepticism. It is anti-establishment. The Wikipedia entry on postmodernism is accurate.

Postmodern thinkers frequently describe knowledge claims and value systems as contingent or socially-conditioned, framing them as products of political, historical, or cultural discourses and hierarchies. These thinkers often view personal and spiritual

needs as being best fulfilled by improving social conditions and adopting more fluid discourses, in contrast to modernism, which places a higher degree of emphasis on maximizing progress and which generally regards the promotion of objective truths as an ideal form of discourse. . . .

Postmodernism is generally defined by an attitude of skepticism, irony, or rejection toward what it describes as the grand narratives and ideologies associated with modernism, often criticizing Enlightenment rationality and focusing on the role of ideology in maintaining political or economic power. Common targets of postmodern criticism include universalist ideas of objective reality, morality, truth, human nature, reason, science, language, and social progress. Accordingly, postmodern thought is broadly characterized by tendencies to self-consciousness, self-referentiality, epistemological and moral relativism, pluralism, and irreverence.

Within the guild of academic historians, there were few practicing postmodernists until the twenty-first century. They have since multiplied in the humanities. Defenders of the academic establishments were disarmed after 1820 by the prevailing nominalism that today dominates the humanities. Postmodernists are anti-realists, but so are virtually all of the other members on a faculty. Realism went out of fashion along with high-button shoes.

Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob identified the problem in *Telling the Truth About History*. They dated it four decades late. "Since the 1960s, all the regnant absolutisms of the nineteenth century have been dethroned. A many-pronged attack coming from a variety of perspectives has zeroed in on the goals of objectivity and truth-seeking. A fluid skepticism now covers the intellectual landscape, encroaching upon one body of thought after another. The study of history has been questioned and its potential for truth-finding categorically denied" (pp. 243–44). Fluid skepticism is not a solid foundation for epistemology.

Postmodernist historians deny that historical writing is based on truth-seeking. They see it as defending existing politics and existing social structures. The three historians rejected this interpretation. But on what philosophical basis did they reject it? By something they called "practical realism." They did not define this. They did not even explain it. They were trying to create a new theory of history. They called for "a different, more

nuanced, less absolutist kind of realism than that championed by an older—we would say naïve—realism. The newer version—what is called practical realism—presumes that the meanings of words are never simply in our head, nor do they lock on two objects of the external world and fixed reality for all time” (p. 247). There was never any historiographical movement that described itself as holding to practical realism. Modernists denied realism. The philosophers also denied it. It is true that all groups attempted to import realism when they got into the bind of complete relativism. Nominalists for centuries have adopted this unofficial strategy. But there was never any developed, self-conscious philosophical defense of a middle ground between the two positions. There was dialecticism: back-and-forth invocations of each view. There was also informal borrowing from each other’s position. But there was never a self-conscious effort to develop a philosophy of historical interpretation that was a functional hybrid between the two systems. Realism and nominalism are mutually exclusive philosophies.

The chief problem for nominalist historians is to find ways to reconcile competing historical interpretations. This is the problem of the imputation of meaning. If God is not there to do this, then man has to do it on his own authority. But man does not have the capability of doing it on his own authority. So, the three authors wanted a middle position. But they did not want to take a stand against imputed meaning. They wrote this: “The realist never denies that the very act of representing the past makes the historian (values, warts, and all) an agent who actively molds how the past is to be seen. Most even delight in the task” (p. 249). Yes, realists do delight in the nominalist task. That is because they are really nominalists.

The three historians wanted human autonomy. They wanted historians to exercise the power to shape the past. “Practical realists are stuck in a contingent world, using language to point to objects outside themselves about which they can be knowledgeable because they use language. This slightly circular situation in which the practical-minded find themselves may not make for heroes, but it does help locate truths about the past. More important, practical realism thwarts the relativists by reminding them that some words and conventions, however socially constructed, reach out to the world and give a reasonably true description of its contents” (p. 250). They called this a “slightly circular situation.” It is 100% circular.

The three then invoked the objective reality of language. (This is also what a Christian historian should do, on this basis: God spoke the world

into existence. Next, God spoke to Adam. Adam and Eve spoke with each other.) These three historians also invoked a common language. But they had no metaphysical foundation for this invocation. They had no epistemological foundation for it. The best they could come up with is this: “reasonably true description.” By what standard? By whose imputation? Revealed by what methodology?

They offered what they called a new theory of objectivity. “We think that a case can be made for a qualified objectivity after this refurbished objectivity has been disentangled from the scientific model of objectivity” (p. 254). But they never offered any philosophical justification for their hybrid system. All they did was offer hope in some future technical reconciliation of the ancient dualism. They told us what scholars must do. They did not tell us *how* these scholars are going to do it. They did not tell us *why* they are going to do it. They also did not tell us why no historian has done this in the past four centuries. As you read the following passage, listen for a faint sound of Judy Garland singing “somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high.”

No longer able to ignore the subjectivity of the author, scholars must construct standards of objectivity that recognize at the outset that all histories start with the curiosity of a particular individual and take shape under the guidance of her or his personal and cultural attributes. Since all knowledge originates inside human minds and is conveyed through representations of reality, all knowledge is subject-centered and artificial, the very qualities brought into disrespect by an earlier exultation of that which was objective and natural. Our version of objectivity concedes the impossibility of any research being neutral (that goes for scientists as well) and accepts the fact that knowledge-seeking involves a lively, contentious struggle among diverse groups of truth-seekers (p. 254).

Their book describes many of the problems that humanist historians created for themselves when they abandoned faith in the Bible and faith in the providential God who created all things out of nothing by the power of His word. What the book does not describe is any philosophy that is half realism and half nominalism. It also does not describe the outline of a philosophically grounded methodology that will enable historians to bring forth objective reality out of the cacophony of competing autonomous interpretations by their peers.



## Conclusion

There is a popular phrase: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinions, but everyone is not entitled to his own facts." In terms of humanist epistemology, everyone really is entitled to his own facts. This is the implication for every philosophy of autonomy.

By the mid-1930s, leaders of American historiography went public with respect to the impossibility of neutral historiography. This included the impossibility of neutral facts. All facts are interpreted, they admitted. But the inescapable implication of this admission is this: *there can be as many historical facts as there are historians*. Modern humanist historiography does not have a theory of objective historical events in the past, objective historical documentation, and objective interpretation of this documentation.

Rushdoony in 1967 contrasted the Christian view of history and the humanist view.

For the Orthodox Christian, who grounds his philosophy of history of the doctrine of creation, the mainspring of history is God. Time rests on the foundation of eternity, on the eternal decree of God. Time and history therefore have meaning because they were created in terms of God's perfect and totally comprehensive plan. Every blade of grass, every sparrow's fall, the very hairs of our head, *all are* comprehended and governed by God's eternal decree, and all have meaning in terms of it. The humanist faces a meaningless world in which he must strive to create an established meaning. The Christian accepts the world which is totally meaningful in which *every* event moves in terms of God's predestined purpose, and, when man accepts God as his Lord and Christ as his Savior, every event works together for good to him because he is now in harmony with that meaning and destiny (Rom. 8:28). Man therefore does not create meaning; instead, having rebelled against God's meaning, having striven to be as God and himself as a source of meaning and definition (Gen. 3:5), man now submits to God's meaning and finds his life therein. For the humanist, the dynamics of history are in titanic man, as he imposes his will and idea on the world. For the Orthodox Christian, the dynamics of history are in God the Creator, and man accepts those dynamics and rejoices in the blessings thereof when man accepts Christ as

Savior and then follows the leadings of the sanctifying Holy Spirit  
(*The Biblical Philosophy of History* [2007], pp. 7–8).

Consider this: “For the humanist, the dynamics of history are in titanic man, as he imposes his will and idea on the world.” But dynamic man, being dynamic, is always changing. He must impose his will on the world in order to keep rival dynamic men from imposing their will on him. In his 1945 novel, *That Hideous Strength*, C. S. Lewis has a power-seeking villain say this. “It does really look as if we now had the power to dig ourselves in as a species for a pretty staggering period, to take control of our own destiny. If Science is really given a free hand it can now take over the human race and re-condition it: make man a really efficient animal. . . . Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest—which is another reason for cashing in on it as soon as one can. You and I want to be the people who do the taking charge, not the ones who are taken charge of.”

Humanists find that they cannot exercise such control. They are not omniscient. The world is highly complex. This law of change confronts them: “You cannot change just one thing.” This is accompanied by the law of unintended consequences. This in turn is accompanied by Murphy’s law: “If something can go wrong, it will.”

What applies to planning for the future applies to our understanding of the past. The past was complex. Documentation is incomplete. It is often contradictory. Interpretations compete for public acceptance. Public agreement declines as the cost of producing and accessing rival interpretations decreases. Cacophony increases. Put differently, intellectual entropy increases. It increases when humanists become more consistent with their theory of the future: cosmic entropy. I cover this in the next chapter.

# 10

## ENTROPY

*That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built. – Bertrand Russell (1903)*

### A. Covenant Model, Point 5

Point 5 of the biblical covenant is succession.

Point 5 of biblical social theory is inheritance, as is point five of the biblical theory of history.

Point 5 of humanist historiography unofficially is succession. Humanists offer multiple theories of succession. But this is self-deception. Why? Because all of humanism's theories of succession have a cosmic limit: the heat death of the universe. This is the inescapable implication of the second law of thermodynamics. Kinetic energy irreversibly moves to dispersed energy. Therefore, coherence moves toward randomness. This one-way process results in entropy. At the end of time, there will be no more change, at least not in the world of molecules. Life will long since have disappeared. There will be nothing left to impute meaning, either to the lifeless present or the past.

Humanists rarely talk about entropy. When they offer their social the-

ories, they do not discuss it. When they offer their theories of imputed value, they do not discuss it. *Entropy is the impersonal cosmic veto of all the dreams and schemes of autonomous mankind.*

All humanist theories of progress eventually hit the cosmic brick wall of entropy. There is no permanent progress possible in a world governed by the second law of thermodynamics. There is only death. All theories of progress are an illusion, humanism teaches, except that humanism refuses to teach it. Occasionally, a humanist discusses entropy as the ultimate negation of every theory of progress, but only rarely. Bertrand Russell was an exception.

## B. The Abandonment of Christian Optimism

In 1903, Russell was 31 years old. He was a rising star in the fields of philosophy and mathematics. He was not a shooting star. His star continued to rise. By the middle of the twentieth century, he was the most famous philosopher in the world. He was famous mainly for his political activities: disarmament, pacifism, and socialism. But he was always regarded by philosophers as one of the most competent in his fields.

In 1903, his first major book was published: *The Principles of Mathematics*. Between 1910 and 1913, he and co-author Alfred North Whitehead wrote their three-volume work: *Principia Mathematica*. It became a classic almost as soon as it was published. Simultaneously, he wrote *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) and *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914). Then came *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) and *The Analysis of Matter* (1927). Yet it was his 1903 article, "A Free Man's Worship," that was most widely quoted during his lifetime. I began this chapter with an extract from the early section of that article.

I know of no more pessimistic assessment of man's condition written by a serious philosopher. It was an application of modern physical theory. Specifically, he was applying the principle of entropy to the future of mankind and mankind's world. Entropy is an inescapable implication of the second law of thermodynamics. Here is a simple definition from the *New Scientist*: "The second law of thermodynamics means hot things always cool unless you do something to stop them. It expresses a fundamental and simple truth about the universe: that disorder, characterised as a quantity known as entropy, always increases." The article added this:

“The British astrophysicist Arthur Eddington have [had] a stern warning to would-be theoretical physicists in 1915. ‘If your theory is found to be against the second law of thermodynamics I can give you no hope; there is nothing for it but to collapse in deepest humiliation,’ he wrote.”

Russell’s article is remarkable for its call to emotional resistance in the face of inescapable pessimism. If entropy is true, then the entire cosmos is heading for oblivion. That state of oblivion is called the heat death of the universe. All change will cease when all kinetic energy is irreversibly dispersed. Everything warm will freeze, and nothing will ever warm up again. Time will end. Meaning will end. The meaninglessness that prevailed from the origin of the universe until the random evolution of man will once again reassert its impersonal sovereignty. There will be no living creature to impute meaning to the now-frozen universe. Russell understood this. Then he adopted the language of resistance to the inevitable.

When, without the bitterness of impotent rebellion, we have learnt both to resign ourselves to the outward rules of Fate and to recognise that the non-human world is unworthy of our worship, it becomes possible at last so to transform and refashion the unconscious universe, so to transmute it in the crucible of imagination, that a new image of shining gold replaces the old idol of clay. In all the multiform facts of the world—in the visual shapes of trees and mountains and clouds, in the events of the life of man, even in the very omnipotence of Death—the insight of creative idealism can find the reflection of a beauty which its own thoughts first made. In this way mind asserts its subtle mastery over the thoughtless forces of Nature. The more evil the material with which it deals, the more thwarting to untrained desire, the greater is its achievement in inducing the reluctant rock to yield up its hidden treasures, the prouder its victory in compelling the opposing forces to swell the pageant of its triumph.

This was a fine example of what we call whistling past the graveyard. Most evolutionists prefer to ignore this cosmic graveyard. They do not think about its implications for their lives.

Russell assumed that there will be no final judgment by God. On the basis of this assumption, he was filled with hope. There is no hell to serve as an intermediary prison (Luke 16), followed by the lake of fire (Revelation

20:14–15). This assumption is based on optimism by covenant-breakers. It is an optimism based on total pessimism with respect to the long-term legacy of mankind. After Russell abandoned Christianity as a teenager, he did not replace it with anything offering hope for mankind. This became his vision of victory:

Victory, in this struggle with the powers of darkness, is the true baptism into the glorious company of heroes, the true initiation into the overmastering beauty of human existence. From that awful encounter of the soul with the outer world, enunciation, wisdom, and charity are born; and with their birth a new life begins. To take into the inmost shrine of the soul the irresistible forces whose puppets we seem to be—Death and change, the irrevocableness of the past, and the powerlessness of Man before the blind hurry of the universe from vanity to vanity—to feel these things and know them is to conquer them.

He ended his sermon with this:

Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.

Russell was an excellent writer. He was a master of rhetoric. He had a mastery of logic. Few philosophers ever have both. He was not exaggerating rhetorically in this essay. His rhetoric was consistent with his logic. Given the doctrine of entropy, which is foundational to modern physics and modern cosmology, the best plan that men can adopt is to pursue the worship of

the best of mankind. Men should build their ethics in terms of their suicidal mission in confronting the sovereign forces of impersonal fate. As to where this ethical system came from, he did not say. As to where the standards of ethics came from, which would enable us to decide what is good and what is evil, he did not say. He simply assumed that such an ethical system exists, and that men can discover it, follow it, and die in terms of it.

The common man did not pay any attention to this in 1903. Christianity in Great Britain and the United States still had influence. Most people still had hope in the future because they still believed in a God who brings hope in both history and eternity. But, among intellectuals, the worldview expressed in Russell's essay began to spread. A fundamental pessimism began to take hold of some intellectuals. This pessimism is consistent with the doctrines of cosmic evolution, Darwinian biological evolution, and the second law of thermodynamics. It is the cosmic invocation of a Christian burial: ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But in the evolutionary worldview, there is no resurrection. There is no redemption. This view is comforting only for those who believe that this cosmic eschatology is preferable individually to the doctrine of final judgment as expounded in Luke 16 and Revelation 20:14–15. For such people, this really is a comfort. It is a delusion, but it is a comfort.

Historians do not write about entropy. They do not discuss its implications for their theory of history. They do not consider its implications for their theory of succession: the next stage of evolutionary development. But the doctrine of entropy undermines optimism. It undermines all meaning and purpose. It undermines hope.

What are some of the implications of the loss of faith in progress? Two major scholars of the late twentieth century explored this question: Robert Nisbet and Jacques Barzun.

### C. Robert Nisbet's Warning

Robert Nisbet was an influential social thinker in the United States, beginning in the mid-1960s. He had spent a decade as an administrator at the University of California, Riverside. Until he moved to the newly created UCR campus in 1954, he had been a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. He had written one influential book: *The Quest for Community* (Oxford University Press, 1953). But then he disappeared academically for a decade.

In *The Quest for Community*, he asked these questions: Why did the modern world turn to totalitarianism in the first half of the twentieth century? What had taken place in the West that produced totalitarianism? He concluded that it had to do with the breakdown of social order. Those institutions to which men had given allegiance throughout history, such as the family, the church, the guild, the fraternal order, and similar voluntary associations, had faded in importance in the twentieth century. This left only the isolated individual and the modern nation-state. Men gained a sense of belonging through their participation in mass-movement politics. Totalitarian leaders began to attract citizens who were isolated, even though they were living in large cities. These leaders were able to offer a sense of brotherhood to millions of people who felt alone. The modern totalitarian state functioned as a substitute for the family, church, and voluntary associations that for millennia had given people a sense of purpose and participation. Collectivist totalitarianism was the product of individualism, institutionally speaking, even though, as a philosophy, totalitarianism is completely opposed to individualism.

In 1965, he began to write again. For the next two decades, he became one of the best-known conservative social scientists in the United States. This was because of the social changes that began to disrupt the United States and many other Western nations, 1965–1970. He had given a lot of thought to the kinds of changes that were taking place. So, when he began to write systematically about these changes, his influence grew extensively. It is revealing that Oxford University Press in 1962 changed the title of his book when it was released as a paperback: *Community and Power*. Then the student revolutions hit in late 1964. The anti-Vietnam War protests began in 1966. The drug-induced counterculture became a half-decade phenomenon. Oxford changed the title back to *The Quest for Community*.

Nisbet was more of a social commentator and social theorist than he was a social scientist. He was interested in the history of ideas. Here is where he had his major influence after 1965. I was fortunate to be his student from 1967 until he left the university in 1972. He was on my doctoral dissertation committee in 1972.

In 1980, the conservative academic publishing company, Basic Books, published his book, *History of the Idea of Progress*. For some reason, he included no footnotes—a pity for those of us who collect footnotes.

He believed that societies need faith in the future. In his book, he traced



the history of Western man's faith in historical progress from the Greeks to the late twentieth century. I think he was wrong about the Greeks. I think they believed in cyclical history, just as J. B. Bury said in 1920. Nisbet was self-consciously reacting against Bury. I think Stanley Jaki was correct: the absence of a concept of linear time kept the Greeks and the Romans from moving beyond technology to science.

In the Introduction, he wrote the following about the idea of progress:

. . . I remain convinced that this idea has done more good over a twenty-five-hundred year period, led to more creativeness in more spheres, and given more strength to human hope and to individual desire for improvement than any other single idea in Western history. . . . The springs of human action, will, and ambition lie for the most part in beliefs about universe, world, society, and man which defy rational calculations and differ greatly from physio-psychological instincts. These springs lie in what we call dogmas. . . . Everything now suggests, however, that Western faith in the dogma of progress is waning rapidly in all levels and spheres in this final part of the 20th century. The reasons, as I attempt to show in the final chapter, have much less to do with the unprecedented world wars, the totalitarianisms, the economic depressions, and other major political, military, and economic afflictions which are peculiar to the 20th century than they do with the fateful if less dramatic erosion of all the fundamental intellectual and spiritual premises upon which the idea of progress has rested throughout its long history (pp. 8-9).

Chapter 9, "Progress at Bay," discusses the evidence for the loss of faith in the West regarding the future. He wrote this: "Behind this spreading atmosphere of guilt and loss of meaning or purpose in the West and its heritage lies a constant erosion of faith in Western institutions; not just political but social, cultural, and religious institutions. Hardly a week passes without some fresh poll or survey indicating still greater loss of respect by Americans and Europeans for government, church, school, profession, industry, the media, and other once respected institutions—and, naturally, those who in one or other degree preside over or represent these institutions" (p. 332).

This passage indicates something that I regard as fundamental for a correct understanding of the decline of faith in the idea of progress. Nisbet

touched on it, but he did not sufficiently emphasize it. The issue of progress is intimately tied to the idea of morality. *The loss of a sense of moral purpose is at the heart of the loss of faith in the idea of progress.* It is not just that people have lost faith in progress; they have lost faith in a moral universe of cause-and-effect, which once governed the thinking of the West. We should not separate the idea of progress from morality, which in turn is established through faith in God, who provides both purpose and meaning for the universe.

If there was a single source of this loss of faith, it was Charles Darwin. His concept of unplanned biological change rested on his denial of any purpose in the universe prior to man. This is the heart of his system, and he knew it. He was reacting against teleology: cosmic purpose or design.

Darwin's followers latched onto the idea of man as the highest evolutionary being in the universe. Without man, Darwinists say, there is no purpose in the universe unless there is a higher evolutionary species somewhere in the cosmos whose sense of purpose trumps ours. (The idea of "higher" implies a hierarchy, which is a hierarchy of power: the survival of the fittest, as Herbert Spencer summarized it.) This places the origin of meaning and purpose in mankind: collective mankind. But who speaks for mankind? On what basis?

The heart of Darwin's theory is that nature has no autonomous purpose. It has no end in mind. It has no mind. It is not structured to benefit man. Man must struggle against the forces of nature in order to retain his dominance in nature. There is nothing outside of man that gives support to man, and there is nothing outside of man that guarantees man's success in extending his rule over nature in history. There is no natural law in Darwinism in the sense that was believed in Western history from the Roman-era Stoics to Darwin. There is also no sovereign God who oversees the affairs of men, which has been the belief of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the beginning.

Man is cut off from any source of positive or negative sanctions in response to a transcendent system of morals. With the triumph of Darwinism and secularism, faith in transcendental morality has disappeared among the intellectuals. This in turn has undermined their faith in progress. There is no way to define progress unless there is a universal hierarchy of values, meaning good, bad, and worst. The god of any society is the source of its laws and the enforcer of these laws. In the Darwinian universe, this means

collective mankind. The trouble is, mankind cannot be trusted, precisely because mankind is afflicted with moral perversity.

In the Epilogue, Nisbet warned that, without faith in the future, no society can be maintained for long. The West therefore faces a crisis.

In our day, however, religion is a spent force. If God is not dead, he is ebbing away, and has been since the early part of the century. We have, in Jonathan Swift's coruscating words, "just enough religion to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another"—or, enough to make us see the flaws and cankers of the society around us but not enough to generate hope for the future. Just as religion has seriously waned, so have most of the systems of thought which for a time served intellectuals as surrogates. There aren't many today who find either Spencer's first cause or Marx's dialectic convincing (p. 353).

He then surveyed the loss of faith within academic disciplines. He said that philosophy is a spent force. Nobody pays any attention or has any interest in what a professional philosopher thinks today. But who has replaced the philosophers? "There is no ready answer. We appear to be destitute of any reigning intellectual class. Intellectuals and artists have gone the way of business and political titans, of clergy and philosophers, of scholars and scientists. When has literature been held in as low estate as it is today in the West? Never has the gulf between creative writer and the public been as wide as it is now" (p. 354).

He then got to the point: the West's lack of a sustaining culture.

The reason for this condition, this debasement of literature and estrangement of writer and public, is our lack of a true culture. And fundamental to this lack is the disappearance of the sacred, always at the heart of any genuine culture—from ancient Athens to Victorian England. For some time we thought we could live off the yield of the sacred, even though it was gone or passing away. Then it was easy to maintain belief in progress and, so believing, to seek to add what a cherished past had contributed. It is no longer easy, for behind the death of the past, the displacement of Western pride of civilization, the waning faith in economic growth in the works of reason lies the moribundity of religious

conviction, of belief and faith in something greater than the life immediately around us (p. 354).

He quoted Alexis de Tocqueville. "When men have once allowed themselves to think no more of what is to befall them after life, they lapse readily into that complete and brutal indifference to futurity which is but to conformable to some propensities of mankind." Nisbet continued: "Only on the basis of confidence in the existence of the divine power was confidence possible with respect to design or pattern in the world and in the history of the world. . . . But it is absent now, whether ever to be recovered, we cannot know. And with the absence of the sense of sacredness of knowledge there is now to be seen in more and more areas absence of respect for or confidence in knowledge—that is, the kind of knowledge that proceeds from reason and its intrinsic disciplines" (p. 355). Then he asked a crucial question: "How long, O Lord, how long?"

But is this contemporary Western culture likely to continue for long? The answer, it seems to me, must be in the negative—if we take any stock in the lessons of the human past. . . . I believe, first from the fact that never in history have periods of culture such as our own lasted for very long. They are destroyed by all the forces which constitute their essence. How can any society or age last very long if it lacks or is steadily losing the minimal requirements for a society—such requirements being the very opposite of the egocentric and hedonistic elements which dominate Western culture today? (p. 356).

He raised a related issue: *religious renewal*. "Whatever their future, the signs are present—visible in the currents of fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, even millennialism found in certain sectors of Judaism and Christianity. Even the spread of the occult and the cult of the West could well be one of the signs of a religious renaissance, for, as it is well known, the birth of Christianity or rather its genesis as a world religion in Rome during and after the preaching of Paul was surrounded by a myriad of bizarre faiths and devotions." There are also other signs. "By every serious reckoning the spell of politics and the political, strong since at least the seventeenth century, is fading. It is not simply a matter of growing disillusionment with government bureaucracy; fundamentally, it is declining faith in politics as a way of mind and life" (p. 356).

With politics fading as a religion, there could be a revival of supernatural religion. That, too, was basic to the replacement of the Roman empire by Christendom, although Nisbet never said this explicitly. Augustine did.

Nisbet was talking about a loss of faith in politics as a source of healing. He was talking about the loss of faith in messianic politics. It was clear by 1980 that what he had described three decades earlier in *The Quest for Community* was dying. The old totalitarianism was fading. The Soviet Union no longer had faith in the Communist future. By the time this book was published, China was going through the transformation that was begun in 1979 by Deng Xiaoping. The Chinese economy was being freed up in terms of individual ownership of the means of production: a most un-Marxist concept.

It is worth noting that 1980 was the year of truth for Soviet Communism. The Moscow Olympics brought rich Western people to Moscow. The leaders of the Soviet empire saw the suits and watches and shoes of the West. They saw that the highest positions of power in the USSR enabled you to look like a Russian bureaucrat. The Soviet leaders never recovered from that realization. At exactly the same time, the Solidarity movement began in Poland, launched by the discovery in a railroad yard that cans labeled "fish" being sent to Moscow were in fact cans of Polish ham. That marked the beginning of the Polish revolt. A year before, a Pole had become Pope Paul II. I like to think of all this as providential. Rival systems of religion and politics went to war against each other.

Also fading in 1980 was messianic politics. The idea that political change will produce some sort of social regeneration was no longer taken seriously by people in the West. Political campaigns invoke the word "hope." But the hope is not fulfilled. Political hope around the world has not been fulfilled. As this confidence in politics fades, something is going to replace it. That was what Nisbet saw as a real possibility in the West. More than this, he believed that, if this religious renewal does not take place in the West, then Western civilization will fade.

This had also been the view of Pitirim Sorokin a generation before Nisbet's book was published. Sorokin was the founder of the Department of Sociology at Harvard. In 1941, Sorokin's book appeared, *The Crisis of Our Age*. He called the worldview of modern man "sensate." If something cannot be touched and measured, it is thought to have no validity. Like Nisbet, he believed that it is not possible to maintain such an outlook without undermining civilization.

### D. Jacques Barzun's Warning

Jacques Barzun's academic influence was considerable. He lived a long time: from 1907 to 2012. His first book was published in 1927. His final book appeared in 2004. In 2000, his magnum opus appeared: *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the present: 500 years of Western Cultural Life*. Barzun was 93. This book is over 800 pages. I have never seen a one-volume book comparable to this one in terms of its consideration of the whole of Western culture, whether scientific, artistic, philosophical, moral, or political. The book is a tour de force.

Barzun was an intellectual giant. He was a history professor at Columbia University from 1928 to 1955. From 1955 to 1968, he was an administrator at Columbia. He was University Professor from 1968 to 1975. (Nisbet arrived in 1973.) Then he retired, with over 35 years to live. He continued to write in multiple fields throughout his career.

The layout of *From Dawn to Decadence* is odd. The chapters have no numbers. The final chapter is called "Demotic Life and Times." It speaks of the fourth social revolution in the West, which was set off in Russia in 1917–18. Leaders around the West pay lip service to the rule of the people. This is seen to be democratic. He believes that this outlook should be called demotic: of the people.

He believed that modern Western culture, as launched in the Renaissance, is coming to a close. He looked at style and society. He regarded style as individual and society as institutional. "The aims and desires of the two overlap but generally conflict—a small civil war, for it is of course individuals who decide to carry out the official demands that are challenged or resisted by other individuals" (p. 773) He summarized the final decades of the twentieth century. "The strongest tendency of the later 20C was Separatism. It affected all earlier forms of unity. The fact was noticed early in this book apropos of culture. The ideal of pluralism had disintegrated and separatism took its place; as one partisan of the new goal put it: 'Salad bowl is better than melting pot.' The melting pot had not eliminated all diversities; it had created a common core."

This is the heart of his book's thesis. "At the outset, separatism might have seemed a mood that would pass. But if one surveyed the Occident and the world as well, one could see that the greatest political creation of the West, the nation-state, was stricken" (p. 774). He then listed several exam-

ples of nations that are beginning to split apart. Scotland and Wales want separatism from Great Britain. The Basques want separatism from Spain. So do the Alsatians. Italy is culturally divided between North and South. Belgium is split by language differences. "Other forces worked to de-nationalize. Immigrants from far-off emancipated colonies brought into Europe alien languages and customs. They huddled separately in slum enclaves—a Turkish settlement here, an Algerian suburb there. France had an African village, complete with medicine man and ritual chants and dances. . . . Europe was experiencing again the grand confusion of the peoples that had occurred in the late Roman Empire and tapered off in the Middle Ages" (pp. 774–75).

This was not confined to Europe. Separatism is rampant all over the globe, he writes. India separated from British rule, and Pakistan separated from India. Then Bangladesh separated from Pakistan. The East Timorese almost destroyed Indonesia. "Wherever one looked—at Ireland, the Middle East, South America, Southeast Asia, all of Africa, the Caribbean, and the whole ocean speckled with islands, one would find a nation or would-be nation at war to win or prevent independence" (p. 775).

He asked this question: "What makes a nation?" He answered: "A large part of the answer to that question is: common historical memories. When the nation's history is poorly taught in schools, ignored by the young, and proudly rejected by qualified elders, awareness of tradition consists only in wanting to destroy it." Nisbet had made the same point two decades earlier.

As a kind of prophet, he announced: "The end is nigh!"

The end of the half millennium destroyed what the beginning had so painfully accomplished: put an end to feudal wars by welding together neighboring regions, assimilated foreign enclaves, set up strong kings over large territories, and done everything to foster loyalty to something larger than the eye could see. A common language, a core of historical memories with heroes and villains, compulsory public schooling and military service finally made the 19C nation-state the carrier of civilization.

Now all these elements were decaying and could not be restored (p. 776).

He came to the heart of the matter institutionally: the inability of the nation-state to reduce violence.



The main merit of the nation-state was that over its large territory violence had been reduced; nobles first and citizens later were subjected to one law uniformly recognized and applied. In the last years of the era of nations, violence returned; crime was endemic in the West. Assault in the home, the office, and on city streets was commonplace and particularly vicious. . . . The prisons themselves, far from exerting the full force of the law, were scenes of perpetual violence. Humane sentiment had made them less rigorous, almost comfortable while prisoners' rights multiplied. The inmates formed gangs that govern, overawing the guards and abusing their fellow prisoners sexually and otherwise; riots and escapes were frequent (p. 776).

America's public schools had become battlegrounds. He cited the figure of 50,000 incidents per year. "From their early years, pupils carried guns, assaulted each other, and on occasion committed little massacres by shooting into a group at random with a rapid-fire weapon" (p. 777). The nation-state's most important single function, its ability to reduce violence, was beginning to break down in the final decades of the twentieth century.

There was also another factor: the expansion of the welfare state.

The welfare ideal did not merely see to it that the poor should be able to survive, but that everybody should be safe and at ease in a hundred ways. Besides providing health care, pensions ("social security"), and workmen's compensation for accidents, it undertook to protect every employee by workplace regulations and every consumer by laws against harm from foods, drugs, and the multiform dangers that industry creates. All appliances were subject to design control and inspection. The citizen must moreover be protected from actions by others that are not visibly hostile or inherently criminal, those, for example, that can be committed by the imaginative in trade, investment, and banking.

At the same time, it was also held that the state had the duty of supporting art and science, medical research, and the integrity of the environment, while it also made sure the children were not simply literate but educated up to and through college— rules, rules, definitions, classifications, and exceptions—indignation—and litigation. The welfare state cannot avoid becoming the judiciary state (p. 777).



The cost of all this has grown ever larger. High taxes are unavoidable. So is waste. So is the administrative state.

As the welfare state needed a new bureau for every added program, the lack of men and women properly trained for the diverse operations was crippling. . . . Those appointed to man them improvised their procedures, and as legislation augmented, laid down rules that filled hundreds of pages, an impenetrable jungle for citizens and officials both. One reads of a new ordinance of 1999 issued by large city to control demolition for low-cost housing; the news report casually mentions that it comes on top of 56 others. Achieving some ordinary purpose was difficult and carrying through a large undertaking [was] impossible without help. The prosperous tribe of consultants, strong minds who had mastered one set of intricacies, enabled entrepreneurs armed with patience to attain their ends (pp. 778–79).

Society has become enormously complex. “As in the years before the French Revolution, demotic society had become labyrinthine” (p. 779). It is too complex for politicians and bureaucrats to regulate. Yet they keep trying. This creates disorder. This has led to a distrust of politicians. There has been an increase of contempt for politics. “Politics was a pejorative word; an endeavor or institution that was branded as politicized lost its virtue” (p. 779). This is exactly what Nisbet had concluded 20 years earlier. The erosion of faith in politics is endemic in modern society. The old belief of politics as a force for social salvation is fading.

Another area of agreement between Nisbet and Barzun was that modern society produces boredom (p. 788). This is extremely dangerous for the survival of any society. It leads to a near addiction to entertainment. It fosters professional sports. It loses itself in the meaninglessness of leisure time that is put to no productive use.

In the final section, Barzun wrote a hypothetical summary that might be written by some future observer. His comments on social organization are at the heart of his analysis. Here is how he assessed the characteristic features of the coming era.

As for social organization, the people were automatically divided into interest groups by their residence and occupation, or again by

some personal privilege granted for a social purpose. The nation no longer existed, superseded by regions, much smaller, but sensibly determined by economic instead of linguistic and historical unity. Their business affairs were in the hands of corporation executives whose view of their role resembled that of their medieval ancestors. Not the accumulation of territories but of companies and control over markets were their one aim in life, sanctified by efficiency (p. 800).

The moral anarchy complained of in the early days of the Interim rather suddenly gave way to a strict policing of everybody by everybody else. In time it became less exacting, and although fraud, corruption, sexual promiscuity, and tyranny at home or in the office did not disappear, these vices, having to be concealed, attracted only the bold or restless. And even they agreed that the veil is a sign not of hypocrisy but of respect for human dignity.

As for peace and war, the former was the distinguishing mark of the West and the rest of the world. The numerous regions of the Occident in America formed a loose confederation obeying rules from Brussels and Washington in concert; they were prosperous, law-abiding, overwhelming in offensive weaponry, and they had decided to let outside peoples and their factions eliminate one another until exhaustion introduced peaceableness into their plans (p. 801).

## Conclusion

Nisbet's book presented the case that the modern world is losing faith in the future. This cannot last, he said, because societies need to have faith in the future and faith in progress. He thought that there might be some kind of religious revival or renewal to reverse the pessimism of the present age. Barzun saw the same sorts of social processes that Nisbet did, especially the spread of boredom. He recognized that the West has moved from a period of dawn into a period of decadence. He understood that faith in the existing institutional structures was fading by the end of the twentieth century. He recognized that the rise of violence undermined the legitimacy of the modern nation-state.

The nation-state has rested on a series of promises. Nisbet and Barzun agreed: the state is failing to deliver the goods. This is undermining the

state's legitimacy, and it will eventually lead to political and social decentralization. That is another word for fragmentation. This will lead to greater liberty for some people and less liberty for others. It will almost certainly lead to greater economic productivity, as long as peace is maintained. Technology will continue to develop. Education will move out of the control of the state. There will be new ways of learning, new ways of organizing, new ways of delivering the goods.

Four decades after Nisbet's book was published, and two decades after Barzun's book was published, the world seemed to be headed in the direction that they predicted. Confirming this was the book by Martin Gurri, *The Revolt of the Public* (2014), which described the disintegrating effects of social media on national political orders around the world. The nation-state does look as though it will break up into smaller units.

Barzun believed that the humanistic culture that became increasingly dominant around 1500 is coming to an end. The historiography of the early twentieth century began to break with the optimistic historiography of the Renaissance. It also broke with the confidence that humanistic historians had in their ability to find out what had happened in the past, the confidence that began with Renaissance historiography. The historians' growing pessimism after 1920 regarding the ability of historians to understand the past matched the pessimism of the physicists regarding the future of mankind in a world governed by entropy.

## CONCLUSION TO PART 2

You have read the opinions of the Durants on the survival of the fittest in a meaningless world, Collingwood on the autonomous historian who imputes meaning to the unknowable past, Becker on a multitude of autonomous historians in a world of imputed meaning, Beard on history as an act of faith, not science, and Russell on cosmic entropy which destroys all meaning and purpose. This is the best that the best and the brightest humanists have come up with to defend the legitimacy of the study of history. Christian historians have nothing to fear from the philosophical challenges from humanist historians who deny the biblical structure of history.

The atheist philosopher Karl Popper wrote extensively on the philosophy of history. In 1945, in his book, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper spoke eloquently for modern humanism's concept of historical meaning. "History has no meaning, I contend. But this contention does not imply that all we can do about it is looking aghast at the history of political power, or that we must look on it as a cruel joke. For we can interpret it, with an eye to those problems of power politics whose solution we choose to attempt in our time. We can interpret the history of power politics from the point of view of our fight for the open society, for a rule of reason, for justice, freedom, equality, and for the control of international crime. Although history has no ends, we can impose these ends of hours upon it; and *although history has no meaning, we can get a meaning*" (Vol. II, p. 278). He spoke against the modern power state, but he spoke in the name of autonomous man, which means either the masses, who do not agree with each other, or else the modern power state. Man somehow will create the rule of reason, justice, freedom, equality, and the control of international crime. Problem: the control of international crime can only be accomplished through a one-world state with massive power to intervene across borders. This was his suggestion in his magnum opus on how to reduce the tyranny of modern political power. Popper wanted freedom, but he did not want God. He wanted meaning, but not God's imputation of meaning. He wanted man's imputation of meaning, but that has to mean collective man— an international government with the power to control crime.

Popper was not alone. In 1949, in a book titled *Meaning in History*, German philosopher Karl Löwith denied that there is any meaning in history. "Historical processes as such do not bear the least evidence of a comprehensive and ultimate meaning. History as such has no outcome. There never has been and never will be an immanent solution to the problem of history, for man's historical experience is one of steady failure. Christianity, too, as a historical *world* religion, is a complete failure" (p. 191). This is historical pessimism. This is not a rallying cry to attract dedicated disciples who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of a cause.

Humanist historians are not formally trained in any philosophy of history. There is no official philosophy of history in the profession. Historians rarely give any thought to such matters. They assume that they know what they are doing. They assume that they are doing the right thing, and they are doing it right. In terms of technical proficiency and creative imagination, a tiny percentage of them are doing things right. A tiny percentage of academics in every field have these abilities and put them to good use. This is a matter of God's common grace to them. But their technical skills are not the products of their self-conscious philosophy of history. They have no self-conscious philosophy of history.

But are they doing the right thing? No. They explain history in terms of their unstated presupposition of man's autonomy from God. They give mankind all of the credit for progress. But they have no agreed-on definition of progress, nor can they identify the permanent standards of progress. They assume that the only purposes in history are men's purposes. But this raises a problem. How are isolated historians able to establish how individuals' conflicting purposes combine to create a coherent story of the past? How do seemingly purposeless and impersonal social forces arise from autonomous purposes of mankind's multitudes? How does the unity that makes possible a civilization arise out of the many of humanity? How does this phrase come to pass in history: "out of many, one"?

Meanwhile, American college students are no longer interested in studying history. Few of them major in history. In the United States, a course in American history is required for graduation in many colleges. This course provides employment for history professors. If it were not required, professors would be fired or else, if tenured, not replaced when they retire. The once-required course in Western civilization is no longer required. History departments are shrinking. This appears to be an irreversible trend.

No one reads most of the arcane, narrowly focused articles in peer-reviewed professional journals. It is estimated that over 80% of journal articles published in the United States in the humanities are never cited by other scholars. (<https://bit.ly/ArticlesCited>) They get published, but they have no impact on anyone's thinking, let alone impact on the profession. The authors get credit for having published, and this will help when they seek a promotion, or more likely, keep their jobs when they might otherwise be fired because of declining enrollment in the department.

But they know that they have little impact on the thinking of their peers, let alone their students.

These are psychologically vulnerable people. They have no self-conscious philosophy of history. They have little impact on anyone's thinking, let alone behavior. The general public pays no attention to them. They are in an academic field that is shrinking. YouTube offers far better instructors free of charge. These online instructors, without Ph.D. degrees, reach millions of viewers. University professors are limited to talking among their peers. But they have a major problem. Their colleagues do not pay attention to them. Only the celebrity professors in the field persuade other historians to read their books and articles. They get paid fortunes to teach a handful of graduate students in a handful of prestigious universities. The rest of the members of the profession labor in well-deserved obscurity.

These conditions have created unprecedented opportunities for Christian historians to extend their influence at the expense of the classroom-based professors in obscure colleges and universities. New digital technologies that are free of charge for viewers to access enable creative, engaging history teachers to reach tens of thousands of viewers—and sometimes far more. Homeschooling also offers new audiences. Conventional academic historians are on the defensive. It never pays to rely on defense to win the contest. The best defense is a good offense.

It is time for Christian historians to go on the offensive. I offer suggestions for an offense-based strategy in Part 3.

# **Part 3**

## **Christian Historiography**





## **INTRODUCTION TO PART 3**

### **A. The Myth of Neutrality**

So far, I have presented a great deal of information regarding history and its interpretation. I have attempted to persuade you of two facts. First, history is not neutral, theologically speaking. I mean its actual structure. I covered this in Part 1. Second, humanistic historians are not neutral toward history and its structure. I covered this in Part 2.

Humanists ever since the fifth century B.C. have adopted some version of the myth of neutrality in order to promote their vision of God, man, law, sanctions, and time. Christian theologians and intellectuals have repeatedly been deceived by this myth. This has compromised their testimony regarding the God of the Bible and His impact in history. This has compromised their testimony in every field of thought and practice in which they have imported the myth of neutrality. This means virtually every field.

In Part 1, I discussed why history itself is not neutral. It is structured in terms of God's covenant with mankind in Genesis 1:26–28. Now it is time to discuss why historiography cannot be neutral. It cannot be neutral because history is not neutral. God expects men's historiography to be consistent with the covenantal structure of the processes of history. Men's historiography must reflect this fundamental underlying structure, which philosophers call metaphysical. Because of the presuppositions of humanism regarding the autonomy of history and the autonomy of man, humanist historiography is always in revolt against God. I discussed this in Part 2.

### **B. Creeds and Historiography**

I recommend a strategy for Christians to begin to reconstruct historiography: study the creeds of Christendom, especially the creed known as the Apostles Creed. It was not a creed written down by the apostles. It grew out of the church's Council of Nicaea in 325. There are numerous versions

of it stretching over centuries. This is called the received form.

I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen. (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, Author: James Orr )

In recommending that we begin with the creeds of the church in our attempt to understand the structure of history, I rely heavily on R. J. Rushdoony's pioneering book: *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (1968). I regard this book as indispensable for understanding early church history. It has been ignored by the academic community, the Christian intellectual community, and virtually all pastors. It helped structure my thinking when I read it in 1969, when I was beginning to research my doctoral dissertation on the economic thought of Puritan New England.

Chapter 1 is "The Apostles Creed and Creedalism." In this chapter, he set forth principles of Christian historiography. He started with this principle: creeds govern the way we think in every area of life. Everyone has a creed, either implicit or explicit. There is no neutrality in creeds. Creeds are inescapable concepts. There is no such thing as a creedless society. There is no such thing as a creedless individual. Most people are not self-conscious about their creeds, but they do have opinions regarding God, man, law, sanctions, and time. They have opinions about the way the world works.

Rushdoony made a crucial observation about the uniqueness of the Apostles Creed. I regard his comment as fundamental for a correct understanding Christianity and its impact on the world. The creed makes affirmations concerning history.

The Apostles Creed is unlike all other creeds of other religions, whether humanist, Buddhist, Modern, Hindu, or otherwise. The face of all the religions is in *a body of ideas or claims concerning re-*

*ality*. It may be a belief in the ultimacy of man, or the ultimacy of nothingness, in the office of a man (Mohammed as prophet), or an ultimate dualism or monism, but, in any event, it demands a belief in certain ideas or claims. The Apostles Creed is radically different: it offers a synopsis of history, created by God the Father Almighty, requiring salvation by Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, who entered, lived, died, and was resurrected in history, and is now the Lord and Judge of history. His holy congregation is operative in history, which culminates in the general resurrection and everlasting life. The whole creed therefore is *a declaration concerning history* (p. 4).

Rushdoony was not aware of the biblical covenant model in 1968. Ray Sutton's book was published in 1987. Yet, in 1968, he wrote clearly of the five principles undergirding the covenantal structure of history and historiography. He did not present them in the order found in the covenant model for history, but he did present them.

### ***Point 1: Creation***

Implicit in this declaration that God the Father Almighty is maker of heaven and earth is the claim of God to be the law-giver, determiner, and sustainer of heaven and earth and of all of history. He is its maker, and it is totally subject therefore to Him. An assertion of the doctrine of creation is also an assertion of the doctrines of sovereignty and of the eternal decree, of predestination (p. 5).

### ***Point 2: Image***

If God is the true source [of law], then the Word of God must be hearkened to by church, state, school, and every sphere of life as the one authoritative source of morality and law. As institutions and orders declare law, they must do it ministerially, as administrators under God. The Word of God therefore speaks to every sphere including church and state, and the Word of God is *over* the church and corrects and disciplines the church (p. 5).

### ***Point 3: Law***

The Creed thus has vast implications concerning history because of its declaration that God is the creator of all things. This dec-

laration immediately makes God the source of all ethics, of all morality, and of all law. In all non-Christian systems, the source of ethics and of law is the state; it is the *polis*, the empire, or the kingdom. There is no understanding the gulf between Aristotle and Plato, for example, and Christianity, apart from this fact, and the gulf cannot be legitimately bridged. Either God is the true source of morality and law, or the state is (p. 5).

#### ***Point 4: Imputation***

History is a succession of judgments, wherein God comes in clouds of judgment, and all these crises and judgments are for the shaking of the nations, to destroy the reprobate realms of man and to establish by sifting Christ's faithful in His realm. As God declared through Ezekiel, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until he, whose right it is; and I will give it to him" (Ezek. 31:27). The purpose of this overturning, according to St. Paul, is "the removing of the things that are shaken as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12:27). The successive judgments have as their purpose the removal of destruction "of all things that are made," i.e., of the humanistic and apostate orders of history, so that Christ's kingdom which cannot be shaken may remain." These are all partial judgments, forerunners to the final judgment (p. 172).

#### ***Point 5: Inheritance***

Not only a theology, but an eschatology, or doctrine of last things, which renounces history or sees it as defeat, is faithless to Christianity. God is maker of heaven and earth, not Satan. History culminates in God's plan and triumph, not in Satan's victory. To the extent that any eschatology involves the victory of evil in history, to that extent it surrenders and retreats from history (p. 5).

### **B. Church and State**

There is a war going on between church and state. The church claims to represent God in history, although not as the sole interpreter of God's word and law. Christianity has always acknowledged the separation of church and

state. But the state has not acknowledged the legitimacy of such a separation except when pressured to do so by a strong church. The war between church and state extends back to the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. (I cover this in my commentary on Exodus, Volume 1: *Representation and Dominion*, [2012].)

Christian historiography must recognize the existence of this continual confrontation between Christianity and the humanist state. The absence of a clear-cut exposition of this conflict in history is characteristic of humanist historiography. Unfortunately, it is also characteristic of most Christian historiography. Christian historians do not return again and again to the confrontations between church and state throughout history. They do not regard this confrontation as inherent to history because of the war of the two views of history. Rushdoony made clear the nature of this confrontation. He did so in the chapter on the church.

The more faithful the Church, the greater its visibility, i.e., the more clearly its witness to the word and power of Christ in this world. But the true church is not alone in claiming visibility, and claiming to be the visible representative of Christ's invisible order. The state claims its own kind of visibility; the state sees itself as the visible expression of the true order of man, and, sometimes also, of whatever gods may be. It then becomes a contest, *first*, as to who represents God's true order, and, *second*, what is the order which is to be represented.

The humanistic order strives for visibility, *first*, as the dominant force in man's society, as the omnipresent fact on the human scene, and, *second*, as the new order of salvation. Accordingly, man's dominant concern in the era of humanism is political, since politics is the area where the hidden deity becomes visible. The 19th century was thus the era of political visibility; the religion of most men tended increasingly to become political. "Democracy" as the hope of the world found its culminating messianic expression in Woodrow Wilson's dream of making the world safe for democracy by war and diplomacy (p. 181).

Church and state have separate legal jurisdictions. They also have separate systems of law. There is civil law, but there is also canon law, which governs the church. Canon law has a long tradition in the West, yet Christian

historiography has generally ignored it. There are no detailed treatises of the historical development of canon law, and especially there are no discussions of the impact of canon law on the church in its development of the principles of Christian civilization. We do not have detailed studies of the interaction between civil law and canon law in confrontations between church and state for domination in society in the West. We need such studies.

In his chapter on canon law, Rushdoony set forth a coherent framework for any discussion of canon law in relationship to civil law. With respect to canon law, he wrote:

The independence of the church required it. Political absolutism, however, then as now, has been hostile to canon law. Instead of the multiple law orders, and multiple variety of courts, which characterized the era of Christian feudalism, absolutism in the state has worked steadily to reduce all human society to one law-order, the state. Every other realm must be subjected to the state rather than to God: the church, economics, science, education, agriculture, the arts, all things are made aspects of the life of the state (rather than of man under God) and therefore under the government of the state (p. 133).

There is a logic behind this. Rushdoony described it: “The supposition of the state in its absolutism is twofold. *First*, by asserting overall sovereignty and jurisdiction, the state is usurping the power and prerogative of God. The state makes itself the ultimate creator and lawgiver rather than God. *Second*, the state declares itself to be the true man as well as the true god. Every God-given aspect of the life of man, the state declares both to be its creation and also an aspect of its life” (p. 133).

### **C. Western Liberty**

Rushdoony’s chapter on the Council of Chalcedon (451) is titled: “The Foundation of Western Liberty.” The Council of Chalcedon’s focus of concern was the question of the unique divinity of Christ. It produced this declaration:

Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ is to us One and the same Son, the Self-

same Perfect in Godhead, the Self-same Perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man; the Self-same of a rational soul and body; co-essential with the Father according to the Godhead, the Self-same co-essential with us according to the Manhood; like us in all things, sin apart; before the ages begotten of the Father as to the Godhead, but in the last days, the Self-same, for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin Theotokos as to the Manhood; One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis; not as though He was parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as from the beginning the prophets have taught concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hath taught us, and as the Symbol of the Fathers hath handed down to us.

Most Christians have never heard of the Council of Chalcedon. They have certainly never read what you have just read. When they read it, they do not ask this question: "What has this to do with Western liberty?" Rushdoony made it clear exactly what this had to do with Western liberty. This declaration was a denial of the possibility of the divinity of man or of any agency of man. This declaration is as important today as it was in 451. He wrote:

The problem centered on the definition of the two natures of Christ and their union. Behind the problem stood the resurgence of Hellenic philosophy in Christian guise and the claims of the state to be the divine order on earth, to be *the* incarnation of divinity in history. The Hellenic faith held to a radically different concept of being than did biblical faith. The Christian distinction between the uncreated being of God and the created being of man and the universe placed an infinite gulf between the two, a gulf unbridgeable by nature and bridged only by grace, by grace of the salvation and by grace permitting a union or community of life, not of substance. For the Greeks, as for non-Christian religions generally, all being is one undivided being; the differences in be-

ing are of degree, not of kind. In this great chain of being, it is a question of place on the scale or ladder of being, whereas for Christian faith the difference is one of divine and uncreated being as against created and mortal being.

In terms of this Greek perspective, salvation is not an act of grace but rather of self-deification. Moreover, the central institution in history becomes the state, because the state as the highest point in power in history maintains the nascent or incarnate divinity of being either in the body politic, the rulers, or in their offices. In various forms, this faith was the substructure of all pagan statism. Thus, the issue very literally was one between Christ and Caesar (pp. 63–64).

I am aware of no textbook on the history of Western civilization that is written self-consciously in terms of the theological conflict between humanism and Christianity. There is no textbook that describes the creeds and councils of the early church as setting forth the principles of Western liberty. Obviously, we cannot find textbooks written by humanists that explain this. The problem is that we cannot find textbooks written by Christians that explain this.

Chalcedon challenged more than humanistic political theory. It challenged non-Christian views of the structure of history. "Statist theology however demands that time govern eternity, and man govern whatever god exists, or, better, be his own god. Any theology which weakens the Definition of Chalcedon weakens the primacy of the triune God over history, and any theology which denies Chalcedon must of necessity to affirm history as the primary area of determination. Time then alone is the source of the historical, and the supernatural is denied" (p. 75).

Any denial of Chalcedon's declaration goes beyond weakening the primacy of the triune God. It is a denial of the divinity of Christ. "God the Son not only does not determine time in history, He is denied historicity because He demands reference to the ontological Trinity, to eternity, to be understood. The only Christ permitted is a totally human Christ, one totally immersed in time and exclusively and totally a product of history. This is 'the historical Jesus' of higher criticism. 'Demythologizing' criticism has a similar goal: to reduce Jesus to history, to a total meaning from within history" (p. 75).



Few Christians understand the nature of the comprehensive challenge to Christ's divinity by humanism. Is also a challenge to biblical ethics. Here is the issue: "A God who is not the creator is an alien to the universe: it is its own evolving law. A God who is truly the savior of the world is of necessity its creator: He has made it, and its only possible health is in the restoration to communion with Him. His law therefore as the only truly regulative principle for the world" (p. 77). "Sovereignty, duty, and law are inseparably united. The source of law in any system is not only the locale of sovereignty but also the god of that system. God only is the true sovereign and the true source of law" (p. 77).

Chalcedon's declaration made it clear that Jesus Christ has two natures: divine and human. As the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ was God, but His perfect human nature was not divine. Man did not become God. This declaration was crucial for the maintenance of liberty. "To have permitted belief in the confusion of the natures would have meant that man could become an aspect of his own God, aspire to be, in his union with Christ, his own lawmaker and co-creator. Humanity would have been introduced into deity, not in a community of life but in a community of substance" (p. 78).

Thus, he concluded, "In the Christian view, man's life is not comprehended by the state; it is comprehended only by the triune God. Man's unity is only truly realizable in God and His Kingdom; man's individuality is again only realizable in and through God. This means that man's eternal destiny is a predestined one and bound to the grace of the ultimate One and Many, the Trinity. But it also means that man's present life is freed from the predestination of the state. Man's self-realization is not in the state but in God" (p. 79).

## **Conclusion**

With this as background, I now discuss Christian historiography. Christians must be self-conscious in their understanding of the comprehensive warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. This understanding must govern what Christians think about every area of life. They should be alert to the invasion by humanism and the categories of humanism into their thinking in every area of life.

Christian historiography must be comprehensive. It must reconstruct the history of man in terms of the battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. Who is Lord? Who is sovereign? Christians must

be clear in their answer. This means that they must also be clear in their discussion of history. They must understand history in terms of this covenantal warfare. Sadly, they have not been given guidance in this battle by Christian leaders. Self-conscious Christians who understand the nature of this warfare are rare. Therefore, most Christians have been guided by Christian leaders who have been confused about the comprehensive nature of the confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. Christian historians have rewritten history in ways that make it more humanistic in tone and content than Christian. Christian historians in their writing ignore God. They do not mention the providence of God. They ignore the laws of God. They ignore the structure of historical sanctions that God announced to the generation of the conquest.

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:10–18).

Christians today have eaten and are full. In every area of life, they have begun to forget the God whose sanctions have blessed them. They have offered thanks to modern science, modern politics, and modern economics for their blessings. It is time for Christians to rethink sovereignty, authority,

law, sanctions, and time in terms of the biblical covenant. It is time for them to become highly suspicious of history as interpreted by covenant-breakers. It is time for them to adopt biblical historiography.

# 11

## STORIES

*And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped (Exodus 12:24–27).*

### A. Covenantal Model, Part 1

Point 1 of the biblical covenant model is God's transcendence, which also includes His presence.

Point 1 of biblical social theory is sovereignty.

Point 1 of biblical historiography is the telling of stories about the past that manifest God's sovereignty in history.

### B. The Limits of Memory

Memory is basic to success in life. For most people, it is a weak link. Most people have poor memories. They recall bits and pieces of the past. Neither they nor psychologists understand how memory works. Specialists can train their memories to accomplish prodigious feats, but these feats are more in the nature of competitive games than aids to help the performers perform their jobs and callings more efficiently. The main mental technique tool of these specialists for millennia has been to imagine a room in which the performer has placed mental images of a series of items that he then links to a series of facts he is trying to recall—facts that are normally unrelated to the images. He places these items in a particular order. (Frances

Yates wrote a 1966 book on the history of this ancient technique: *The Art of Memory*.) This is not how most people recall the past.

A Christian historian's most important task is to help God's people recognize and then trust the sovereignty of God in history. This sovereignty is manifested in His deliverance of His people, individually and corporately, out of the pretended sovereignty of Satan. Satan's sovereignty is manifested in history by means of the authority of the kingdom of man. *Covenantal warfare is primarily an ethical struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man.* Bible stories are tools to help God's people understand the nature of this struggle. The Bible is mostly a series of stories about struggles between representatives of God's kingdom and the rival kingdoms. God's covenant people learn about His sovereignty in history through Bible stories. Stories are easier to remember than long chains of reasoning. The Bible offers no long chains of reasoning. It offers epistles: theological commentaries on the Bible's stories and also on the Bible's revealed laws. These commentaries have been used by theologians to produce books filled with long chains of reasoning, but most Christians do not read these books. Before there were printed books, most Christians did not know about the discipline of theology. That intellectual discipline was the responsibility of bishops and literate bureaucrats under their authority, plus—after 1100—university professors. Even today, when Christians read a book on theology, a month later (or less), they do not remember the book's long chains of reasoning. At best, they remember a few points, but they cannot explain how they are connected.

In contrast is the Bible. The Bible offers long lists of laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. It offers this message: *the centrality of ethics in history.* Ethics is built on the authority of these laws, which in turn are enforced by God's sanctions, positive and negative, in response to people's obedience or disobedience to these laws (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28). Biblical history is structured in terms of this pattern: the transition from grace to wrath, followed by the transition from wrath to grace. My book offers this thesis: the transition from wrath to grace applies to all history, not just Bible history.

If my thesis is correct, then a Christian historian has this three-part task. First, he reads other historians' publications in search of stories that reveal this pattern in a specific narrative. Because most historians have been humanists, they did not see this pattern, but their narratives may reveal traces of it. Second, he does detailed research to identify or disprove the pattern.

He examines primary source documents for evidence of the pattern. He also examines additional historians' accounts. Third, he rewrites the humanists' narratives to make clear what the covenantal issues were, and how they affected the outcome of the story.

## **C. The Five-Point Structure of History's Pattern: Genesis 1–3**

### ***1. Capital***

Genesis 1:1–25 is the story of God's creation of the world prior to mankind. Because God is personal, the world reflects this. God was purposeful. He had a plan. The plan had standards. God repeatedly announced that His work had been good. The story of this creation day sequence affirms cosmic personalism. This is the context of God's creation of man.

God provided enormous capital for mankind. This was evidence of His grace. What is grace? It is a gift undeserved by the recipient. This gift included laws governing nature. These laws were tools of dominion for anyone who understood them. They provided cosmic regularity, which was part of a system of cause and effect.

This grant of capital would soon serve mankind as an inheritance from God. It was inheritance to mankind. Inheritance is always twofold: inheritance from and inheritance to. *Inheritance from* begins with life: life itself. *Inheritance to* extends after death. The Bible's phrase for this process is this: *the death of the testator*. "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Hebrews 9:16–17).

How is this a model for Christian historiography? A Christian historian should begin his narrative with background information that provides the context of the covenantal conflict of his narrative. This is the historical context. It is the context for individuals and institutions.

### ***2. Assignment***

God had a plan: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over

the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (v. 26). The plan was two-fold. First, He would grant mankind life. Second, He would give mankind an assignment: *exercise dominion*. The whole world would be men’s realm of authority. It would be their inheritance.

Next, God implemented His plan. He provided the next gift to mankind: life. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (v. 27). Covenantally, this was given to both Adam and Eve. Chronologically, it was given first to Adam, but before the day was over, God had given him Eve.

Next, they had to develop the capital. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (v. 28). This defined mankind: exercising dominion. This required labor. Labor was not cursed.

Next, God gave them the right to the fruits of their labor. “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so” (vv. 29–30). This provided economic motivation for them to exercise dominion. This was a positive sanction. Conclusion: Capital/inheritance must be developed. God expects humanity to increase its dominion. The value of the capital/inheritance is supposed to increase over time. Men are stewards for God.

How is this a model for Christian historiography? It offers a theory of progress. (See Chapter 5) It is mandatory for mankind to increase the value of God’s domain. Mankind has the ability to do this. A Christian historian should identify those areas of life in any historical era and geographical region that experienced advancement. Then he should look for explanations for this advancement. Advancement is normative morally. History is not cyclical. It is linear. It is also progressive. The mark of history’s progressive structure is the increased value of the inheritance over time: point 1 (grace) to point 5 (inheritance).

### 3. *Boundaries*

God announced a boundary in Genesis 2: “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (vv. 15–17). Adam and Eve had almost the whole world as their inheritance. Only one small portion of the garden was not theirs. They were obligated to respect this boundary.

This was a matter of property rights. They were not to steal (commandment 8). In the Decalogue, this was the third law in the second, kingly, series of five. (The first five commandments are priestly.) This indicates that this tree was marked off by God’s name, which was sacred (commandment 3). This was the third law in the first, priestly, series of five. The priestly status of the tree indicated that it had a special legal status. It was the place for a covenantal meal. Access was closed to all humans who did not have the mark of saving grace: immunity from death. Immunity from death was available to mankind only through a communion meal at the tree of life.

This boundary was the first covenantal law governing mankind. To it was attached a negative sanction: death. This is why the dominion covenant was a covenant. It had positive sanctions associated with one boundary: almost the whole earth. It had a negative sanction associated with the other boundary: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree was sacred: separated by God by law. This boundary was holy space: separated by God for covenantal purposes. To violate this space was to commit sacrilege—a profane act.

How is this a model for Christian historiography? A Christian historian should look for major ethical issues that are associated with sacred space or sacred office. Who violated them? What were the consequences? Who honored them? What were the consequences? In this sense, Christian history is covenantal.

In a broader sense, all of man’s history is covenantal because of ethics. Most laws in the Bible are not associated with holy space. The same is true of all history. But all biblical laws are covenantal. They impose boundaries. To them are attached sanctions. If covenantal authorities—individuals, family heads, church officers, and civil magistrates—do not impose neg-



ative sanctions on individuals who break the laws, then God will impose negative sanctions on individuals and the derelict institutions. A Christian historian should look for this pattern of covenantal sanctions.

Genesis 1 (capital) and 2:15–17 (law) are the theological foundation for this theological principle: *grace precedes law*. The first story in the Bible provides information regarding this theological principle. This story is not part of a long chain of reasoning. This is why you may remember it.

#### 4. Performance

Genesis 2 is the story of Adam's apprenticeship in the garden. God guided him in naming the animals. Adam performed well. God gave Eve to him. This established the family, as Adam announced on his authority: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (vv. 23–24). Adam had begun to speak as a law-giver. He did not violate God's authority in making this announcement. He was learning how to do applied theology.

Genesis 3 is the story of Adam's journeyman status as a guardian of Eve and the garden. It was also the story of Eve's obedience as a wife and as a guardian of the garden. (If Eve was alone with the serpent, she was acting as a journeyman. If Adam was present, she was an apprentice.) They both had greater authority than they had in Genesis 2. God was physically absent.

They violated God's law by eating from the forbidden tree. Then their eyes were opened regarding their nakedness. This was their first experience of knowing good and evil. They sewed together fig leaves to make aprons to cover their nakedness. This was their first response to sin: *self-salvation*. They did not eat from the tree of life, although it was available to them. They were still not afraid of God's promised negative sanction: death.

God returned. He first observed the setting: missing journeymen. He then conducted an investigation. He conducted a trial. He interrogated them in order to learn the truth. He asked: what, where, when, who, why, and how? Then He promised further negative sanctions: for Eve (childbearing), for Adam (thorns), and for both of them: death (dust to dust).

How is this a model for Christian historiography? A Christian historian should look for anomalies in the accepted historiography. As with Adam's

absence, something will be missing. He must then conduct an investigation. He must ask questions: what, where, when, who, why, and how? He must seek answers from the primary source documents, but also from other historians' narratives. What are their explanations?

### *5. Inheritance*

God did not execute them that day. Instead, he showed grace to them. First, He promised them descendants: Eve's childbearing. Second, He promised them meaningful work: Adam's work in the fields. Adam would have to subdue thorns. Third, He began to fulfill these promises by providing animal skins to protect them (v. 21). This was grace: gifts unmerited by the recipients.

Because of the negative sanctions, they would have to work harder to pass on a greater inheritance to their descendants. As an economist would say, there would be less output per unit of resource input. (Economists use strange phrases to describe simple relationships.) Dominion would be more difficult. This would be a feature of the transition from wrath to grace. To put it theologically, it would take common grace (life and productivity) to provide the context of special grace (eternal life). But this was also true in Genesis 1. What was different after Genesis 3 was that eternal life required special grace. Prior to Genesis 3, eternal life required only a covenant meal at the tree of life.

How is this a model for Christian historiography? A Christian historian should investigate any increase of capital in a society during one historical period. He should ask these questions. To what extent was this increase the result of covenant-breakers applying their main ethical principles? What were these principles? To what extent was this increase the result of covenant-keepers applying their main ethical principles? What were these principles? To what extent did covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers share the same ethical principles? Here are underlying questions. First, to what extent did common grace preserve a society or even allow it to increase its influence? Second, to what extent was this common grace the result of either covenant-breakers or covenant-keepers? Third, did the society maintain its commitment to the shared ethical principles that maintained common grace? If so, why? If not, why not? If it abandoned these common ethical principles, what happened in the next chronological period?

## D. Constructing the Story

### 1. Theme

Every story needs a theme. The theme provides a message. This message requires a chronological structure. The story has a beginning and an end. The end is consistent with the system of causation that undergirds the theme. *This system of causation is the essence of the theme.* Without it, there can be no theme.

The Bible's theme is simple: the transition from grace to wrath, followed by the transition from wrath to grace. This theme is conveyed by a series of personal stories. At the heart of the theme is a series of trials: God's trial of Adam and Eve, His trial of Cain, the Sanhedrin's trial of Jesus, Pilate's trial of Jesus, the Sanhedrin's trial of the apostles, the Sanhedrin's trial of Stephen, the Roman court's trial of Paul, and God's trial of humanity at the last judgment. We should also add covenant-keepers' trial of fallen angels, but there are no details.

Time is scarce. Do not waste the listeners' time. Therefore, a story should be memorable. Its theme should be memorable, and several of the theme's illustrating characters and incidents should be memorable.

A Christian historian should not waste his time investigating any events that are unlikely to lend themselves to the narration of a story with at least one major theme. Some trends are general, and can be used to establish context. There may be causation, but if this causation is not visibly covenantal, then the Christian historian should select a different topic. Life is short, and the number of stories revealing covenantal causation is huge.

### 2. Questions

I have described these six questions in terms of God's trial of Adam, Eve, and the serpent. They are questions regarding personal responsibility. I have summarized these six questions: what, where, when, who, why, and how? Any historian who provides plausible answers to all six has done yeoman service. If he can tell this story accurately, clearly, and persuasively in the time that an audience will grant him to tell the story, he has done well.

It is far easier to answer questions about deceased historical figures than it is to answer questions about seemingly impersonal trends. I regard

the most important historical question over the last two millennia is this: “What produced the Industrial Revolution, with its per capita economic growth of 2% per annum for over two centuries?” The Industrial Revolution changed the world more than anything else in recorded history, and it did so in just three generations—if you pick the right family. That family is the family of John Tyler, who became President of the United States in 1841. He was born in 1790, the first full year of President George Washington’s first term as the first President. His grandson Lyon Tyler died in October 2020. His other grandson, Harrison Tyler (b. 1928), is still alive as I write this (October 2021). There are at least three dozen explanations that economic historians have offered to explain this. Each of them is refuted by Prof. Dierdre McCloskey in *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can’t Explain the Modern World* (2010).

### 3. *Structure*

Telling a story requires structure: words put together in a specialized way. The words must hold the attention of a listener or a reader. To do this, the narrator must provide markers that convey to the reader that the story is progressing in a coherent way. A disjointed structure produces confusion. Listeners’ attention will drift.

The narrator faces boundaries. The main one is the boundary of time that the targeted listener or reader is willing to donate to the narrator. The second is the boundary of memory. People have weak memories. Most of what they hear in a lecture is forgotten within 48 hours. About 95% is forgotten in a week. So, the story’s markers must serve the purpose of providing hooks onto which the listener can “hang” his memory. This is a variation of what Yates described as the art of memory: a mental room wherein memory-triggering items are placed sequentially. The narrative must substitute for the room.

### 4. *Lesson*

A Christian storyteller’s goal should be to convey an ethical lesson. This lesson should serve as a model for judging people and events. The standards of judgment are mainly ethical. There are other standards, such as aesthetic standards. But there is no formula for aesthetic standards. There is no

known biblical formula. “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” This does not mean that beholders cannot accurately judge beauty. There are beauty contests in many nations. The finalists in any nation would find widespread agreement from men in other nations. Men know which women are beautiful, and women also know. But they cannot explain this in agreed-upon ways, other than a few characteristics, such as weight.

Stories in the Bible are structured ethically. They provide lessons regarding right and wrong. They have a judicial function. They were designed by God to train covenant-keepers in the principles of justice, climaxing in their judging of fallen angels after the final judgment of humanity.

### **5. Vision**

The listeners should gain a renewed vision of victory after hearing a story. The story should supplement stories of successes by Christians in extending the kingdom of God. The models for such stories are stories about foreign missionaries. These stories contain sub-themes of the organizations they set up, or their successors set up. These stories include discussions of life-and-death decisions, cultural conflicts, worldview conflicts, educational programs, fund-raising, getting out the story of the missions to supporters, past successes, new challenges, and plausible prospects for further success. Histories of foreign missions are not taken seriously by most academic historians, who see them as recruiting and fund-raising tools. I take them seriously because they are recruiting and fund-raising tools. A history presentation whose ultimate goal is not successful evangelism is a waste of time. The goal should be to persuade covenant-breakers to switch confessions. To do this, an army of evangelists who believe in comprehensive redemption must be recruited and trained. The Bible proclaims such a vision. (See Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission*, 1992.) So should Christian histories.

## **E. Historiography and Discipleship**

### **1. Mission**

This is a common feature of leadership in all areas of Christian dominion. Every Christian has been given a commission by Christ: “Go ye there-

fore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19–20).

In my book, *The Five Pillars of Biblical Leadership* (2021), I identify point 1 as mission. The four other points are these: service, teamwork, mastery, and inheritance. All of these apply to the Christian historian.

A Christian historian’s mission is to explain the details of the biblical framework of history: the transition from wrath to grace. Christian historiography must reflect and represent the five points of the biblical structure of history: the providence of God, the image of God in men, biblical ethics, God’s imputation of meaning to all facts, and progressive cultural inheritance. Progressive cultural inheritance is the parallel development of the two kingdoms, God’s and man’s (Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43).

I have argued that people remember stories better than they remember long chains of reasoning. Therefore, a Christian historian serves as a practical theologian. He has a prophetic function. (See Chapter 12B). He brings his theology to his research. His historiography should reflect this theology. There is no theological neutrality. There is therefore no historiographical neutrality.

His initial mission is to teach Christians what Christ told the disciples. This must include the Old Testament, as interpreted by the New Testament’s epistles. The Old Testament is mainly stories. This is how he should teach. He should recognize that historians are in a better position to teach Christians how to apply Christ’s principles than any other profession, except for pastors. They teach this by showing how Christians in the past applied them, or failed to apply them, with what results.

## **2. Audiences**

A Christian historian must first decide who his audiences will be. He should tailor his presentations in terms of specific audiences. He represents God to these audiences. This is an aspect of point 2 of biblical leadership: service.

He should research each topic comprehensively. He should over-research the topic in terms of the needs of multiple audiences. His goal should be to present his findings to more than one audience. Not to do this is to

waste research time. The most difficult part of the historian's task is to identify the applications of the five principles of biblical history to a specific society or person. This takes creativity. Then he must do the research necessary to draw conclusions. This takes time. The product of this mixture of asking questions and getting answers is a body of conclusions. He must then package these conclusions for separate audiences.

He must recognize the limits of knowledge in each group. Overcoming these limits in most groups is challenging. This is the context of his task. This is the capital he must work with. His God-given task is to increase the value of this capital for use in the kingdom of God. This is human capital. He must make covenant-keepers more productive. Above all, he must help them become better judges. (See Chapter 14.)

He must decide how he will get his lessons to members of each audience. This is the question of media. He must estimate how much time they will give him for each lesson. This varies in terms of media: viewing time vs. reading time. Then he must estimate the size of his budget for marketing. He has to have a marketing plan. On this point, I quote Mac Ross, a marketing genius in the late twentieth century. "If you build a better mousetrap, but you do not set aside money for marketing, you will die alone and broke with a garage full of mousetraps." If you have no money for marketing, then invest more time in marketing strategies that do not require up-front money: YouTube, Kindle Direct books, social media, and a blog.

### *3. Message*

For a Christian historian, the message of each lesson must be this: the effects of covenant-keeping in history, compared to the effects of covenant-breaking. He identifies a historical story as an example of this message. This story illustrates and reinforces the message. The story is designed to help Christians understand God's providence in history: the transition from wrath to grace.

His story has boundaries. It has chronological boundaries. It has boundaries of responsibility: individual and institutional. Specific individuals and organizations represent movements. (See Chapter 12.) A handful of movements shape history. A handful of trends shape history. A Christian historian should identify the importance of various trends by means of the covenantal structure of history. The key issue is ethics: point 3 of the biblical covenant.

#### ***4. Commitment***

A Christian historian, because he is an evangelist with a prophetic function, must design his presentation to persuade listeners of the truth regarding the providential nature of past. He uses stories to persuade people.

Accurate knowledge is necessary but not sufficient in the Christian life. Accurate knowledge must shape action. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:22–25). This rule applies to the results of historiography. It is not sufficient to teach people about God’s providential control in the past. They must also believe that God’s providence applies to their circumstances.

This narration requires persuasion. This is not just persuasion that God’s providence shapes history by means of Christians’ faithfulness to His laws. It is persuasion regarding the requirement of each hearer of the historical stories to obey God in order to exercise dominion.

#### ***5. Hope***

The stories should persuade listeners of the reliability of God’s covenant in providing the basis of progress in history. (See Chapter 15.) They should offer hope. “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). So, this should be the motivation of a Christian historian: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus announced that He was the fulfilment of this verse. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19).



If a story ends in defeat for covenant-keepers, a Christian historian's work is not complete. He should continue to write until the defeat is visible as a victory. Some stories in the Old Testament reveal defeats for covenant-keepers. The story of Joseph is such a story. Joseph announced the biblical principle of interpretation: a hermeneutic. "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20). The story of Job also reflects this. "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses" (Job 42:12).

There is also another consideration. In a war, there are necessary casualties. "And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Joshua 7:3–5). The New Testament model for this is the crucifixion of Jesus. Then came the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). The theme of temporary defeat is basic to the story of the transition from wrath to grace.

## Conclusion

If Christian historians follow these procedures, they will produce stories that replace the prevailing humanistic stories. Humanists have no self-conscious theory of history. It is not taught in humanist institutions. They have no theory of the structure of Christian historiography. They are not good at persuading the general public. The sanctions within history departments militate against persuading the public. The sanctions favor persuading editors of peer-reviewed journals, meaning committees.

Until Christian historians regard their callings as God-given, they will not be successful in competing against an army of humanists in tax-funded schools. They will not persuade Christians in churches. Academic Christian historians are not ready for covenantal warfare. They have been in retreat since 1500.

The five-point model for historiography provides the structure for writing historical stories: capital, assignment, boundaries, performance, and inheritance. It offers a theory of telling a story: theme, questions, structure, lesson, and vision. It is a tool of discipleship: mission, audiences, message, commitment, and hope. None of this is taught in Christian schools. Christian historians are unaware of it. They also have no Bible-based theory of the structure of history to rival the assumed but unspoken structure that govern humanists. I surveyed the correct theory in Part 1. So, they lose by default.

Meanwhile, the competing historical narratives presented by humanists are increasingly divided. They have no agreed-on theory of world history. They have no agreed-on theory of how to interpret documents. They have no theory of how the autonomous historian can make sense of the past. There is no agreement on the existence of an objective past.

The humanists are vulnerable. The problem is this: Christian historians are not ready to replace the humanists. They are not self-confident. They do not have an alternative agenda. They cannot beat something with nothing. In the next four chapters, I hope to provide them with four more stones. David picked up five stones to do battle with Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40). I think the first stone, which you have just read, would be sufficient. But historians must know how to use a sling to make the stone deadly to the enemy. That sling is Christian education.

# 12

## REPRESENTATION

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:18–20).*

### A. Covenant Model, Point 2

Point 2 of the biblical covenant model is hierarchy: God over man over the creation. Adam represented God to the creation. He represented the creation to God.

Point 2 of biblical social theory is authority, which is delegated to man by God.

Point 2 of Christian historiography is representation. This has to do with a judicial office: trusteeship. It has to do with speaking God's word authoritatively in His name.

### B. Christian Historiography as Prophetic

Jesus' command to the disciples is known in Christian circles as the Great Commission. These are marching orders for the church. Jesus announced them, and Christians are supposed to obey them.

The first command is to go and teach all nations. This means all peoples. This means every group across the face of the earth. Second, this is a command to teach the whole world about the church covenant, since it involves baptism, the New Covenant's mark of covenantal membership in the church. Baptism is an oath sign of the New Covenant, as Meredith Kline demonstrated in Chapter 5 of his book, *By Oath Consigned* (1972). Third, this is a command to teach the whole world about the God of the Bible, who

is a Trinity. Fourth, this is a command to teach about ethics: whatever Jesus commanded the disciples.

It is not possible to teach people about who Jesus was, what He commanded, what His church is, and what baptism means unless you teach the history of Jesus as found in the four Gospels. You must also teach what is found in the Book of Acts and the epistles. When you bring the message of salvation to someone, you are bringing the story of the history of Jesus' ministry. You also bring the history of Israel prior to A.D. 70. You also bring the story of the creation of the world and the developments of history up until the calling of Abram. In short, it is not possible to bring the gospel of salvation without simultaneously bringing the history of that gospel. The gospel developed over time. The gospel developed as part of the general development of history: the transition from wrath to grace.

This means that the evangelist is inescapably an historian. I argue that the reverse is also true. A Christian historian is inherently and inescapably an evangelist. He brings the message of the transition from wrath to grace. This is the history of the gospel. It is not possible to understand the gospel without understanding its history. It is also not possible to understand the gospel without the commentaries found in the epistles. There is an inescapable and unbreakable link between the facts of New Testament history and the interpretation of these facts by the epistles.

A Christian historian does not select, research, interpret, and teach history correctly if he ignores the general framework of biblical history: creation, image, law, imputation, and inheritance. There is a structure of history, and a Christian historian is supposed to use this structure as a template for interpreting the past. He is supposed to do this self-consciously. Historical facts are not brute facts, meaning uninterpreted facts. They are God-interpreted facts. The meaning of these facts is imputed by God. Every Christian interpretation of history should be based on the fact that a Christian historian can think God's thoughts after Him. He is supposed to present history in terms analogous to the absolute and authoritative imputation of meaning by God. He cannot do this perfectly, but he can do it accurately. If he could not, history would be inherently incoherent and beyond man's ability to understand. This is the conclusion of the most radical of the post-modernist historians.

If what I have said is true, then a Christian historian has a prophetic function. A prophet in the Old Testament came before the people and also before

rulers and warned them that their violations of God's law would bring God's negative historical sanctions on them. He appealed to history, including the law of God and the past warnings of God, in order to validate his warning of what was going to happen in the future. That office was abolished after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus is today the only covenantal prophet. He is prophet, priest, and king. So, when I say that a Christian historian has a prophetic function, I do not mean that he has the authority of an Old Covenant prophet. I mean that his task is analogous to the task of an Old Covenant prophet. A Christian historian is required by God to evaluate history in terms of men's ethics-based decisions. Men's decisions are either in obedience to God's laws or in violation of God's laws. A Christian historian is supposed to explain historical sanctions—positive and negative, individual and corporate—in terms of conformity to God's law or a revolt against God's law.

The prophet in the Old Testament evaluated the current decisions of the people of Israel in terms of God's revelation of His laws. The prophet also warned that God in the past had brought negative sanctions against Israel when Israel revolted against His law. So, there was a strong historical component in the prophet's message. Finally, he predicted future negative sanctions if there was no repentance. A Christian historian does not have equal access to the mind of God that a prophet had under the Old Covenant. He cannot see into the future as clearly as an Old Covenant prophet could. But he can make covenant-based judgments about the likely results for individuals and societies if they continue to violate specific biblical laws. There will be coherence between the nature of the laws violated and the kinds of negative sanctions imposed.

### **C. Four-Way Representation**

All covenantal representation is four-way representation. It is representation upward toward God, outward toward other people, downward toward those under authority, and inward, meaning conscience above all. For example, a father must serve God. If he has a job, he has to serve his employer. He serves his wife and his children. He serves himself. How? He has his own self-image. He evaluates his own work. He has standards that he thinks he should meet. Some of these standards are ethical. Others are professional/technical. There is supposed to be coherence among all four kinds of representation.

Consider the work of a Christian historian. First, he is supposed to select a topic that is pleasing to God. God has some purpose for him in selecting this topic. He selects one topic, and he rejects all the others. Second, he has to meet standards regarding the quality of his work. Other historians may read his work and find errors. He will come under criticism. He wants to avoid this if this is possible by doing better research. Third, there are people under his authority: students, readers, and viewers of online lessons. He is acting on their behalf. They trust him. They are willing to re-think their view of a particular historical incident or trend. They may even change their behavior because of what they hear. Fifth, he must satisfy his own standards regarding the quality of his work. He does not want to feel guilty about his performance.

Covenantal representation is not easy. A Christian historian is not in a covenantal relationship with other historians or with students, but he is in a covenantal relationship with God. He is also in a covenantal relationship with himself. He is acting in the name of God and also on behalf of God. He is acting as a trustee of God. If he does poor work, this brings God's name into disrepute. Nathan the prophet told David that this is what he had done by committing adultery with Bathsheba. The enemies of God blasphemed God (2 Samuel 12:14). A Christian historian wants to avoid anything remotely like that kind of performance. Therefore, he must count the cost: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:28–30).

### **D. Representation and Topic Selection**

A Christian historian understands that his work is highly specific. It is specialized. He cannot research everything. He must work hard to produce something of value to God. So, he has to exercise judgment in selecting what he is going to study and how he is going to do this. There is a familiar statement in English: "Do the right thing, and do the thing right." These are different requirements. You must do the right thing, which has an element of morality about it. You must do something that you think is a good thing to do. But, once you have decided to do it, you now face all of the difficulties

associated with doing it. You must do it right. Your work must be technically precise. It must meet standards associated with professional performance. If you build a bridge, the bridge should not collapse.

A Christian historian also must think very carefully about the people under his authority. How can he serve them well? How can he make his presentation meaningful to them? Before he begins his work, he must identify his audience. This raises several questions:

1. What do they know already about the topic?
2. What else do they need to know in order to understand the past?
3. What do they need to know about the past in order to make good decisions?
4. What motivation will it take to get them to make good specific decisions?

The answers to these questions will determine how the historian should present the results of his investigations. Should he write a book? Should he write an article? Should he produce an online video? Should he produce a Sunday school course?

Then there is the question of the level of sophistication of the presentation. A 500-page book filled with footnotes is suitable for instructing a student who is taking an upper-division college course in history, or maybe a graduate student. It is not suitable for people who have never taken a college-level history course. Self-taught experts will have no problem, but they are not normally the target audience of someone who is about to devote three or four years to writing a book. A publisher will reject the manuscript if he does not think there will be enough buyers to justify its publication. The publisher's editor will also get involved in the selection process. The Christian historian must take all this into account.

Then he must assess his own capabilities. Is he sufficiently skilled to write a book? If not, what must he do to get the needed skills? Next, how will he have to budget his time in order to write it? There is always great competition for his time. Time is the only irreplaceable resource in history. He must budget it carefully. If he is plans to produce online videos, what equipment is required, and how long will it take him to master its use? The same applies to typesetting if he is going to typeset the book. All of these issues involve limits. Put differently, they involve boundaries. Boundaries

are associated with point 3 of the biblical covenant.

## **E. Representation and Selection of Facts**

### ***1. Relevant Facts***

This is the issue of the content of historiography. The number of facts that God has interpreted approaches infinity from the point of view of the Christian historian. The number of documents that deal with any particular incident or trend is also enormous. The cost in terms of time to get access to documents in archival collections is high. There are travel costs and lodging costs. This cost will decline as the posting of documents on the Internet continues. The cost will be much lower in half a century than it is today. It will be much lower in a century than it will be in half a century. We can be confident that there will be superior historiography because of the reduced cost of getting access to relevant documentation.

When we speak of relevant information, we raise the issue of standards of evidence. How do we determine what is relevant? Humanistic historians do not agree on this. They do not agree on a theory of relevant evidence, and they do not agree in terms of actual practice. They have no fixed standards that determine the correct answers.

The issue of relevance is the issue of imputation of meaning. This is associated with point 4 of the biblical covenant. In covenant theology, point 2 is always closely related to point 4. Point 2 is about the person who brings sanctions. Point 4 is about the sanctions. Assessing relevance is the task of casuistry: applying fixed principles (point 3) to specific situations. In the case of historiography, the historian must decide which facts to consider, but he also has to decide how the standards of interpretation should be applied to the available documents.

The facts do not speak for themselves. Van Til said there is no such thing as brute factuality. All factual reality is interpreted factuality. Most modern historians have concluded the same thing. (See Chapter 9.) Therefore, a Christian historian must interpret the facts. He must attempt to think God's thoughts after Him. The heart of the week of creation was this: God spoke repeatedly. He spoke the world into existence, He spoke when He gave his assessment of the quality of His work at the end of days and the end of the week. *Speaking is an inescapable aspect of the historian's craft.*



It is always possible to make an error when interpreting a fact. This is why it is imperative that historians should seek out confirming facts. The Bible says that in a multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14). In a multitude of confirming verifiable documents there is safety. The historian may not be able to find verifiable documents that confirm the testimony of a document. In such cases, he must look for other documents that indirectly verify the document that he thinks is crucial to his argument. If he cannot find them, he is supposed to reconsider his thesis if it rests heavily on a single document that stands alone without verification. He does not want that document to become the cornerstone of his argument. It might collapse, bringing down the whole structure.

## ***2. Relevant Selection***

Some facts will support a thesis effectively. We do not have to search for all of the facts. We will never find all of the facts. We must find those facts which faithfully represent the broader event that we deal with in our presentation. Here are two biblical examples of this selection process.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:31–32).

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (John 21:25).

John was a disciple of Jesus. He was recruited at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He was at Jesus' crucifixion. He wrote the Gospel of John. He wrote three epistles. He wrote the Book of Revelation. No one had more personal experience in Jesus' ministry than he did. When he wrote the Gospel of John, he excluded huge quantities of information. He was being rhetorical when he said that the world could not contain the books that would be written about everything that Jesus did. He was conveying a message. His Gospel is a short summary of what Jesus did in His ministry. He selected specific facts by means of a criterion: "But these are written, that ye

might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” He was open about this. He selected a small number of facts about Jesus’ ministry because he knew that nobody was going to read a multi-volume book on everything that Jesus did. John selected relevant incidents from Jesus’ ministry that would convey the same truth that he could convey if he had written multiple volumes. He adopted an economy of writing. He wanted the readers to read all of his Gospel. It was better that they read all of a short presentation than read only a small portion of a very long one.

He did not select these incidents in order to deceive his readers. On the contrary, he selected them in order to persuade readers of the truth. He was not compromising the accuracy of the message that he could have conveyed in a longer Gospel. He selected facts that would convey accurate information in a more effective way. This was a matter of persuasion as well as a matter of accuracy. This raises the issue of persuasion.

### ***3. Relevant Rhetorically***

A Christian historian is like an attorney presenting a case to a jury. He has to pick those facts that confirm the arguments that he thinks will persuade the jury. But, unlike a lawyer, a Christian historian must seek the truth, a considerable part of the truth, and most of the truth. He cannot legitimately seek the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That would require omniscience. That is an incommunicable attribute of God. But he can present a case that will lead the jury to bring a verdict that is, in the language of American jurisprudence, beyond reasonable doubt.

In doing this work, a Christian historian must recognize that he faces critics who are his intellectual peers. Other historians will examine his documentation if his thesis becomes popular. He is like an attorney facing another attorney. If he is facing a small army of attorneys who are critically inclined, he must go the extra mile in advance in order to make his thesis, if not airtight, then at least watertight. He does not want it to be sunk in full public view.

Once he is convinced that he is correct, he must become an advocate. He must become a promoter. He must become a persuader. The element of persuasion is always present, but in Christian historiography, it must be a major component of a presentation, whether the presentation is a book, an article, or an online video.

In all forms of nonfiction writing, there are three crucial elements: accuracy, clarity, and persuasiveness. Writing that does not have all three elements is unlikely to gain long-term influence. If it is erroneous, the book or article will be demolished by critics early in the debate. If it is not clear, it will not gain widespread acceptance by members of his targeted audience. If it is not persuasive, it will not change the thinking of most of the members of his target audience. He has wasted his time. His goal is not simply to change their thinking; his goal is to change their behavior. It is to persuade them to act in new ways. He had better be persuasive.

Persuasion is the art of rhetoric. Rhetoric involves several components. The most familiar component is emotion. Another is the use of familiar symbols that evoke emotion. Another is the use of adjectives and adverbs that persuade people to draw conclusions that they would not have drawn had the adjectives and adverbs been missing. There can be an appeal to pride. There can be an appeal to someone who is responsible for protecting someone else. There can be an appeal to self-esteem.

I have spent almost half a century as a direct-response marketer. I have marketed my books and web materials. As is the case in every profession, direct-response marketing has many rules. As is the case in every profession, it requires creativity, which cannot be taught by a formula. The direct-response marketer understands this: you must appeal to emotion. But an even more powerful technique is this: sell a product that the shopper has already decided to purchase. We cannot always do this in non-fiction writing, but sometimes it is a good way to begin. A Christian historian who is attempting to confirm the beliefs of his audience will find this task easier than if he is trying to persuade them to abandon a strongly held belief. I speak from experience. My book on the conspiratorial origins of the United States Constitution was a failure, not because of its inaccuracy, and not because of its lack of clarity. It is accurate, and it is clear. But its thesis is offensive to almost all Americans, and especially those Christian Americans who believe that the Constitution is inherently Christian.

A Christian historian is wise to begin his presentation with a benefit. He must persuade the reader or viewer to read his book or watch his video because there will be one or more benefits associated with having completed the task. Here is the rule of the direct-response marketer: “Lead with the benefit. Follow with the proof.” The benefit should be presented early in the presentation. In the case of this book, I presented the benefits in the

Preface, Part A: Benefits of Reading This Book. The remainder of this book is the proof. As a reader, you have not finished the book. But, if you have read this far, you probably have begun to receive at least some of the benefits. I reveal this technique here because I do not want you to waste time in producing materials that almost nobody in your targeted audience will read. List the benefits early.

Here is another crucial rule for persuasive writing. Do not write to persuade a committee. *Write to persuade an imaginary reader.* This reader is a representative of the targeted audience that you are attempting to persuade. This individual is a composite. He is an intellectual construct. You are trying to persuade this representative person to change his mind, change his behavior, and buy another of your books.

It is the curse of academic historiography that apprentice historians are trained to write articles throughout their education. These articles are read by professors who are using standards of evaluation that are associated with peer-reviewed journal articles. In order to advance your career in academia, you have to publish in peer-reviewed academic journals. These articles are screened by committees. *Academic writing is boring.* Everyone in academia knows this, and everyone has known this for generations. Yet this never changes. That is because the academic sanctions never change. The sanctions do not have to do with persuading laymen to change their minds. They have to do with gaining guaranteed employment security (tenure) or a promotion through publication in peer-reviewed journals. One of the reasons why most academic historians are incapable of gaining widespread acceptance of anything they write is that they do not write for the general public. They write for each other. They use their own jargon. They use their own criteria of persuasion. They do not care with the public thinks. Then they complain that the public accepts what they refer to as conspiracy theories of history. Conspiracy theorists try to persuade large numbers of readers and viewers. They do not write for committees. Their writing is not boring.

## **F. Answering Two Questions in Advance**

I learned about this strategy after years of copywriting. Years later, an idea hit me: this copywriting strategy applies to every form of persuasion. This includes the writing of history.

Every sales presentation should overcome two almost automatic re-

sponses by listeners or readers. Over a lifetime of television viewing, they have read or watched tens of thousands of advertisements. They have learned to tune out these ads. Even among those few ads that they consider briefly, consumers remain skeptical. They do not want to hand money over to somebody for a product or service that will turn out to be a dud. They may not ask these two questions with exactly these four words, but they respond to new ads with these two questions:

So what?

Who says?

Try to get these questions answered early in the presentation. If you do not successfully do this, the listener at any time may decide to stop listening. This is especially true of the first question. "So what?" This is the skeptic's first line of defense. He wants to know what the benefits are if he continues to listen to the sales pitch.

The second question has to do with evidence. The listener does not readily accept the sales copy unless he already trusts the salesman, and this trust is based on either the salesman's good reputation or else past personal experience of the buyer. When dealing with strangers, readers ask this question: "Who says?" The reader wants verification from somebody he trusts. In matters historical, verification requires footnotes.

There are also potential critics who are not part of the targeted audience. They are also ready to ask the question: "Who says?" They probably have made up their minds not to accept the thesis. Historians want to see evidence. Critical historians want to see a lot of evidence. Historians who are gifted hatchet reviewers, such as the legendary British historian A. J. P. Taylor, are nearly impossible to persuade, irrespective of the evidence. A Christian historian should ignore such reviewers, except as sources of minor corrections for future editions or a follow-up book. If the critics are inherently unteachable because of their ideological or religious commitment, it is not necessary to persuade them. A Christian historian's readers will never read these negative reviews. The critics' influence is getting less and less as time goes on. The number of students majoring in history is shrinking.

With respect to members of the targeted audience, the sooner in the presentation that a Christian historian offers validating testimony that

supports his thesis, the better off he is. The more controversial his thesis, the earlier he should present evidence that indicates that he is not the only person ever to reach this conclusion. If a Christian historian can supply testimonies from people who lived in the era surveyed in his presentation, this may be able to persuade readers that the thesis is worth considering. The testimonies do not have to come from experts who are alive today. It is worthwhile for a Christian historian to search for this kind of confirming testimony in the piles of records that he must go through in order to construct the thesis.

### G. Self-Taught Historiography

No one taught me what I have presented in this chapter. I developed these approaches and skills, beginning in 1965. I am putting them into something like final form here. As with so many of my books, I am writing this only because I think these things need to be said, but nobody else has bothered to say them. If I do not say them, nobody else will.

My first exercise in Christian historiography began in 1965 when I began researching *Marx's Religion of Revolution*, which was published in 1968 by Craig Press, a spinoff of Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing. I had just read Rushdoony's 1965 pamphlet, *The Religion of Revolution*. He argued that Marx had adopted an ancient theology of social regeneration: revolution through chaos. It occurred to me that Marx's social theory rested far more on his non-scientific concept of social transformation than it did on dialectical materialism, the mode of production, or his theory of surplus value. I decided to investigate this. Over the next three years, I put together a manuscript. I was in graduate school. I began the project in my second semester of graduate school at the University of California, Riverside. I finished it a year after I received my master's degree. I began the project at age 23. I finished at age 26.

The book was self-consciously a work in Christian historiography. I began with Rushdoony's suggestion that the religion of revolution stretches back half a millennium before Christ. He identified Marxists as modern believers in this ancient pagan worldview. I decided to compare this theory of social regeneration with the social theory presented in the Bible. I announced this on page 15: "The chief motivation behind the writing of this study, however, was my desire to subject Marx to an evaluation based upon

the perspective of that contemporary Calvinist system known as ‘presuppositionalism.’ The major exponents of this viewpoint are Professor Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and Herman Dooyeweerd of the Free University of Amsterdam. So far as I know, no one writing in English has made this kind of analysis of Marx’s thought. I trust that this book will fill the gap.” At the end of chapter 2, “The Cosmology of Chaos,” which was the book’s major theoretical chapter, I wrote this:

The Bible affirms a wholly divergent cosmology. Man is not his own creator; he did not create himself “*ex nihilo*”—out of nothing. Man is a creature who must operate under law, and he lives in a universe which also operates under law. Because he is under God’s law, man can stand over creation as God’s vicegerent. Marx, however, could not admit that man’s authority is derivative; like the self-proclaimed autonomous men at the Tower of Babel, he announced the creative power of man apart from God: “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name [i.e., define ourselves without reference to God], lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth” (Gen. 11:4) . “Ye shall be as gods,” the Tempter promised, and Marx believed the promise. In affirming the powers of man for total creation, he launched the forces of absolute destruction. Man’s capacity for self-delusion seems boundless, but man has been warned of the results of such self-deception, and the Marxists shall be the recipients of their proper reward: “Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel (Prov. 20:17).

As you can see, I came to the readers as an explicitly Christian historian. I evaluated Marx’s theories in terms of biblical law. I condemned his work as anti-Christian and also inaccurate in terms of economic theory. I then pronounced a judgment, predicting the eventual failure of the Marxist movement. On December 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev literally shut down the Soviet Union. This was the nicest Christmas present the West ever received.

I did not write the book to impress my professors. I did some of the research in graduate seminars, but I did not expect them to read the book, nor did I expect either praise or criticism for it. I was operating outside the normal chain of authority within the university system. I have done the



same through the remainder of my academic career. I was not looking for positive sanctions from humanists. This is why I have had to self-fund my academic work throughout my career. My donors and paying subscribers provided the funds. Accredited academia did not.

My major historical work is *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church*. I had my Institute for Christian Economics publish it in 1996. Basically, it was self-published. I would not have expected any other publisher to publish it. It was 1100 pages long. I began that book in the fall of 1962. The first version of it was 120 double-spaced typewritten pages. This was my bachelor's thesis (spring 1963). The University of California, Riverside required every student in every department to write a bachelor's thesis for graduation. That requirement was dropped in 1964, the year after I graduated. I researched the topic on and off until 1996. The manuscript kept growing. I typed the rough draft of the thesis on a Hermes 3000 portable typewriter. I finished it on WordPerfect for DOS, version 5.0.

My book was a detailed history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States—the northern Presbyterian Church—from about 1730 until 1936. It was mainly the story of how the Old-School Calvinists steadily lost control of the church from 1870 until 1936. I explained the long-term strategy of the theological liberals. I also described their tactics, decade by decade. I identified them as wolves in sheep's clothing. There was nothing neutral about my book.

On page xi, which was part of “Note to the Reader,” I identified my audience: “I wrote this book for Christians who are tired of being milked, bilked, and forced to ride silently in the back of humanism's bus. If this is you, keep reading.” I made it plain what the benefit of the book was: not being led by humanists. The final paragraph of the Conclusion announced this:

The question facing Christians today is this: Will there be a resurrection of Christendom? Few of [J. Gresham] Machen's heirs believe in the possibility of such a resurrection; few believed in 1937. Some of them believe not only that it will not be resurrected; it should not be resurrected. I believe that Christendom can, will, and ought to be resurrected, though next time without kings, and also without a U.S. Department of Education. This is my confession. It was also Machen's.

I followed a similar strategy in my book, *Conspiracy in Philadelphia*:



*The Origins of the United States Constitution* (2013). I began the Foreword as follows:

This book is the history of a deception. I regard this deception as the greatest deception in American history. So successful was this deception that, as far as I know, this book is the first stand-alone volume to discuss it. The first version of this book appeared as Part 3 of *Political Polytheism* (1989), 201 years after the deception was ratified by representatives of the states, who created a new covenant and a new nation by their collective act of ratification-incorporation.

This new covenant meant a new god. The ratification of the United States Constitution in 1787–88 was not an act of covenant renewal. It was an act of covenant-breaking: the substitution of a new covenant in the name of a new god. This was not understood at the time, but it has been understood by the humanists who have written the story of the Constitution. Nevertheless, they have not presented the history of the Constitutional Convention as a deception that was produced by a conspiracy. The spiritual heirs of the original victims of this deception remain unaware of the deception's origins.

There is no trace of either theological or ethical neutrality in my history books.

## Conclusion

A Christian historian is supposed to serve a prophetic function. He is supposed to review documents of the past, and then evaluate them in terms of their faithfulness in revealing that past. Then he must impute judgment for and against the participants. There were good guys, and there were bad guys. He is supposed to identify the good guys, and then show the ways in which they were good guys. He is to identify the bad guys, and then show the ways in which they were bad guys.

A Christian historian is not to come in the name of some neutral concept of the structure of history. Therefore, he is also not to come in the name of some neutral structure of historiography. The principles of his historical investigation, evaluation, and publication should self-consciously parallel

the biblical structure of history itself.

What I have written here has not been believed by the vast majority of historians who have identified themselves as Christians. For over two centuries, they have adopted humanistic presuppositions about the structure of history and the structure of historical writing. They have compromised their faith by compromising their work. They have not served as covenantally faithful representatives of the God of providence. He expects better from those who research and then write about history in His name.

# 13

## CIVILIZATION

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Matthew 6:9–13).*

### A. Covenant Model, Part 3

Point 3 of the biblical covenant model is ethics

Point 3 of biblical social theory is law.

Point 3 of Christian historiography is civilization. A civilization is the result of the covenantal foundations of a religion. In the nineteenth century, humanistic historians searched for laws governing specific civilizations. They hoped to discover such laws by a careful study of historical facts. Through empiricism—attention to documents—they hoped to discover fixed laws of development. The desire to find fixed laws is the Parmenides impulse. In the twentieth century, most humanist historians decided that there are no laws of historical development. This is the Heraclitus impulse.

The biblical answer to both camps of humanists is that there are universal laws governing historical progress. They are ethical. They are found in the Bible. Adherence to these laws brings progress. Disobedience brings either setbacks or wealth that covenant-keepers will eventually inherit in history.

A Christian historian should recognize that a civilization is the product of a specific ethical system and God's sanctions, positive and negative, enforcing this system. According to Arnold Toynbee, who wrote a ten-volume history (1934–54) of 21 civilizations, there have been five surviving civilizations since approximately the year 775: Western civilization, Byzantine civilization, Islamic civilization, Indian civilization, and Asian civilization. Geographically, they have remained fairly constant.

## B. A Covenantal Prayer

What we call the Lord's prayer is covenantal. It has five points.

Point 1: "Our father." This identifies God as personal. He is the father of mankind. Mankind is also personal.

Point 2: "which art in heaven." God reigns from on high. In the cosmic hierarchy, He is supreme.

Point 3: "hallowed be thy name." A hallowed item or space is set apart for holy use. It is sacred. God's name is sacred. It must not be violated. The third commandment declares: "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" (Exodus 20:7).

Point 3: "thy kingdom come." This identifies civilization as an aspect of point 3.

Point 3: "thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." God's will is our ethical standard. It is perfect in heaven, where there is no sin. That is to say, it is definitive in heaven. In history, where there is sin, His will is supposed to be progressively revealed to and implemented by covenant-keepers as history moves forward.

Point 4: "Give us this day our daily bread." This is a positive sanction.

Point 4: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." This is a positive sanction.

Point 4: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This is a positive sanction.

Now things get controversial. The final section of the prayer is not found in Luke's version (Luke 11:6). It is not found in the most ancient manuscripts of Matthew. It is found in what is known as the *textus receptus*.

Point 5: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." This has to do with the future. God's kingdom, power, and glory are permanent.

## C. The Fifth Kingdom

Western history began in the mid-eighth century B.C. In Greece, this was marked by the first Olympiad in 776 B.C. In Rome, it was the founding of the city, which Roman historians believed took place in 753 B.C. Israel's civilization began with the exodus, which took place around 1492 B.C., ac-

cording to internal evidence of the Bible, and one outside anchor date: the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B.C.. The first reference to the origin of the West came late in the ministry of Isaiah, probably around 730 B.C. He prophesied the coming of a Medo-Persian king, Cyrus, which occurred two centuries later. This is the most specific prophecy in the Bible or any other ancient document. It is so specific that critics of the Bible say that the document must have been written by a second author who added the text to the original. He did this after Cyrus allowed the Israelites to return to Israel.

Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things (Isaiah 45:1–7).

This passage combines a highly specific prophecy with a declaration of God's sovereignty. He governs the world in terms of His ethical system—righteousness: “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it” (v. 8). These are laws governing history.

The Persian invasion of Greece in 490 B.C. unified Greek civilization. Before this, Greece had been hundreds of independent city-states. From 490 B.C. until its defeat by Sparta in 404 B.C., Athens was dominant military and culturally. When we read about “Greek culture,” we are being misled. There was Athenian culture for a little over a century and a half. It left cultural artifacts. After 404 B.C., there were Plato's records of Socrates'

debates, and there were Aristotle's many works. He rejected everything Platonic. The other cities left mostly pottery in graves.

Macedon conquered Greece in the mid-third century. Then Alexander's brief empire disintegrated into four in 323 B.C. Rome conquered them in the mid-second century. This had been prophesied three times by Daniel. This would have been after 586 but before the fall of Babylon to the Medo-Persians in 539 B.C. To Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel revealed the rise and fall of four kingdoms. The four were in the form of an idol: gold, silver, brass, and iron (Daniel 2:31–35). There will be a fifth kingdom. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (vv. 44–45).

To Belshazzar, Daniel described the four kingdoms as beasts, not an idol: lion, bear, leopard, and a beast with iron teeth, which will destroy the leopard. The leopard had four wings and four heads (Daniel 7:4–7). A fifth kingdom will replace the fourth. "As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (vv. 12–14). "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (v. 27).

In a third vision, also explained to Belshazar, Daniel described a ram with two horns. "Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts

might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great" (Daniel 8:2–4). Daniel named the ram. "The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia" (v. 20). The ram was destroyed by a goat (v. 7). Daniel named the goat. "And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king" (v. 21). The goat's single horn was broken into four (v. 8). "Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power" (v. 22). These four kingdoms will be destroyed by a fourth. "And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people" (vv. 23–24). This was clearly Rome. Rome will be destroyed by the prince of princes. "And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand" (v. 25).

Here, we have the story of the rise and fall of Greece and Rome. This will be followed by a new kingdom, one that will rule forever. Daniel's prophecies reveal that Christendom is the focus of God's concern. It is the final kingdom.

## **D. Western Civilization**

Western civilization is the product of two historical cultures: Israelite culture and classical culture. Classical culture is a combination of Greek and Roman culture. The battle over historiography is this: which of these three traditions was most dominant in the development of Christendom after Constantine gained full control in A.D. 324, and after the Council of Nicaea in 325?

A Christian historian should acknowledge the crucial historical incident in the development of Western civilization. It is not discussed in any textbook. Paul had planned to take the gospel to Asia, but he was dissuaded. "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered

them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts 16:6–10). *Paul's change of plans changed the geographical history of Christendom.* It directed most of Christianity westward.

The history of Western civilization as a separate academic discipline was developed in the Renaissance. Renaissance humanists resisted the idea that Christianity had built Western civilization. They self-consciously went back to the writings, the sculpture, and the mythology of Greece and Rome in a quest for an alternative explanation of the development of Western civilization. There had been Platonic influences in the development of Christian theology and practice in the first six centuries. Platonism favored mysticism at the expense of dominion. Also, the discovery of Aristotle's writings by Islamic scholars in the eleventh century led to the export of Aristotle's writings to the West through Spain. But Aristotle had little influence in classical Greece. Roman law was highly influential in the development of the Christian Roman Empire. But these classical influences affected mostly literate leaders. The common people had little contact with the remnants of classical culture. The priests told the stories of ancient Israel to the early church. These stories and the priests' explanations of God's laws shaped the thinking of the masses. The masses were not students of Greece and Rome. Renaissance humanists ignored this obvious fact.

The humanists revived Greek and Roman learning, which was hostile to the gospel. They attempted to fuse classical knowledge, classical literature, and classical sculpture with Christianity. *This was a self-conscious attempt to undermine Christendom.* This tradition of explaining the development of the West in terms of Greece and Rome rather than the Old Testament, the New Testament, the monasteries, and canon law was extended by the Enlightenment after 1660. The war against Christendom was self-conscious on the part of the humanists. They rewrote history in order to conform to their concept of a humanist culture that was based more on Greek and Roman learning than on the Bible. The humanists explained human progress, not in terms of the Bible and the teachings of the church regarding the Bible, but by humanist philosophy and literature from the classical world. To this, they added scientific knowledge that seemed to be independent of biblical revelation.



It should be the task of every Christian historian to revise the humanists' interpretation of the development of Western civilization. Christian historians need to go back to the original sources and examine the relevance of Greek and Roman thought in shaping Christian thought and culture. They should ask this question: "Were the Greek and Roman imports fundamental to the development of the West, or could biblical revelation and exposition based on this revelation have produced greater progress?" Next, they should ask this: "Specifically, would biblical ethics have been a better anto human action the Greek philosophy? If the West's leaders had been disciples of Christ instead of disciples of either Plato or Aristotle, would their leadership have been more productive in the development of Western civilization?"

Put differently, what was the nature of the war between the remnants of classical civilization and the Bible in the early church and the medieval church? This was the question that Van Til asked in his 1962 class syllabus, *Christianity in Conflict*. He was convinced that classical philosophy was a liability. He understood what Charles Norris Cochrane described in his book, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1940). Classical culture, especially in the area of metaphysics and ethics, was in a state of near-collapse at the beginning of the Christian era. Christianity replaced much of classical culture during the first four centuries. It gave hope to broad masses of the people. Without Christianity, Cochrane argued, the Roman Empire would have collapsed earlier.

There are numerous topics that Christian historians should begin to investigate in depth. They should ask this question: "Has there been progress over the last two millennia, and if so, why?" Here are a few topics.

### ***1. Confession of Faith***

A confession of faith is the heart of every civilization. The story of the Tower of Babel is the story of a humanistic confession.

What do men believe about God, man, law, sanctions, and the future? Do their beliefs give them hope in the future? Do their beliefs give them standards by which they can judge their own behavior and the behavior of others? There are rival confessions of faith. There are rival worldviews. Which ones have been most productive over the last two millennia?

Paul wrote that the confession of faith is basic to salvation. "That if thou

shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Romans 10:9–11). Humanists do their best to persuade their followers that anyone who believes on Christ will be ashamed. Basic to humanists' strategy is public shaming of Christians. Christian historians must devote their lives to showing why Christians need not be ashamed of Christ and His church. They must produce a counter-narrative to the one that the humanists have been using ever since the Renaissance.

## 2. *Liberty*

In the Introduction to Part 3, I discuss Rushdoony's analysis of the confessional formula of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. As far as I know, he was the first theologian to recognize the connection between this formula and the development of Western liberty. It placed limitations on humanism in their development of state power. By declaring that Jesus Christ is both man and God in two natures, the declaration undermined the attempts of humanists to divinize the state.

The separation of church and state became foundational to Western liberty as a result of the Papal Revolution of 1076. Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII came to an agreement regarding church and state. Each institution would have its own jurisdiction. Each would have its own legal system. This created the Western legal tradition: separate judiciaries. But it was not a Christian historian who studied this agreement in detail. It was Harold Berman in his 1983 book, *Law and Revolution*. I ask: "Where are Christians who have studied the twin developments of state law and canon law in the medieval era?" They are missing in action. They have always been missing in action. How many Christians have been told that the Magna Carta (1215) was probably written by Archbishop Stephen Langton. If he did not write it, he was the major advisor to the barons. In 1224, he divided the Bible into the chapters that we still use. Yet he is forgotten.

Christianity, not Plato or Aristotle, has been the source of Western liberty. Plato was a communist. Aristotle devoted many years to studying Athenian politics and the constitutions of other Greek city-states, but he did not believe that a successful political order could be established in any

community much larger than 40,000 people. Athens was at least one-third slaves. With the military triumph of Alexander, Aristotle's student, the autonomy of Greek city-states ended. There was nothing in Aristotle that would have produced Western liberty. In any case, Aristotle's writings on politics and law had almost no influence in Greece and Rome. It was not until the Western church rediscovered him after 1100 that his influence began in Christendom.

### 3. *Economic Growth*

The breakdown in trade in the Western Roman Empire began early. The Western half was under assault by barbarian tribes. But, over time, these tribes converted to Christianity. Then there was the assault from Islam that began in the seventh century. Islam captured Spain in 712. Spanish Muslims were finally defeated by Spain in 1492. Nevertheless, there was technological development throughout the medieval era. But it took an atheist historian, Lynn White, to tell this story, and he did not tell it until 1962: *Medieval Technology and Social Change*.

England and Ireland suffered from constant invasions from Viking looters from about 800 until 1100. The Vikings were eventually converted to Christianity, and they turned to trade rather than war. That marked a turning point in Western economic development around 1100. European trade began to increase.

Economic development increased after the discovery of the New World after 1492. Then, around 1750, came the great transformation: the Industrial Revolution. Economic historians have come to no agreement as to why it began, but this changed the world as never before. Beginning in the British Isles and North America, economic growth began to expand at about 2% per person per year, and except for the 1930s, that rate of increase has continued. The world of 1880 would have been unrecognizable to someone living in 1800. Economic growth has spread to the rest of the world. This is bringing Western civilization to the whole world. The economic fruits of Western civilization have been the hook, but much of the rest of the West is being imported by Asia.

#### *4. Knowledge*

Sometime around 1100, Western Europe developed a radically new institution: the university. The structure of the university has remained almost unchanged for nine centuries. The university is uniquely a western creation. It has spread across the world.

Around 1250, scientific knowledge began to advance rapidly. The story of this transformation was first presented by a French physicist and historian, Pierre Duhem. He wrote 10 volumes on this remarkable development. The first five volumes were published between 1913 and 1916. At his death in 1916, his publisher decided not to publish the remaining five volumes. Only through the threat of legal action in 1954 were the remaining volumes published. This was one of the most egregious examples in twentieth-century academia of a deliberate blackout on the part of humanists to conceal a story that overturned Renaissance historiography, Enlightenment historiography, and modern historiography.

Then came the invention of metal movable type around 1440. Movable metal type had been invented two centuries earlier in Korea, but the Koreans did nothing significant with it. Johannes Gutenberg understood its potential. This technology has transformed the world. Inexpensive printed materials provided reasons for billions of people to learn how to read. The division of intellectual labor leapt forward more rapidly than ever before in recorded history.

#### *5. Social Development*

In this area of life, it is more difficult to make the case for progress. We are reminded once again that ethical knowledge has not kept pace with technological knowledge.

The Industrial Revolution broke the pattern of family living. Fathers left home for the entire day to work in factories. They no longer took their sons with them into the fields to teach them the basics of agriculture and marriage. This made mothers the primary teachers of both sons and daughters. That was a social revolution. It was probably the most significant transformation in the history of the Western family.

The movement off of farms had begun in the United States by the end of the nineteenth century. In urban areas, tax-funded education began to

replace the family as the primary agency for instructing children. This instruction was comprehensive. It shaped the way children lived for several hours a day. It created student peer pressure on a scale never seen before. Professional educators were able to isolate the students from their parents. This provided a tremendous opportunity for humanists, who controlled the institutions of higher education, to begin to indoctrinate the students in a rival worldview. This began as early as the late 1830s in Massachusetts when Horace Mann, a Unitarian, became the head of the newly created State Board of Education. Rushdoony was correct in 1963 in identifying what this educational process was: messianic. The public school was the humanists' substitute for the church. It was operated by a new humanist priesthood.

The assault against the authority of the Bible, the authority of the church, and the authority of the Christian family has been relentless in the public schools in every nation for over two centuries. This has transformed the ethics of the masses. They have increasingly adopted a rival worldview. This worldview is the culmination of Greek statism and autonomy.

This humanistic worldview is self-destructive. Those who embrace it lose faith in the ethical basis of contemporary institutions. They lose faith in what was once a Christian concept of history. They prefer a lost faith in the structure of history to the doctrine of the final judgment. In this, they are consistent with their worldview.

With the widespread acceptance of humanism in the schools, we have seen the rise of socially deviant behavior. There is an opioid crisis today in the schools. There are declining test scores. Chastity is under assault. Long before this, there was a rising rate of divorce, which began no later than the 1920s in the United States. Despair is on the increase, despite the fact that per capita wealth continues to increase. The world is beginning to discover the emptiness of its faith: salvation by gadgets.

Christianity has been the primary basis of liberty in the West. This in turn created the conditions for trade and economic growth. Trade and economic growth favored the development of new technologies. Medieval monasteries were important in this development until their properties were confiscated by the state, beginning in the mid-sixteenth century. This continued through the French Revolution in the early 1790s.

The West was the first civilization in which the doctrine of progress became widely accepted by intellectual leaders and also the masses. A systematic doctrine of progress began in the seventeenth century within

Protestant circles. It was accepted by humanists almost immediately. Karl Marx's variety of communism was intensely optimistic about the future. That was one of the main reasons why it was adopted by intellectuals and activists around the world. Only when faith in the inevitability of Communism began to recede in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Soviet Union and China was the survival of Communism called into question. When that optimism died, Communism died in both countries within two decades. A similar loss of optimism in the future is becoming common among humanist intellectual leaders. They are beginning to adopt a worldview that is consistent with their concept of entropy. (See Chapter 10.)

This presents a tremendous opportunity for Christians to challenge humanism in every area of life. Part of this challenge must come from historiography. Christian historians must become self-conscious in their search for overlooked documents—overlooked by humanist historians and even suppressed by them.

The loss of faith in history as a meaningful area of study has accelerated rapidly since the 1960s in the United States. Fewer and fewer students are majoring in history. There will be fewer jobs for history professors. There will be fewer graduate students majoring in history. Textbooks in Western civilization are no longer widely assigned. The worldview of the Renaissance and its successors has always rested heavily on their reinterpretation of Christianity's effects in developing Western civilization. Fewer students are being exposed to what was a self-conscious exercise in historical revisionism. It is now time for Christians to produce a new revisionism, which is in fact the old story of how Christianity became Christendom in the West.

Every movement needs its own narratives. Every movement needs professional researchers and skilled storytellers who are able to persuade leaders and common people of its legitimacy. But without confidence in the future, the stories cannot gain traction. People do not want to hear about the inevitable failure of their efforts in history.

## **E. Byzantine Civilization**

This is functionally a closed book in the West except for a handful of historians who have studied the development of the Eastern Roman Empire and Eastern Orthodoxy. There is no question that Christendom should be studied as a unit. It is a confessional unit for the most part. Confession is

crucial to the establishment of any civilization. In the case of Christendom, the confession was highly developed. It was hammered out through a series of church councils. It was enforced by the church. In some cases, it was enforced by the church on emperors. The early emperors had a tendency to move in the direction of Arianism, because Arianism did not make clear the complete separation of Jesus as divine from Jesus as human. Arianism held that Jesus was created by God the Father. It had a faulty Christology. In his chapter on the Council Chalcedon as having laid the foundation of Western liberty, Rushdoony made this observation.

Statist theology rested on the primacy of nature is the voice and manifestation of God, and nature's high point of power in history is the state. Statist theology was ready to accommodate grace by giving it a subordinate role, by using grace to buttress nature. It created a nature-grace dialectic which was a revival of the Greek form-matter dialectic and thus implicitly anti-Christian. In such theology, Christ simply becomes a support to the state rather than Lord over church and state. . . .

But a true Christology is not dialectical but trinitarian. It rests, not on the dialectics of nature versus grace, but on the moral crisis, sin versus grace. Nature is in need of redemption. Christ enters the world to establish a new humanity in whom He creates by his regenerating and sanctifying power a new nature, one in communion with Him. God has no war against nature, and His struggle is not against nature but against sin. In the redeemed humanity, Christ rules over all things, state and church included (*Foundations of Social Order*, pp. 72–73).

The temptation was to imagine that man can become God. Then, collectively, men can create a divine state. This was the theology of Babel. The early church creeds undermined this theology.

The historiographical question is this: how did the two civilizations reflect an almost common confession of faith, yet were so different? Next, why was liberty developed more systematically in the West than in the Christian East? This is especially curious in light of this fact: the Eastern empire achieved a goal that is unique in history. It established a gold coinage in the early fourth century that it did not debase for 800 years.

Christian historians need to ask a series of questions. Then they need to

get these questions answered in terms of the available historical evidence. These questions apply to history from 325 to the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

What were unique identifying points of difference in their theologies?

What were the major differences in the relations between church and state?

Why was Western theology more judicial than Eastern theology?

Who were the key theological figures in both cultures?

Why were they the key figures?

How did these differences affect the development of the two cultures?

Why was the centralized state stronger in the East than in the West?

How did each of the civilizations deal with Islam after 632?

What was the history of commerce in the two civilizations?

What were the comparative rates of technological development in the two civilizations?

How did the two systems of law, church and state, develop in the two civilizations?

What was the influence of Roman law in each?

What were the main ideas of political philosophy in the two civilizations?

Which philosophical influences from Greece were stronger in each of the civilizations?

What were the primary roles of the monastic orders in the two civilizations?

How did historiography differ in the two civilizations?



## **F. The West Moves East**

Toynbee was correct. There are five civilizations: Western civilization, Eastern Orthodox civilization, Islam, India, and Asia. None of them has been successful in persuading the others to adopt the confession of faith in each of them. Islam does not evangelize; it conquers militarily. India does not evangelize or conquer. Neither do the cultures of Asia. Eastern orthodoxy does not evangelize. Catholicism has systematically evangelized ever since the late sixth century. But its first major success after 1492 has been in Latin America. This was the result of military enslavement, followed by massive depopulation during the first century of Spanish rule after 1492. Members of the surviving tribes were evangelized by Catholic priests. Catholicism has been successful in recent decades in evangelizing those parts of sub-Saharan Africa that were under Catholic European powers in the early twentieth century. Protestant foreign missions did not begin until the 1720s with the Moravians. They began the world's longest prayer meeting in 1727, which lasted 24 hours a day for a century. They prayed for foreign missions. They were highly influential in the career of John Wesley. Then came the Baptist mission to India run by William Carey in the late 1790s.

The East India Company set up trading outposts in India, beginning in the early 1600s. The Dutch East India Company set up trading outposts at about the same time in Indonesia. The commercial ventures eventually led to national political intervention to create empires. This was a form of conquest, not evangelism. In the late nineteenth century, European nations began to set up colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. The Dutch had begun this in South Africa in the 1600s. There was some attempted evangelism by the English and the Dutch. The results were minimal.

When a few ships of the United States Navy sailed into Tokyo Bay in 1854, that got the attention of the Japanese leadership. That visit led to a minimal trade agreement. The Japanese systematically transformed their own society in terms of Western technology after the Meiji restoration in 1868. This was a coup d'état. The Japanese systematically and rapidly adopted Western technology, especially military technology. They built a fleet. They were able to defeat Russia in 1905. But the Japanese did not import Christianity.

In the late 1800s, foreign missionaries, especially Protestant missionaries, went to China. Some were evangelicals. Some were theological liberals.

Their ideas led to the Chinese revolution of 1911. That in turn led to a division between Chang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-Tung which began in the 1920s. It ended only with the victory of the Communists in 1949. Mao imposed Western philosophy in the form of Marxism from 1949 until his death in 1976. He also killed about 50 million Chinese.

Asia has imported Western technologies on a systematic basis since about 1900. Exporting firms in Japan and China became major trading partners with Western consumers. Then, beginning in the 1990s, Protestant evangelism began having visible effects in India and China. It has had no effect in Japan. Neither has Catholic evangelism.

A similar expansion of Catholic and Protestant missions in sub-Saharan Africa has taken place since about 1970. Hundreds of millions of Africans have been converted to the two church traditions.

Western civilization has gained a foothold in East Asia based on technology and trade. Some aspects of Western civilization, including Christian religion, are now beginning to establish a foothold in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Protestant churches are beginning to spread rapidly in Latin America. In both Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are the dominant forces. Pentecostalism began in 1906 in a tiny church in Los Angeles: the Azusa Street Church. It has been the fastest growing Christian movement in church history.

## **Conclusion**

Christian historians should discuss the development of Christendom as the basis of both Western civilization and Eastern Orthodox civilization. These rival Christian civilizations have been centers of economic, political, and scientific development ever since the fourth century. Western civilization has developed at an accelerating rate since about 1500, and at an historically unprecedented rate after 1750. Humanist historians have claimed that the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were the primary sources of these positive developments. Christian historians, by remaining mute, have surrendered to the narratives of the humanists. This surrender must end.

# 14

## JUSTICE

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat (Genesis 3:7–13).*

### A. Covenant Model, Point 4

Point 4 of the biblical covenant model is oath. Every covenant is established by an oath between God and man. Sanctions are attached to every covenant oath.

Point 4 of biblical social theory is sanctions.

Point 4 of biblical historiography is retroactive justice. Biblical justice is attained by imitating a trial conducted by God. So is biblical mercy. God conducted this trial in the garden of Eden. He will conduct a trial for all mankind at the final judgment.

The story of mankind after the fall is this: the transition from wrath to grace. God imposes negative sanctions on covenant-breakers in history. But He also grants the mercy. He does so on the basis of a series of informal trials. All of human history reflects the outcome of these trials. There is a mixture of wrath and grace in all of them. It is the task of Christian histori-

ans to assess the effects of both wrath and grace in history, person by person and institution by institution.

There will be justice at the final judgment. For covenant-breakers, there will be no additional mercy.

## B. Six Questions

Genesis 1 and 2 present the story of the first phase of history: the transition from grace to wrath. This phase did not last long. Genesis 3 presents the story of the transgression of God's law. Ethics is point 3 of the biblical covenant model. It has to do with boundaries: judicial and moral.

There was a judicial boundary around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God verbally marked this boundary in Genesis 2. He told Adam not to eat of this tree. Adam and Eve violated this prohibition. So began the story of history through Revelation 20: the transition from wrath to grace.

The story of the fall of man is a story of the violation of God's law. It is also the story of how God deals in history with people who violate His law. It is the story of a trial, sanctions, and a declaration by God about future conflict between kingdoms.

First, God suspected that something was wrong. It was wrong in terms of the environment. It was also wrong in terms of his moral standards. Adam and Eve were missing. They were not doing their work in the midst of the garden. The garden was a walled-off area of their responsibility. It was to serve as a training ground for them. They should have been at work, but they were not. This was a specific area of inquiry. "What is going on?" This was the *what* question.

Second, God began an inquiry to find out where they were. "And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9). He knew where they were supposed to be, but they were not there. So, there was a location aspect of the inquiry. This was the *where* question.

Third, when God called out to Adam, He expected Adam to answer. Adam did answer: "And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (v. 10). When did this happen? God did not ask, but there was evidence available: they had sewn fig leaves for themselves. This had taken time, but it had not taken much time. They had ceased their labors in the garden on behalf of God. They had begun labors on their own behalf. They had adopted a new form of living: living au-

tonomously. But this had only recently begun. This was the *when* question.

Fourth, “And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked?” (v. 11a). It was clear who had told hem this: each other. This was the first step in their lifetime journey of knowing good and evil. It was the first step in mankind’s lifetime journey of knowing good and evil. This was the *who* question.

Fifth, God asked a *what* question: “Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” (v. 11b) Adam answered, and in doing so, he answered the question of *why*: “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (v. 12). God then asked Eve the same *what* question. She had a variation of Adam’s *why* answer. “And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (v. 13).

These five questions are familiar to historians and journalists: what, where, when, who, and why? There is the subordinate question: *how*? In the case of the story of the fall of man, this trial answers mankind’s universal question: “How did we get into this mess?” Every society has had an answer for this question. It is an inescapable question because of the magnitude and the universality of the mess that mankind has been since the fall of man.

### C. God’s Covenant Lawsuits

God brought a covenant lawsuit against Adam and Eve in response to their violation of the judicial boundaries around the tree. He knew exactly what had happened. Nevertheless, He adopted a specific judicial procedure in order to determine their guilt or innocence. He held a trial. *This is the research model for Christian historiography.* The story of the transition from wrath to grace is the story of a series of trials. Put differently, it is the story of a series of repetitions of the fall of man. Man has continually revolted against the judicial boundaries that God set up. Man has also revolted against the ethical boundaries that God set up. God has brought covenant lawsuits against the violators. These covenant lawsuits had a pattern. This pattern should govern all historiography, and surely must govern Christian historiography.

In Genesis 4, we have another story about the violation of God’s law: murder. This is the story of Cain and Abel. Once again, we see the same kind of judicial procedure that we saw in Genesis 3. “And Cain talked with

Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (vv. 8–10).

God knew exactly what had taken place. Nevertheless, He adhered to a specific judicial procedure, a procedure based on a series of questions. This was part of God's historical investigation of what had taken place. He asked Cain the *where* question. Where was Abel? If Cain had given an honest answer, he would have told God exactly where Abel was: buried. But Cain adopted a strategy that has become familiar. He answered a question with a question. Was he his brother's keeper? That is to say, was he in charge of Abel? Of course not. So, why should God expect Cain to know where Abel was? Adam and Eve had given direct answers to God. Cain had become devious.

Then God asked a *what* question. "What hast thou done?" But before Cain could think of a lie, God pointed to evidence: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." This statement did not mean that Abel's blood was literally crying out to God for vengeance. Here is the second example of metaphorical language in the Bible. (The first is "heel" and "head" in Genesis 3:15.) God knew what had happened, and He knew where the body was. He was reminding Cain of His omniscience.

He then pronounced judgment on Cain: "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (vv. 11–12). Again, this was metaphorical language. The earth really does not have a mouth. But the symbolism of the language conveyed to Cain the nature of the available evidence against him. He had killed his brother. He had buried his brother's body. That body was not hidden from God. God was providing testimony to Cain regarding Cain's infraction. God used metaphorical language to point to a pair of witnesses: his brother's blood and the earth. This was a double witness against Cain. This was consistent with the Mosaic law. "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death" (Deuteronomy 17:6). This is why God did not execute Cain. There was no human witness to testify against him. No one

had inquired about where Abel was. No one had investigated to see if there had been foul play.

God then pronounced sentence. The sentence was consistent with the symbolism of the earth as being a witness against Cain. "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" ( v. 12). Cain protested: "And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me" (vv. 13–14). God then promised him protection: "And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (v. 15). Other people would know about Cain's transgression, but they did not possess the judicial authority to impose the death penalty on him. He had not been convicted in a human court of law.

The history of man reveals a series of transgressions, which were followed by a series of negative sanctions. The whole earth became wicked, and God brought the flood against them. But He saved Noah and his family. Noah and his family became the central covenantal agents of the transition from wrath to grace. God had reduced wrath on a worldwide basis by means of the flood. God destroyed the tower's construction by scattering the people. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Joseph's brothers would have killed him, but Ruben spoke in his favor. So, they sold him into slavery. He later became an agent of grace in their lives. They knew they were guilty, and they feared that he would kill them all. But he did not. God brought judgment against Egypt at the time of the exodus. Soon thereafter, He brought judgment against representatives of Israel because of their worship of the golden calf. The stories of covenant lawsuits continued until the final judgment against the nation of Israel when the Romans conquered the city and burnt the temple.

Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin, by Herod, and by Pontius Pilate. In each case, there was an inquiry. The Sanhedrin pronounced judgment against Him. Herod did not, and then sent Jesus back to Pilate. Pontius Pilate declared Him innocent, but then imposed the crucifixion anyway. That was the most important trial in history. That trial and the subsequent sanctions are the judicial foundation of the transition from wrath to grace.



I am arguing in this chapter that the model for the Christian historian is this: *begin a search for historical evidence that points to some anomaly*. You are looking for the equivalent of Adam's absence from the garden. Historical investigation should begin with suspicion that the widely accepted historical account is not only incomplete, it is erroneous. More to the point, because the vast volume of historiography has been written by humanists who are in revolt against God and His kingdom, their anti-covenantal worldview has shaped their interpretation of the past.

A Christian historian must begin an investigation. He must question the historical documentation, just as God had questioned Adam and Eve. He must ask these questions: what, where, when, who, why, and how? He asks himself these questions. How is the textbook narrative consistent with what the evidence reveals regarding the answers to these questions? Is there other evidence, meaning testimony, that would point to a different set of answers?

A Christian historian must look at the documentation past to see if some historical figures should have been condemned, but were not. He should also look to see if some historical figures who were condemned should be declared innocent? In other words, a Christian historian looks at the past as if history was a series of covenant lawsuits, which it is. There were lawsuits brought by covenant-breakers against covenant-keepers. These lawsuits tend to be favorably reviewed by humanist historians. On the other hand, God brought lawsuits against covenant-breakers, and the results of those trials have been ignored or downplayed by humanist historians.

### **D. Documents as Witnesses**

The world is cosmically personal. It is not impersonal. Facts are interpreted facts, which means they are not neutral. There are no brute facts. There are no neutral documents.

Documents testify to someone's memory of what took place in the past, if only the immediate past. Memories can be incorrect. Also, documents can be shaped by people's desire to avoid posthumous convictions in the court of public opinion.

In his book, *The Idea of History*, R. G. Collingwood returns repeatedly to the metaphor of a Sherlock Holmes-type investigator. This investigator looks for oddities in the documentary record. He looks for errors of inter-



pretation by the local constable. One reason why Collingwood's book is still in print is the power of those sections of the book that use the metaphor of criminal investigation. This metaphor sticks in people's minds. Also, it is fundamentally correct in terms of the nature of biblical historiography. Historiography is the investigation of the past in terms of the covenant lawsuit that God will bring against all people on the day of final judgment. History is shaped by people's adherence to or violations of the laws of God. God will announce this to all mankind on the day of judgment.

A Christian historian must examine documents as if they were witnesses speaking on the witness stand. He has to cross-examine them. They cannot reply. He must think through the most likely explanations for the existence of a document, its preservation, its origin, and its original purpose in the thinking of the person who wrote it. He applies to the documents the five questions: what, where, when, who, and why? Then he uses his judgment as a Christian who believes in the providence of God to extract information from the document.

A Christian historian should begin with this presupposition: *God has imputed meaning to every fact in the universe.* He providentially controls each fact. He also controls the historical context of each fact. He establishes each fact's importance in the development of history. Not only is every fact an interpreted fact, every fact is interpreted by God. God has a flawless memory. He has preserved some pieces of evidence but not others. Also, He has preserved some pieces of evidence that have not yet been discovered, or whose significance has not yet been recognized. This is why there is lots of work for every Christian historian. There are lots of documents to discover. As surely as God accepted testimony from Abel's blood and the earth, so can a Christian historian accept testimony from a lifeless document. He must assess (impute) its relevance in the collection of documents available to him. In short, he must think God's thoughts after Him.

God has established a procedure of inquiry. Christian historians must respect this procedure. They must begin with an inquiry based on a court of law. Specifically, it is God's court of law. He conducted the first trial in Genesis 3. He will conduct the last trial as described in Revelation 20. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were

judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (vv. 11–12).

History is about ethics. It is about the law of God and men's violations of it. History is about God's negative sanctions brought against covenant-breakers, and also God's positive sanctions visited on covenant-keepers. That is to say, it is about Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

## **E. Texts and Contexts**

Written texts reflect the worldview and also the information available to the people who wrote them. They also reflect the motives of the people who wrote them. It is not easy to discern what their motives were unless you have more than one text from the author, preferably during the same period of time.

People have an extremely limited amount of information about what is going on around them. The further back in history we look, the less information that anyone had. Communications were slow and expensive. Literacy was limited. Information was filtered through a small number of organizations that had access to literate employees and which relied on written materials. Interpretation depends on the context in which the document was written. What kind of information did the writer have at his disposal? Was it accurate information? The historian needs information on the kinds of information that the writer drew upon when he wrote the document. Historians rarely have this kind of detailed information. So, they have to exercise their imaginations in order to impute accurate meaning to the document. This is not easy. It takes years of experience. It takes years of understanding the context of a particular society or a particular region in a limited timeframe.

In philosophical terms, this is the problem of the one and the many. The one is the overarching context in which the documents were produced. The many are the multitudinous documents that somehow survived and are available for historians to investigate. Unless you are familiar with a large quantity of documents from a particular era, it is difficult for you to reconstruct the historical context of any one of the documents. In other words, you need to be familiar with many documents in order to understand what one of them means. How important was it? How important was the person who produced it? If the person who produced it was not important, but he

knew somebody important, and the document testifies what that other person said or did, then the document may be important. However, the story needs multiple documents to confirm the opinion of the document's writer. So, it takes a great deal of knowledge about what was going on at the time in order to impute accurate meaning to a particular document.

This requires context. Historians can master only a limited number of topics within a limited geographical area in a limited time frame. They become dependent on summaries by other historians who have devoted years of study to other documents and other kinds of evidence that were produced in the same era and the same region. How accurate are the assessments of those historians? When someone has carefully examined many historical documents, he may begin to lose confidence in the judgment of other historians. He may begin to suspect that their narratives have been shaped more by their worldview than by their familiarity with documents.

A Christian historian should be primarily interested in the broad context rather than a particular text, unless he is specializing. Why? Because he is looking for evidence that would confirm his theory of historical development, namely, the transition from wrath to grace. He should be aware of documentation that points to a temporary reversal of this trend in a particular region and time period. But he should remain confident that the longer trend will reappear as he studies what came after the period of the reversal.

The more experience that a historian has with other historians' interpretations of the past, the more easily he will recognize either the absence of a coherent theory of historical development in their writings or else an interpretation that is hostile to the biblical structure of history. So, he needs to read widely, yet he also needs to become familiar with documents of a limited period of time in a particular region. By doing his own work of interpretation of texts and context, he can recognize the techniques used by humanist historians to shape their narratives of the past. He should be like a professional magician. He should learn the tricks of the trade in order to recognize the nature of the deceptions that his peers present to each other and to the general public.

## **F. Standards of Interpretation**

There are standards of interpretation that are common within the guild of professional historians. These standards are enforced by the guild in or-

der to defend members of the guild from deceivers within the guild. Nobody wants to be caught citing the work of another historian, when that work is later exposed as incompetently written and not supported by the evidence. There is self-interest among historians to avoid this kind of embarrassment.

One way to reduce the risk is peer review. Books and articles are reviewed by specialists in the same area of investigation. Editors of academic historical journals assume that if there are any egregious errors or egregious misquotations of original source documents, one of the reviewers will find it. Then the editor of the journal will send back the article to the author. It will not appear in his journal. He will not risk being embarrassed retroactively.

One of the ways that editors of journals protect themselves against such an outcome is to accept mainly articles on narrow topics of marginal importance historically. This is why most articles in most academic journals in every academic field do not get read or cited by scholars. Only a tiny percentage of these articles is quoted by other scholars. Because an author's primary goal for getting published is to secure tenure or a promotion, this absence of influence does not discourage authors from continuing to do research and sending the results to editors of journals. The fact that almost nobody ever reads or quotes their articles is of only marginal importance in their careers.

There is no written list of rules and regulations associated with publishing articles. Familiarity with these unwritten rules takes time. It takes years of experience in writing term papers in graduate school. Basically, the rules and regulations associated with academic publication are more like rules of etiquette than rules governing chemical experiments. Probably nothing is going to blow up in the faces of the editors. If it does, it will not be a major explosion.

Early in his distinguished career, David Hackett Fisher wrote a book, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (1970). It lists a lot of fallacies that historians have committed. Predictably, another historian, L. O. Mink, wrote a negative review in 1971. This is standard operating procedure. Historian A says this; historian B says he is mistaken. Most historians pay no attention to either of them. I do not think many historians have read Fisher's book. I do not think most graduate students read it. It sits unread on the shelves of people who edit historical journals.

It is so rare for any historian to be severely sanctioned for having pro-

duced a third-rate book that the guild has little influence in shaping the content of books directly. The shaping begins through a long process of training in graduate school. Would-be historians find out from their professors what is considered respectable documentation and what is not. They find out which historians are acceptable in footnotes, and which historians are not. The academic guild of historians can be described accurately as an old boy network. A handful of research universities produce most of the Ph.D. students who wind up teaching in the second-tier universities and even third-tier universities. The glut of these people has been so great since 1969 that, unless you graduated from one of these major universities, you will not find a teaching job in college.

### **G. Normal Science and Revolutionary Science**

In 1962, the University of Chicago Press published a short book: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. That book created something of an intellectual revolution in academia. The author, Thomas Kuhn, had received his Ph.D. in physics from Harvard in 1948. The president of Harvard, James B. Conant, allowed him to teach courses on the history of science. In 1956, he moved to the University of California, Berkeley. He taught in both the philosophy department and the history department. His field of expertise was the history of science, but his book created an academic sensation in numerous fields.

He argued that science has developed through a series of unexpected intellectual revolutions. It did not develop as a result of a series of experiments that led to new discoveries in a slow, evolutionary way. He called the intellectual revolutions “paradigm shifts.” This phrase got into the English language. Most scientists work at what he called normal science. They study limited areas in their field, and they conduct experiments that do not affect other scientists’ understanding of the field. Their discoveries confirm the existing outlook of the guild. A field is not changed dramatically as a result of normal science. It changes because of major intellectual breakthroughs.

Kuhn argued that major breakthroughs come primarily from two groups: young scholars and outsiders to the guild. They discover anomalies that cannot be explained by prevailing interpretations of cause and effect. I would call these anomalies “suspicions.” This is like God going into the garden and finding it empty. “Where is Adam? Something does not add

up.” The revolutionary scientist sees something, and he thinks this: “That’s strange.”

The people in charge of the guild resist these revolutionary breakthroughs. They do not want to re-think the prevailing explanation that has long governed the guild. They fight back. They try to suppress the spread of some revolutionary idea. There is an old phrase: “Science advances, one funeral at a time.” Eventually, the new idea gains wide acceptance, and the guild adjusts to it. What had constituted an unchangeable law in the field a generation earlier gets modified. Parmenides has to adjust to Heraclitus. He does not like it, but he has to do it.

Kuhn’s book became a kind of Bible for younger scholars in the social sciences after 1965. A paradigm shift took place in academia. This was the five-year era of the counter-culture. It spread across the West. It affected numerous academic disciplines. Young scholars embraced Kuhn’s thesis as a way to justify their own reaction against the established academic guilds in the universities. The moderate political liberals who had dominated American universities from 1950 to 1965 received challenges from younger members of the faculties.

I am arguing that a Christian historian should see himself as part of a revolutionary movement within the field of history. He comes with a different set of presuppositions about God, man, law, sanctions, and time. He comes with a different view of the structure of history: creation, image, law, imputation, and inheritance. He should regard himself as an outsider in the field. He should not regard himself as part of the “loyal opposition” to the humanists who dominate the field. This should apply to every Christian and every academic field. The Christian’s attitude should be one of revolution. He seeks to overturn the paradigm of humanism. He should be self-conscious about this.

As an exercise, he should read three textbooks on Western civilization. (He can buy used ones a lot less expensively.) He should identify the grand narrative. If he could find one or two textbooks on Western civilization written before 1965, that would be informative. Has the grand narrative changed?

I recommend that Christian colleges teach Western civilization, but from an explicitly Christian standpoint. The instructors should produce videos and reading assignments based on primary source documents. The course should show that, apart from Christianity, there would not have been

a distinctly Western civilization. Classical Greece fell to empire through Alexander. Then Alexander's shattered empire fell to the Romans. Then the Roman Empire collapsed. Western Europe would probably be Islamic today, had there not been an existing Christian civilization that developed after 325.

## **H. Guilt and Innocence**

The category of justice is an implication of point 4 of the biblical covenant: sanctions. Sanctions are imposed by God in terms of people's guilt or innocence. Sanctions are therefore a matter of justice. Consider the ninth commandment. It is the fourth commandment in the list of five kingly commandments. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). This commandment applies to all false testimony, but the judicial context is a civil court.

We think of this commandment as applying only to contemporary events. This is too limiting. It applies to all events in history. The Christian doctrine of the final judgment teaches that everyone will be judged at the end of time in terms of what he has said and done. God's standard of evaluation is God's law. God will impute guilt or innocence retroactively. This is the model for Christian historiography.

A major goal of Christian historiography is to identify significant covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers in history. These people must be representative of their respective worldviews. Presumably, they were leaders in some way. Humanistic historians have created a narrative in which Christian leaders are presented as threats to the development of civilization. They have praised political leaders who promoted the expansion of the state. A Christian historian should look at these narratives to see whether the humanist historians have misrepresented these people. He should look at contemporary evidence to discover the truth or falsity of the judgments against these people. An important area of revisionist Christian historiography is to judge retroactively the extent to which significant historical figures have adhered to or violated biblical law. What were the results of these violations?

In the Introduction, I discussed the antipathy of the humanist philosopher Benedetto Croce against assessing the guilt or innocence of historical figures. He was not alone in his opinion. One of the most distinguished historians in the first half of the twentieth century was the French historian,



Marc Bloch [BLOCK]. In an unfinished book that he wrote in 1941 and 1942, he condemned the practice of judging the ethics of historical figures. In Chapter IV, "Historical Analysis," he began with this supposed dichotomy: "Judging or Understanding?" He said these must be rigorously separate assessments by historians. I argue that judging guilt or innocence is crucial for historical understanding. Bloch resisted this suggestion. "Now, for a long time, the historian has passed for a sort of judge in Hades, charged with meeting out praise or blame to dead heroes." He said this idea is wrong-headed. He said that historians must not judge guilt or innocence because all that we have to judge past morality is our contemporary standards.

Bloch was an historical relativist. He ignored the possibility that Christian historians should use biblical standards to judge people's actions. He asked a rhetorical question: "Are we so sure of ourselves and of our age as to divide the company of our forefathers into the just and the damned?" The correct answer to this question is this: we had better be sure of biblical standards. We should be sufficiently sure to pass judgment on contemporary leaders as well as leaders in the past. That is to say, *we must deny historical relativism*. Bloch continued: "How absurd it is, by elevating the entire totally relative criteria of one individual, one party, or one generation to the absolute, to inflict standards upon the way in which Sulla governed Rome, or Richelieu the States of the Most Christian King!" Bloch assumed that ethical standards change, generation to generation. Therefore, historical judgments on people's behavior always are revised. "Moreover, since nothing is more variable than such judgments, subject to all the fluctuations of corrective opinion or personal campus, history, by all too frequent preferring the compilation of honor rolls to that of notebooks, has gratuitously given itself the appearance of the most uncertain of disciplines. Hollow indictments are followed by vein rehabilitations." Then he drove home the point rhetorically: "Robespierrists! Anti-Robespierrists! For pity's sake, simply tell us what Robespierre was" (*The Historian's Craft*, Vintage edition, 1953, p. 140). I ask: "How can we assess what Robespierre was unless we can also make moral judgments regarding what Robespierre did?" He was a tyrant whose Committee on Public Safety sent at least 17,000 innocent people—a retroactive judicial assessment—to the guillotine. In addition, 10,000 more died in prison without trials. He was the essence of the worst aspects of the French Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century.

Humanist historians who pretend they are not making retroactive



judgments delude themselves. They structure their narratives to persuade readers that historical progress is based heavily on the expansion of state power—power that turns civil magistrates into implacable bureaucrats and political tyrants. They present the growth of the secular state as almost always positive. They present the contraction of the influence of the church as almost always positive. They do this in the name of neutral historiography. It is time for Christian historians to stop playing the humanists' game.

## I. The Price of Documentation

The supply of documentation is a function of its price. The lower the price, the greater the demand. With the development of the Internet, the price of documentation has fallen dramatically. Students can now get access to English translations of primary source documents in every historical field. They do not have to pay to gain this access.

As the publication of primary source documents by major research libraries continues, materials that have been long forgotten will be discovered by search engines. Online language translation software will get better. The availability of video hosting will make it possible to post detailed information about geography, monuments, statues, and other artifacts. Detailed historical maps will become available.

Then there is digitized information, especially economic information. This field is called cliometrics. It became increasingly popular after 1960. Today, computerization is spreading across national borders. Vast databases are becoming available at low prices or even for free that enable historians and social scientists to see developments over time.

The amount of data that is available as a result of what is called the internet of things is already a tsunami. Most of this data is proprietary, but companies will be able to bring in extra money by letting research institutes gain access to the data for explicitly educational purposes. This development is now part of the international social order. There seems to be no conceptual limit on the amount of information that will be made available. Over time, historians will be able to study social behavior in ways that are impossible today.

This new information will make narratives more accurate, though maybe not more clear. Statistical information is not a competitive substitute for historical narration. People want stories, not pages of statistics.

But well-designed graphs can help them understand what is going on. A well-designed graph can convey information that would be difficult to convey through narrative alone. The interaction between charts and narration will lead to greater understanding on the part of specialists and also the general public.

The great breakthroughs in the field of documentation lie ahead of us.

## **Conclusion**

There will be greater awareness of an explicitly biblical worldview and explicitly biblical systems of ethical causation. The Christian school movement will begin to produce young adults who are ready to re-think the worldview of humanism. When they do this, they will begin to re-think the conclusions of humanism in every academic discipline. They will begin to ask questions that the humanist worldview is incapable of answering. They will find themselves facing this thought more often: "That's strange." There will be interaction among Christians in multiple academic disciplines. This will be cross-pollination. People will ask questions that can be answered only through new research paradigms. There will be a flowering of Christian academic endeavors. I say this because I believe in Christian education. If researchers begin with a view of the world that is accurate, they are going to be more productive in their various academic disciplines than they would be if they held tightly to the humanist worldview, which is in the process of disintegration.

# 15

## PROGRESS

*For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody (Isaiah 51:3).*

*For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).*

### A. Covenant Model, Part 5

Point 5 of the biblical covenant model is succession. The system of covenantal sanctions in point 4 benefits covenant-keepers and hampers covenant-breakers. This creates conditions favorable to increased dominion by covenant-keepers. This dominion produces positive effects over time.

Point 5 of biblical social theory is inheritance. Covenant-keepers progressively inherit the earth. Covenant-breakers are steadily disinherited. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Proverbs 13:22).

Point 5 of Christian historiography is progress.

### B. Progress Described Biblically

Isaiah 51:3 describes a future society. This society is described in terms of restoration. God restores society to be like the garden of Eden. This is the imagery of the world before the fall of man. As part of God’s curse on mankind, the world outside of the garden was turned into wilderness. It became difficult for man to cultivate. The curse imposed a major economic loss on mankind. Man would have to work by the sweat of his brow to grow food. The curse increased the costs of production. It encouraged cooperation, economic specialization, and increased output.

Isaiah understood that the people of Judah would recognize the story of the fall of man in Eden. Their parents had told them this story. So had the Levites. They understood that the world they lived in was under a curse. They also understood that it is the task of covenant-keepers to work to restore a world comparable to the garden of Eden. This takes time and effort. It takes capital, especially accurate knowledge. It takes all of the benefits of civilization. It is a long-term task.

Habakkuk reminded them that this dominion process applies to the whole world. Dominion was not a geographically limited assignment given to Israelites to restore only the tiny nation of Israel to fruitfulness. The whole world had to be restored. But how? The heart of the dominion covenant is adherence to God's law: point 3. This is the way in which people gain the blessings of God: point 4. These are not limited to spiritual blessings. They are comprehensive blessings that apply to every area of life. Man's sin in the garden was a comprehensive rebellion. Therefore, God's redemption of mankind in history also is comprehensive.

Habakkuk told the Israelites that the whole world will see the glory of God. This glory will be comprehensive. He reminded them that their task in life was to extend this knowledge of God to those outside of Israel. This was an evangelical function. The nation of Israel served as a kind of cultural boot camp. It was to become something like a re-creation of the garden of Eden. It was to be a training ground for covenant-keepers. Their work will be successful, he assured them. This was a vision of worldwide redemption. The prophet said that this vision will be fulfilled in history. *Biblical progress means the redemption of the world.* This will be comprehensive. It will apply to every area of life that is presently under the dominion of sin. There will be no safe zones for sin.

### C. God's Visible Kingdom

Evidence of God's comprehensive redemption will be widespread knowledge of the word of God. Dominion is not merely technological. It is covenantal. At the heart of the covenant is God's law-order: point 3. Adherence to this law-order is the basis of positive sanctions in history: point 4. This is the message of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The Israelites understood this. Moses had told the generation of the conquest that this was the case. Each successive generation was told what the conquest generation

had been told. Jeremiah reminded Judah of this message. The nations outside of Israel will see this redemption of Israel. "Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all" (Jeremiah 31:10–12). This message gave Israelites hope that the whole world would understand that God is in charge of history, and He directs history to favor His people.

Later in this passage, we read a prophecy regarding the law of God.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

The Epistle to the Hebrews cites this prophecy as being fulfilled by what takes place in the hearts of Christians. This is the promised New Covenant.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the

land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: (Hebrews 8:7–10).

Then it announces this regarding Jesus: His footstool victory through His law in covenant-keepers' hearts.

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (Hebrews 10:12–17).

Jeremiah's prophecy to Judah regarding the law in men's hearts has been definitively fulfilled by the church of Jesus Christ. All of the prophecies associated with the rebuilding of Zion now apply to the church. The task of the dominion covenant still applies to all mankind, but God expects His New Covenant people to use His law-order as their tool of dominion. It was a tool of dominion for Old Covenant Israel, but the Israelites continued to violate these laws. God divorced Israel in A.D. 70: the fall of Jerusalem to Rome's legions. Jesus had warned the Pharisees of this divorce. God will create a new nation, He said. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). That nation is the church. This is why Paul called the church "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). We know what the fruits will be: worldwide dominion. These will be the same fruits that had been promised to Israel. The kingdom of God will be visible to the whole world. Until it is, Christians' task of dominion is not over.

## **D. Kingdoms in Conflict**

There are two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. The kingdom of man was established by a covenantal agent of Satan: the serpent. Such an oath was implied, but it was not formal. This was implicit: the right of man to everything in the garden, including the forbidden tree. Adam through his actions passed judgment on the word of God. He decided that he would test the word of God. Perhaps the word of God was not autonomous. Perhaps it was not authoritative. It was merely one opinion among two. The serpent had offered one interpretation. God had offered the other. Adam decided that he would run a test to see whose word was accurate. He was the arbiter. He did not act in the name of the serpent or Satan. He acted on his own authority in his own name.

God has established His kingdom. He has established a law-order governing this kingdom. He presented this law-order to the Israelites at the time that they covenanted with him by oath at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–23). Moses read those laws to the generation of the conquest four decades later. The Israelites were required by God to adhere to the laws that God had given them. God promised positive sanctions for obedience. He promised negative sanctions for disobedience.

Paul compiled two lists of laws whose violation identifies covenant-breakers. He said specifically that covenant-breakers are headed for destruction because they violate these laws. That is to say, there are negative sanctions associated with violating these laws, and God imposes those sanctions in history.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (Romans 1:28–32).

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:9–10).

The Bible teaches that there are rival kingdoms that compete for dominion in history. They do so in terms of rival systems of ethics. The conflict between the two kingdoms is not primarily based on power. It is based on ethics. The kingdom of man does have a tendency to manifest itself as a power religion. But the Bible makes it clear that this strategy of dominion eventually fails. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright” (Psalm 20:7–8). “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (Psalm 73:18–19). The biblical basis of long-term dominion is obedience to God’s laws.

### **E. Covenantal Success**

A Christian historian should begin with this premise: there has been no change in the concepts of covenantal success and failure with the coming of the New Covenant. There is ethical conflict in every area of life between the two kingdoms. A Christian historian should understand that there has been an escalation of conflict because of the New Covenant. The conflict has spread outside the borders of Israel ever since the days of Augustus Caesar. There has been an increasing self-consciousness on the part of both covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers about the nature of the conflict. Each side becomes more self-conscious about implementing its worldview at the expense of the other. Renaissance humanists were far more self-conscious than their predecessors. Enlightenment humanists were more self-conscious than Renaissance humanists. Humanists in the nineteenth century became more self-conscious than humanists in the eighteenth century. Humanists in the twentieth century continued this increase in awareness regarding the



threat of Christianity to the extension of the kingdom of man. But, with each escalation of self-awareness, humanists have become more irrational. The confidence of Renaissance humanism is no longer widespread among humanists in the twenty-first century. The epistemological and moral acids of deconstructionism and postmodernism have undermined humanism. These acids have barely touched Christians. Among those Christians who did not go to graduate school, these acids have had almost no effect at all.

There is a familiar saying among humanists: "Man's technological knowledge has outpaced his moral knowledge." This is surely an accurate assessment. It has been accurate for as long as civilization has existed. There is a reason for this. The division of labor increases specialization in production. Men then trade with each other. The benefits from the division of labor and trade have combined to persuade men to cooperate. They sell their ideas. They cooperate with each other because this increases their output and therefore their wealth. Technological knowledge has therefore advanced far more rapidly than ethical knowledge has.

Men are ready to fight at the drop of the proverbial hat. James was correct: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:1–3). War comes from sin. Men are not equally ready to cooperate with each other in areas outside of market exchange. God understood this when He cursed the ground (Genesis 3:17–19). This curse forced men to cooperate with each other in order to increase their wealth. So, there has been steady technological development throughout the ages. This is why men's technological knowledge always outpaces their ethical knowledge. Covenant-breakers' ethical knowledge is based on theft. Self-proclaimed autonomous man possesses no knowledge that he has not stolen from God. He is a thief in every area of life. From the day that Adam and Eve stole fruit from God's tree, man has been a thief.

There has always been extensive technological development in the area of warfare. In this area of life, men have progressed technologically from the beginning. They want to be able to fight more efficiently. The military victors take the wealth of the losers. But the price of this victory is destruction. War is destructive.

There are two major economic processes at work in history. One pro-

cess favors cooperation through voluntary trade. The other process is warfare, which rejects cooperation. It is destructive. Trade is not destructive. Members on both sides of a voluntary transaction hope to improve their wealth. If they do improve their wealth as a result of a transaction, they seek to make another transaction. Cooperation increases wealth in the camp of the covenant-keepers as well as the camp of the covenant-breakers. Both kingdoms prosper economically.

A Christian historian who looks at the history of technology will find that covenant-breakers seem to be the pioneers in technological innovation. There is an economic reason for this. There are more of them to become pioneers. There is a greater division of labor within the camp of covenant-breakers. But both sides win when either side gets richer. Productive technological techniques are difficult to monopolize. Good ideas spread rapidly. Success is imitated in the realm of economics.

In contrast is the realm of evangelism and conversion. This is competition for souls. This form of competition is what economists call a zero-sum game. One kingdom wins when an evangelist persuades someone in the other kingdom to defect. Thus, in matters of confession of faith, the warfare is more obvious than in matters of economic trade and technological advancement. Christian evangelism invites covenant-breakers to bring their talents and wealth under God's authority. It invites them to become God's servants. Converts move from death to life. John the Baptist announced: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). So, Christ's kingdom expands through evangelism. This is non-violent warfare.

Jesus made it clear that covenant-breakers who sin against God knowingly come under greater negative sanctions than those who sin against God less knowingly.

But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according

to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:45–48).

With greater wealth and greater knowledge comes greater responsibility. This is a fundamental principle of life. Most societies understand this. People teach this to their children. But covenant-breakers do not recognize this truth in their own lives when they prosper. Their success leads them into disasters. This is what Psalm 73 teaches. *Success for covenant-breakers is a slippery slope*. It confirms their covenant. They are deceived by this confirmation.

A Christian historian should look at the past in terms of the success and failure of individuals and especially societies. He will find that periods of great success for a covenant-breaking society are followed by society-wide disaster. This is the message of Daniel regarding the four beasts, which were kings. “These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever” (Daniel 7:17–18). There will be ten successive kingdoms. They will all fail. “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:27). *This is the pattern of history*. “Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezekiel 21:26–27). This speaks of Jesus Christ.

## F. Optimism and Commitment

Someone who believes that his efforts are doomed to fail in his own lifetime may be willing to sacrifice a great deal for the sake of the long-term results of his efforts. This was certainly true of Communists in the first half of the twentieth century. But if someone believes that the long-term results of his efforts are as doomed as the short-term results of his efforts, he is

unlikely to make a major commitment, which involves a major sacrifice. He is far more likely to seek ways to conserve whatever he possesses. He does not want to place all of his assets on the line for the sake of a cause that is doomed to fail. A popular American phrase says not to throw good money after bad. Another phrase says not to throw money down a rat hole.

Entrepreneurs are optimistic about the future. They are convinced that their next venture is going to be successful, and maybe stupendously successful. They are willing to face the burdens of uncertainty about the future because they expect to profit mightily from the success of their present sacrifices.

This outlook applies to Christian historians. Someone who thinks that no one will pay any attention to his publications is unlikely to sacrifice time and money in order to master the documents required to present a coherent narrative of the past to the public. If he also believes that Christianity will be unable to extend its influence around the world in every area of life, he has little incentive to study the past in search of evidence that earlier Christians firmly believed that Christianity will extend its influence around the world in every area of life. A Christian historian who is pessimistic about the efforts of Christians to build a Christian civilization has to regard the optimism of earlier generations of Christians as misplaced. They did not understand what he firmly believes, namely, that covenant-breakers will be victorious in history. If he also believes that covenant-breakers will systematically persecute Christians, he is even less interested in sacrificing in the present in order to develop narratives about Christianity's past. The best that he will be able to say about the optimists of the past is that they had the right attitude, but bad eschatology. They were consistent with what they believed about the future, but they misunderstood the future. They expected Christian victories, not defeats. Poor, misguided souls.

One reason why I hope that readers of this book will take seriously Chapter 5 on inheritance is to persuade them that the New Testament clearly teaches that Christianity will be successful in the future. The inheritance left by Christians to successors will not be transferred to covenant-breakers. On the contrary, the inheritance left by covenant-breakers will be transferred to Christians and to Christian civilization. The Christian historian who believes the message in Chapter 5 will be more willing to sacrifice time, money, and emotional commitment to investigating the history of Christianity's influence in developing Western civilization. He will be

more ready to confront the humanist interpretation of Western civilization, which de-emphasizes the contribution of Christianity and emphasizes the legacy left by classical civilization to the West.

Humanists are losing faith in the future. They are also losing faith in Western civilization. The top American universities ceased requiring a course in Western civilization in the 1990s. Postmodernist historiography has called into question the historiography of the modernists, the Enlightenment, and the Renaissance. This creates a tremendous opportunity for Christian historians to re-interpret the history of Western civilization in terms of the contributions of Christendom, which is what Renaissance historians dedicated themselves to refuting.

### **G. Christian Revisionist Historiography**

The necessary initial task is to reinterpret the history of Western civilization. This is because humanists have begun to abandon the battlefield on which they fought a successful series of campaigns, beginning with the Renaissance. The humanist version of Western history was that the classical heritage was foundational to the creation of Western civilization. Therefore, the Christian version of Western history must make the case that Christianity, not classical culture, is the primary inheritance of the West.

This revisionist program has two components: offensive and defensive. The offensive program is to show that the Bible is the basis of Christendom. Christianity has imported technologies from other societies. There is always sharing of technologies across borders and cultures. The offensive campaign must show how Christians developed a civilization that we call Christendom. It was primarily biblical, but not entirely. Christian historians must show that the crucial elements of Christendom came from the Bible, not from Greece and Rome. They should show how Christianity applied biblical principles in order to build a unique civilization in the West. There are very few books on this. This has not been the way that Western civilization has been taught since the Renaissance. There should be detailed studies of monastic technological development. These have been produced by humanists. We need more of these studies. There should also be studies on how biblical principles affected the development of both civil law and canon law. There are few studies on this. There is be studies on how biblical laws establishing private property led to increased trade and increased tech-

nological development. This kind of research is going to take generations.

Then there is the defensive component. Yet, even here, it is mostly offensive: a frontal assault against classical culture and classical civilization. The operational model is the book by Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*. It was published by Oxford University Press in 1940. It has been reprinted by Liberty Press. It is a detailed study of the moral and intellectual collapse of classical culture at the beginning of the Roman Empire. This book must not simply be read; it must be mastered. A serious historian will follow the footnotes. Another useful book is Ethelbert Stauffer's *Christ and the Caesars* (1955). It shows that the conflict between church and state was at bottom a conflict over rival views of salvation. This battle is reflected in the history of Roman currency.

To understand the failure of classical culture, Christian historians must read accurate accounts about classical Greece. The first thing they have to understand that its creative period lasted for only about a century: 450 B.C. to 350 B.C. Greek culture was committed to constant warfare, and this warfare ultimately weakened Sparta and Athens, so that the Macedonian army was able to conquer Greece without a great deal of trouble in the mid-fourth century B.C. The place to start is Greek religion. Religion is the place to start every history of society. The historian must read Fustel de Coulanges' masterpiece, *The Ancient City: A Study in the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (1864). That will dispel the notion that Greece and Rome took seriously the Olympian gods. What they took seriously were demonic beings that surrounded them on their own property. These were the gods of the underworld. For confirmation of this thesis, historians must read the works of the remarkable and generally forgotten historian, Jane Ellen Harrison. She wrote in the early 1900s. She was a master of Greek poetry and Greek pottery. She also emphasized the centrality of what she called the chthonic gods of Greece. Also crucial is the book by Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*. He gave these lectures in 1872, and again in 1874, 1878, and 1885. They were edited and published in 1998.

A Christian historian should read Plato. But, before he reads Plato, he should read the 1945 book by Karl Popper: *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Volume 1. It is a devastating critique of Plato as a defender of tyranny.

The Christian historian should ask the following questions:

What were the legacies of Greece and Rome that shaped the early church? What is the evidence?

What were the legacies of Greece and Rome that shaped the medieval church up to about 1100? What is the evidence?

Were these legacies positive when compared with the Old Testament and the New Testament? Or were they mostly negative?

Next, a Christian historian must study the Renaissance. This should begin with a detailed examination of books written by Francis Yates. Yates showed that it was not just Greek and Roman culture and philosophy that the Renaissance humanists revived. It was also Greek and Roman occultism. Begin with her book, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964). That book created a paradigm shift among historians regarding the rationalism and commitment to science of Renaissance humanists. She was a careful historian. She worked with documents that humanist historians had ignored or had not known about. She extended her studies into the Enlightenment. Also important is the short book by Stephen McKnight: *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity* (1989). Then read his book, *The Modern Age and the Recovery of Ancient Wisdom: A Reconsideration of Historical Consciousness, 1450-1650* (1991).

Two crucial books on the world from the French Revolution to the present are these: James Billington's *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (1980) and Paul Johnson, *Modern Times* (1983). Billington begins with the French Revolution and traces the revolutionaries to Lenin in 1917. Johnson begins in 1916.

If you do not feel competent yet, do not worry about it. With sufficient study, you can become competent. You may be regarded as an amateur, but this should not bother you.

## H. Publishing Agenda

You do not need to be a professor in a college to teach history. If you limit yourself to a few dozen students in a college classroom, you are limiting yourself far too much. Your audience will be much too small. Think big. Think YouTube.

The first step in any publishing agenda should be to identify your audi-



ence or audiences. Each book, article, online video, or podcast should target a specific audience.

YouTube has proven that a man who is willing to study the details of specific historical topics can gain an enormous audience. A good example is The History Guy. Some of his videos have been watched by 500,000 viewers. They are usually about 15 minutes long. He just sits in front of a camera and talks. He then edits in public domain photographs or maps. The narration carries the presentation, but the support materials add credibility. Another example is Simon Whistler, who has 3.3 million subscribers.

There are dozens of extremely lively videos on American history by John Green. Green is a gifted novelist for teenagers. He is a multimillionaire, as is his brother, who co-produces the videos. There are multiple series of courses. In 2020, his 49 videos in American history had been watched by 47 million people. His targeted audience is high school students who are studying for the AP or Advanced Placement exam. These videos are nothing like any course you ever had in high school.

These teachers have reached more people than any other teachers in history, with one exception: Salman Khan. The Khan Academy in 2020 had almost 2 million full-time students taking video-based courses around the world. He has revolutionized education.

We need 12-part Sunday school courses on church history. They can be talking-head videos. They can be screencasts. Screencast technologies are inexpensive, and they are effective for teaching. You simply narrate what is on the screen.

It is relatively inexpensive to have books typeset. They can be published on Amazon as Kindle books. They can be published as print-on-demand books, which can then be sold through Amazon. If you can write a book, you can get it published.

There is plenty of demand for free courses that target homeschooled children.

Each YouTube video should have a link at the end that leads the viewers to your free WordPress.com website.

## **I. Christian Discipleship**

Do not go to the trouble of producing a video until you know what you want the person who watches the video to do at the end of the video. Ob-



viously, you want him to watch your next video in the series. I am speaking about what you want the person to do after he has watched all of the videos in the series.

You are making these people responsible for implementing changes in their lives as a result of having watched your videos. There is no escape from this law of human action: *with greater knowledge comes greater responsibility*. You should have a specific action agenda for members of each audience. Maybe they should read another book. But that only postpones the day of reckoning. At some point, people have to put the knowledge that they possess to productive use for building the kingdom of God. Christians should not be content to be consumers of anything, including information. They should put this information to productive use.

Viewers should be encouraged to recommend your videos to other people. They should become evangelists. We need Christians who understand the history of the church's impact in building Western civilization. We need Christians to gain confidence in the long-term potential for their own efforts. They need to understand the growth of the kingdom of God in the past so that they can commit personally to the growth of the kingdom of God in the future.

Your goal should be to train leaders. They must discipline themselves in a program of self-improvement. Their goal should be recruiting and training disciples. Christian discipleship involves far more than a program to share the gospel of personal salvation. Christian discipleship must train leaders to serve as agents of the kingdom of God. There is a division of labor in this kingdom. Different people have different gifts. They have different opportunities. You should train them to recognize what their skills are and how they can put these skills to effective use in their circumstances.

Basic to Christian leadership is an understanding of the history of the church as an institution, but also understanding the history of Christian civilization. Christians should understand Christendom. This has not been taught in the churches over the last four centuries. It surely has not been taught in public schools. It has not been taught in Christian schools. Your presentations on history should be part of a much broader program of Christian discipleship and leadership training. I wrote a book about this: *The Five Pillars of Biblical Leadership* (2021).

## Conclusion

Humanism is now in defensive mode. It dominates the institutions of higher learning and public education. It dominates what are called the mainstream media. But their audiences are shrinking. A kind of disintegration is taking place. This disintegration became visible in 2011: the so-called Arab Spring. It was an unorganized revolt against Middle Eastern governments. It began to spread. This has been chronicled in a 2014 book by Martin Gurri: *The Revolt of the Public*. Social media available on smartphones have begun to fragment the establishment's near-monopoly of control over the flow of information. It took less than a decade from the development of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to overturn governments in the Middle East and around the world. It happened without warning.

The Internet has created opportunities for evangelism and education on a scale unparalleled in human history. It is time for Christian historians and Christian storytellers to take advantage of this opportunity.

## CONCLUSION TO PART 3

### A. Historical Structure and Facts

Christian historiography must begin with presuppositions about the nature of history. This means these issues: creation and God's providence, the image of God in man, biblical law, sanctions in history, and eschatology. A Christian historian should have clear ideas about how the Bible addresses each of these five issues. He should also have decided how to integrate all five points into a coherent theory of history.

He must assume that God has imputed meaning to all of history in terms of the five points. God's memory has flawlessly connected the historical dots retroactively because He connected the dots originally. His decree is sovereign. He makes no mistakes. He is omniscient. Nothing that has ever happened in history has been a surprise to Him. First, this is the biblical solution to the problem of the source of *coherence* in history. Second, this confession is the solution to the problem of identifying the source of *meaning* in history. Third, it is the solution to the problem of *historiography*. Because God is omniscient, and because His providence holds the universe together, a Christian historian does not need to know everything exhaustively in order to know anything accurately. His goal is to think God's thoughts after Him. He can do this because he has the mind of Christ. He also has access to the Holy Spirit, who guides Christians into all truth. That was what Jesus specifically said that the Holy Spirit would do. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit has this task: to bring all things to our remembrance.

Trust in the covenantal structure of history, trust in God's biblical revelation of this structure, and trust in the reliability of the connection between God's mind and covenant-keepers' minds are just the beginning. Then the hard work begins. The Christian historian must research an existing histor-

ical narrative in terms of this question: "Does this narrative reflect the five points of the structure of history?" Historical narratives must be structured in terms of the five points. *Historiography must faithfully reflect history.* In his quest for a topic to write about or teach, he should look for accepted narratives that are not consistent with the five points. These are candidates for Christian revisionism. The correct goal of Christian historical revisionism is to revise humanism's narratives so that they reflect the coherence between the biblical structure of history and the interpretations of the past. A Christian historian should demonstrate the biblical structure history by means of the historical facts. Historical facts are not autonomous. His theory of history is not autonomous. It is covenantal.

The Holy Spirit can and does intervene in order to assist Christian historians to do their work more effectively. God does not expect Christian historians to be omniscient. He understands that they need assistance in order to do their work faithfully. The humanist historian has no faith in such a personalized source of truth. This has always been true of humanist historians. Classical Greeks believed in minor divinities known as the muses. One of the muses was memory. But the muses confined themselves to poetry. They were of no assistance to would-be historians. That is why there were so few historians in classical Greece. Basically, there were only two of note: Herodotus and Thucydides. Humanistic historians have long regarded them as the originators of historiography. That is because they do not take Moses and the prophets seriously. Moses and the prophets appealed to God as the source of memory. Herodotus and Thucydides did not.

## **B. Humanism Is Flying Blind**

What I am saying here may seem difficult to believe for someone who has not received graduate-level training in historiography. I am saying that courses in epistemology have always been nonexistent. There have been no courses on foundations of historical knowledge, beginning with Kantian philosophy as applied to historical understanding. There have been courses on methodology: research and writing skills. There have been books on competing philosophies of history. These are usually written by philosophers. Such courses are not taught in history departments. They should be taught in every history department in every Christian college. Such a course could use this book as a textbook: *Historiography Secular and Religious*,

by Gordon Clark. It was published in 1971. Clark was a Christian philosopher. But there is a major problem with his book. He never wrote a history book, other than a history of philosophy. He had no experience in applying a biblical philosophy of history to specific historical questions. He never presented a biblical philosophy of history. The book is devoted to surveying previous historians and their philosophies of history.

This is the same problem that R. G. Collingwood had. He was a sophisticated philosopher. He wrote to impress philosophers. He did not write for the benefit of historians. He never wrote a history book. When I first read the book over half a century ago, it was clear to me that he had no idea of the relationship between the actual methodologies of history and the philosophical issues he was raising. Most of his book is incomprehensible to historians. I am a competent historian. I find page after page of his book irrelevant to the question at hand. What is the question? "How should the historian actually do his day-to-day work in terms of Collingwood's philosophy of history?" You cannot find the answer to this question by reading Collingwood.

Historians have long been silent with respect to their personal philosophies of history. David Hume wrote a detailed history of England. He also wrote a great deal on philosophy. But he never wrote a book on how his philosophy governed his historiography. He never wrote a book on the philosophy of history. It was as if his work as an historian and his work as a philosopher were in hermetically sealed-off partitions of his brain.

This astounding naïveté of practicing historians regarding the structure of history, which most of them deny—the connection between the historian's methodology and this structure of history, and the principles governing the production of historical narratives—is remarkable. These issues are not publicly discussed because most historians are unaware of these interconnected problems, and those few who are aware of them have not been able offer coherent explanations of how these three aspects of the historian's task can and should be integrated.

There is an old phrase: "He made it up as he went along." This is exactly what humanist historians have been doing ever since Herodotus. They have some vague sense of what they are doing, and some of them are quite good at it. But they cannot explain to anyone else's satisfaction how they do it. They also seem incapable of explaining to non-historians why they do it. Some historians do it out of curiosity. Some of them do it out of a desire

to change the world, although not that many of them are this dedicated. Marxists were. Some of them do it because they get paid to do it. Some of them do it because they are good entertainers. They like to tell stories. But when asked why teaching history is their calling, meaning the most important thing they can do in which they would be most difficult to replace, they flounder. They offer no clear answers. They have devoted their lives to work that they have trouble justifying to themselves or to others. We are back to the statements that leading historians made in the presence of Prof. Singer in 1970. I quoted these statements in the Preface. Historians really do not think that history has any identifiable meaning.

## Conclusion

If you have doubts about your ability to perform as a Christian historian, either as a reader or a teacher, keep this fact in mind. You are now better prepared theologically, philosophically, and methodologically in the field of historiography than any humanist historian is. He may be a better writer. He is familiar with far more documents than you are. He may have a knack for connecting historical dots that you do not possess. But he cannot explain why his dot-connecting procedure is correct in terms of an overall philosophy of history. He has no overall philosophy of history. He does not accept the biblical philosophy of history. He does not believe there is a biblical structure to history. But, in arguing against the Bible's view of history, he is in the unenviable position of someone who is trying to beat something with nothing.

Van Til made this point regarding humanism in every area of scholarship. He argued that epistemological blindness is the universal condition of humanist scholars. Rejecting the God of the Bible, and rejecting the Bible as a reliable testimony to this God, humanists have no coherent alternative to offer to explain the coherence of the world and to explain their ability to perceive this coherence. Van Til devoted six pages in a course syllabus to refuting Collingwood. What I have done in this book is to confirm in the field of history and historiography what Van Til recognized no later than 1962. It has taken me almost six decades to catch up with where Van Til was in 1962. I apologize for the delay. But better late than never.

## CONCLUSION

*For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them (Isaiah 65:17–23).*

### A. The Story of Christendom

The story of Christendom will triumph over the story of the kingdom of man. This is because it is tied to the story of one man: Jesus Christ. The story of Christendom has a simple narrative: the transition from wrath to grace. This is an easily understood narrative.

Judaism can provide a narrative based on the centrality of Moses. But it relies heavily on the Talmud, and the Talmud is both obscure and gigantic. Islam can provide a narrative based on the centrality of Mohammed. But Islam does not have a long tradition of developing historical narratives. Its concept of conquest is military, not cultural. It teaches dominion by force, not dominion by ethics. It does not have a developed theory of cultural progress. It looks backward to Mohammed, not forward to the establishment of a worldwide civilization based on shared ethics, science, and economics.

Here is the inescapable reality of historiography. *The longer the time period, and the wider the range of discussion geographically, the simpler the*

*story becomes.* This is because people have limited memories. They also have limited spare time. They may read one or two books on the history of Christendom or any other civilization. They will not read dozens. *The broader the range of discussion, the fewer the details that people can remember.* This means that whoever has the most memorable narrative will win the battle for the minds of men. The historical narrative must be tied to key people and events, and it must be structured in terms of the Bible's historical structure. This is an easily understood narrative: the transition from wrath to grace.

Let me give you an example of the problem of teaching history over a career. When a first-year teacher begins teaching a one-year course on the history of anything, he takes the narrative up to the recent past. But, year after year, he faces a problem: more events have taken place. Some of these events are relevant to the overall narrative. A few of them are crucial. But, a decade out, or two decades out, he will have to stop talking about people or events that seemed to be crucial to the narrative. He cannot add the new events because he does not have additional classroom presentations. He is limited to a specific number of lessons, and he must make the year-long narrative fit. Therefore, decade by decade, he must drop events that he told students at the beginning of his career that they had to remember and understand. New events supersede old events.

This process will go on for as long as humanity studies history. Furthermore, as more national traditions feed into a worldwide civilization, these new stories will replace earlier stories that were believed to be essential in explaining the development of Western civilization. Historians will have to decide which events and representative figures in the history of Western civilization must be removed from the story of the development of a new worldwide civilization. Over time, the story will get less detailed. Over time, the overall narrative will become simplified. It will reflect a relative handful of dominant issues and personalities. This is another way of saying that whoever has the most compelling story of historical development will win the battle. This worldview must have a simple story to tell, and it must be structured in terms of a relative handful of principles.

Christianity has the advantage. Humanism does not. Humanism denies the legitimacy of a single structure of history. Christianity affirms it. Humanism denies there is objective history. Christianity affirms it. Humanism denies that one narrative does justice to the sweep of history. Christianity affirms that a single narrative does justice to the sweep of history. This is the



narrative: the transition from wrath to grace, with grace provided through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ of the right hand of God the Father. That is a simple narrative to understand. Humanism has no comparable narrative.

Compare this with the assertion of humanist philosopher Karl Popper. He argued that there is no legitimate history of mankind. There is no grand narrative. In his book, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), he announced: "There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life. . . . But is there really no such thing as a universal history in the sense of a concrete history of mankind? There can be none. This must be the reply of every humanitarian, I believe, and especially that of every Christian. A concrete history of mankind, if there were any, would have to be the history of all men. It would have to be the history of all human hopes, struggles, and sufferings. For there is no one man more important than any other" (Vol. II, p. 270). Here, an atheist tells us what a Christian has to believe. He tells us that all men are equal. Jesus was no more important than your next-door neighbor. He obviously did not believe it, but he felt compelled to write it. Why? Because this is what his philosophy of history told him he had to believe, despite the fact that it is obvious nonsense. Everything is equal to everything else. Such a view makes all human judgment impossible, not just about the past, but about the present. *This is relativism extended to the point of insanity.* This is what happens when covenant-breakers want to escape from this message: the transition from wrath to grace. They correctly suspect that their views will place them in the ranks of the goats. They would rather deny the possibility of men's ability to make judgments, rather than affirm that God will do so at the end of time.

Humanist historians are not in position to compete with Christians when it comes to developing the grand narrative of history. They deny that there is any pattern to history. They deny that there can be any grand narrative. As they become more consistent with their presuppositions, they will cease writing the grand narratives. They already have. The last serious grand narrative was Toynbee's, and that was completed in 1955. It is long forgotten. It was never taken seriously by academic historians. So, they will not write the grand history, and Christians will. The Durants wrote a series of national narratives, but it was not a grand narrative. Humanists are not in a position to produce a grand narrative that is consistent with their worl-

dview. In contrast, Christians are in this position, and as time goes on, they will write an ever-improving grand narrative that captures the hearts and minds of covenant-keepers. Humanists will not have a grand narrative to inspire them, motivate them to change the world, and then judge the angels

## **B. Narratives and Expositions**

According to the narrative in the Book of Acts, these were Jesus' final words to His disciples immediately prior to his ascension into heaven. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This passage is important as a guide for Christian historians. They must bear witness to what the Gospels reported. The Book of Acts follows the pattern in the Gospel of Luke: reliance on narratives. Jesus here called them to be His witnesses. Basic to being His witnesses is telling stories about Jesus, the disciples, and the historical facts in the Book of Acts.

The author of the Book of Acts identified himself in the opening words of the book. He was the author of an historical account of the life of Jesus. "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (v. 1). In the opening words of the Gospel of Luke, we read this: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:1–4).

The author of both of these treatises was concerned with historical accuracy. He selected narratives as the appropriate format for conveying details of the life of Jesus and the details of the work of the apostles after the ascension of Jesus. This strategy was consistent with the structure of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is filled mainly with narratives about people whose lives testified to the providence of God in history. The Old Testament conveys faith in God by telling stories of how God had intervened in history in order to set apart a people bearing His name. Israel represented Him in history.

The first five books of the New Testament continue this strategy of evangelism. The letters written by Paul, Peter, John, the author of Hebrews, and Jude explain the meaning of the Old Testament and the five historical books of the New Testament. *This indicates that the narratives are not self-explanatory.* The epistles have been more important than the Gospels in shaping formal theology. But the Gospel narratives provide the stories that have been necessary to persuade non-Christians to take seriously the theological points in the epistles. The Bible is mostly stories. It has a minimal component of what we call theological exposition. It offers theology, but it offers it mainly by means of a series of sequential narratives about people who were singled out by God to represent Him in history.

Evangelism historically has centered on telling the Gospel stories. Successful evangelists have not initiated their presentation of the gospel—the good news—by means of expositions of the epistles. They have spread the gospel by means of the Gospels. The Gospels are filled with stories about Jesus and His disciples and their interactions with common people among the Jews. The Gospels also describe Jesus' confrontations with Jewish leaders, and, to a much lesser extent, representatives of the government of the Roman Empire. These stories grab the attention of non-Christians. Later, evangelists begin to teach the theology found in the epistles. Their listeners had already accepted the truth of the narratives in the Gospels. They had moved from the legal status of covenant-breakers to covenant-keepers. Only then were they ready to study and apply the theology of the epistles.

Christianity is unique among religions. It has written narratives. So does Judaism. But it also has the epistles, which spell out the details of the implications of the narratives. Judaism does not have a concise body of materials that explains the meaning of the narratives. The Talmud is a gigantic compilation of brief debates by rabbis over obscure judicial issues. This is a disadvantage when compared with Christianity. The New Testament is a comprehensive handbook for personal and social transformation. It offers short narratives that are easily understood by children and people from all other cultures. It also offers short, practical expositions on the meaning of these narratives. The epistles are as authoritative as the narratives.

Preaching has always involved presentations of the narratives and explanations of the narratives that are based on the epistles. In this sense, Bible history and theology are unified. Every church member has access to the narratives and the epistles in one book. With the coming of printing,

this has democratized Christianity more than any other religion in history. Access to the narratives and the epistles is open to anyone. The translation of the Bible into other languages has universalized Christianity to an extent greater than any other religion. Today, the Internet delivers these translations free of charge to anyone who owns an inexpensive smartphone and has access the Internet. Entry-level smartphones get cheaper, and so does the cost of Internet services.

The Bible provides the model for historical teaching. It is composed mostly of stories, but with expositions explaining the meaning of the stories and the application of the stories in daily living. *The stories are structured by a consistent system of ethics.* These ethical principles are illustrated in the stories, but they are also explained in expositions. In the Old Testament, the wisdom literature provides explanations: Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The prophets also expounded on the meaning of the stories in order to call people back to obedience to God. The interplay between the stories and the explanations teaches listeners how to interpret stories about the past in ways that are applicable in the present. This skill is then applied to non-biblical narratives.

The Bible's stories are highly specific. They are stories about a relatively small nation: Israel. The New Testament is the story of how God transferred Israel's nationhood to a new nation: the church. Jesus told the Jewish leaders: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). This new nation is universal. What had been local for over 1500 years now became international. The Book of Acts chronicles this transition from localism to internationalism. The ways in which God had dealt with the Israelites provided information to gentiles about how God would subsequently deal with them. Therefore, gentile believers had incentive to study the narratives regarding Israel that are found in the Old Testament. They could learn how God would deal with them. They could learn what to expect from God if they obeyed His law. They also learned what to expect from God if they disobeyed His law.

The Septuagint was crucial in this development. About two centuries before Christ's birth, Jewish leaders formed a committee of translators to produce a Greek Old Testament. Koine Greek was the primary language of commerce in the Mediterranean world. Jews were scattered across this world. Alexandria was a favored city by Jews. This translation became the

early church's version of the Old Testament, beginning with the apostles, who repeatedly cited it, not the Hebrew version. In Rome, enough church members were literate in Greek so that they could translate Greek Old Testament passages into Latin at church meetings.

I have argued that there is a central theme in biblical history: *the transition from wrath to grace*. All of the stories in the Bible after Genesis 2 are governed by this principle and therefore illustrate it. The stories are not random. They are coherent. They are coherent because God's decree controlled them.

### C. Narratives Are Sequential

Narratives are sequential. One event follows another. Each event influences what takes place next. People identify with historical sequences because their lives are made up of a series of historical sequences. We are interested in ourselves. That is a law of human nature. That is a constant across all cultures and all time periods. This means that we are interested on our own stories. Unless somebody has Alzheimer's disease or has suffered a head injury, he has a remembered narrative of his own life. He forgets most of the details, but he has some idea of what he was from about the age of three until what he is today.

People like to tell stories about themselves. They like to share stories about "the good old days." If they are really good storytellers, even their grandchildren may listen to them in between video games. But most people are not good storytellers. Nevertheless, they are always ready to narrate a favorite story. Because of our ability to think historically, and because calendars are basic to our lives, we can usually identify within a year or so when we recollect when a particular event took place in our lives. We can do this from memory. With computers and smartphones, we could probably identify the day when something happened to us. In this, we are unique in history. Consider calendars. Calendars are cheap. Three millennia ago, only kings, bureaucrats, and priests had access to calendars. Calendars were basic to their control over society. Today, nobody controls society because of his access to a calendar. The calendar is a democratic tool of self-government.

I do not remember exactly when I took a graduate seminar in the American Revolution that was taught by Douglass Adair. I had not yet earned my master's degree. It was probably in the spring of 1966. Adair was one of the

founders of the field of colonial American history. He had been an editor of the *William and Mary Quarterly*. When he assumed editorial responsibilities in 1943, it was a regional journal that published family letters and other obscure documents from the era. Under his editorship, it became the premier academic journal in the field colonial American culture and history. The new format became known as the Third Series.

There were several high school teachers who had come back to school to get credit, so that they could get raises. He offered this advice. Teach the American Revolution from the point of view of biography. Do not focus on the latest theory of some broad historical movement. Illustrate movements by way of biographies. This is excellent advice for all teachers. People find it easier to remember the past when they can tie the past to specific events and leaders. They can better remember a movement because of one or two major representative figures of the movement.

Why is this good advice? Because of the fundamental biblical principle: *cosmic personalism*. Individuals are responsible for their actions. God holds them responsible. They answer to God primarily, and then they answer to other people. This is the doctrine of representation. It is a doctrine of hierarchy. There are no broad historical movements without specific individuals who promote the movements.

Biographies are about life and death. They have a beginning, and they have an end. Most people want to believe that they will leave a positive legacy of some kind. They want to believe that they will be remembered. For most people, not many people will remember them, and certainly not half a century after they die. But a Christian believes that God remembers everything. A Christian believes that there is a meaningful sequence from creation until the final judgment. It is all of one piece. So, historical sequence means a great deal to a Christian. To the extent that Christianity has influenced the world, people around the world now think in terms of historical sequence. Around the world, people date each year in terms of the agreed-upon date for the birth of Jesus Christ. Actually, there is no agreement on exactly when He was born, but there is agreement within a few years. *People around the world think in terms of linear time only because Christianity persuaded the world that time is linear.* Christians also persuaded the rest of the world to adopt an explicitly Christian chronology. Jews resent this, and so they substitute BCE (before the common era) for B.C. (before Christ), and they substitute CE (common era) for A.D. (*anno domini* – year of our

Lord). In humanist historiography, we see BCE and CE most of the time, not B.C. and A.D. I use B.C. and A.D.

Biblical narratives are not always sequential. Genesis 1 and 2 are not sequential. Theological liberals have argued that God's creation of Adam out of the dust, which is described in Genesis 2, is a rival narrative. This indicates the extent to which theological liberals think that their readers are easily fooled by silly arguments. They imagine that their readers are going to take seriously their argument that a second author intervened generations later to tack on an addendum to the first author's narrative. The second author was so stupid as to offer a second account of the event instead of rewriting the entire section. The second author expected his readers to be as easily fooled as the readers of articles by theological liberals. Anyone with normal intelligence would figure out that the description of events in Genesis 2 was a clarification of what had been described briefly in Genesis 1.

Christianity was successful in converting tribes in the West by means of the narratives in the Bible. These tribes had no concept of chronology. The Bible's stories are powerful, irrespective of their chronological identification. But, over time, the converted tribes became aware of chronology. What had been believable stories about Jesus and the apostles became chronologically identifiable stories about the beginning of the transformation of the world outside of Israel. They became stories about the kingdom of God in history. This kingdom expands in history.

## **D. Narratives and Christian Historiography**

There are many ways to write history. There are many topics suitable for historical exposition. But the narrative format is by far the most effective way to enable most people to pay attention to history. People listen to stories. If the stories are good ones, people listen to them several times. This continues through adulthood. People watch their favorite movies several times. They know how the movies will turn out. There are no surprises. But the stories are compelling. People are drawn into the emotional experience of viewing a story. This is why the moving picture has been the most effective storytelling device in history. It combines visual imagery, voices, sound effects, and music to create an experience unmatched by the written word and stage plays.

The movie industry in the twentieth century was dominated by Hollywood. Hollywood was dominated by Jews. This began early, no later than



1910. Several of the moguls had been furriers in New York City. They moved West because Thomas Edison controlled the patents on movie cameras. He charged royalties for the use of the equipment. But he found it difficult to enforce patent laws on the other side of the country. His headquarters were in New Jersey. Still, there was no obvious reason for the ex-furriers' enormous financial success in making movies. It is a curiosity. There were a number of economic reasons for their success, but the main reason was this, in my view: Jews are part of a culture that has always centered on storytelling. This is a Bible-shaped culture. Rabbis told stories. Their listeners learned how to tell stories. Thus, when a handful of mostly secular Jews got access to a technology that was the supreme technology in history for storytelling, they prospered. The only gentile who competed with them effectively was Walt Disney. (This story, meaning a series of narratives, is told in Neil Gabler's 1989 book, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*.)

Every society has a theory of its origins. Most societies are governed by the idea that the gods in some way created the universe as an extension of themselves. The biblical account is radically different. Genesis 1 says that God spoke the world into existence. It was the power of His word that created something out of nothing. Modern humanism believes in the Big Bang. It took place 13.7 billion years ago. That is certainly chronological. Cosmic evolutionism has no explanation about the origin of the nearly infinitesimal compressed particle that, in a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a second, became the universe. Whatever that impersonal something was, way back when, it did not stay anything like what it was. There was a radical discontinuity separating what it was then and what it is now. That discontinuity was in part chronological. Also, we are not told the origin of that tiny particle. A clever child asks: "Who made the particle?" Sophisticated cosmologists avoid this question. They have no answer.

The Gospel of John identifies the Creator of the universe as the word. This is the Second Person of the Trinity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1–3). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is



preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (vv. 14–16). Language is at the center of biblical cosmology.

God spoke to Adam in the garden. Adam understood what God said because Adam understood language. Adam was made in God’s image, so he could understand God. Adam spoke to Eve. In Genesis 3, the serpent spoke to Eve. Eve then spoke to Adam. Both of them spoke to God. Language is at the center of biblical history.

All of this was sequential. All this was based on language. All of this was based on stories. The stories have meaning because God imputes meaning to them. We cannot understand God’s relation to man apart from understanding the narratives that the Bible provides that describe God’s interaction with men. That interaction was mainly verbal. It was based on verbal revelation. It was based on verbal sequence. It was based on memory. This is the way in which God has chosen to communicate with mankind. The final judgment is based on a written account of historical events. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12). Jesus warned: “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” (Matthew 12:36–37).

This is why Christian historians should use narratives as the most effective way of communicating the facts of history, the meaning of history, the sequence of history, and the end of history. People understand stories. They have trouble learning theology. Without stories, almost nobody can learn theology. Nobody is supposed to learn theology apart from stories. Stories of what God did in history are the centerpiece of His revelation of Himself to mankind. This fact has not changed as a result of the closing of God’s authoritative verbal revelation with the completion of the Bible before A.D. 70.

Without emotionally compelling, factually accurate narratives that target specific audiences, a Christian historian is not going to convey his view of the past to most people. He can convey his view of the past to other trained historians, who learned in graduate school that they must not rely heavily on narratives. They learned this again when their articles were re-

jected by editors of peer-reviewed academic journals. There are no courses in graduate school on how to write narrative history. There never have been. The focus of graduate training is on learning the techniques and methodologies for verifying historical arguments, not producing narratives.

The creativity associated with telling a good story is always in limited supply. This creativity cannot be taught in a classroom or in a textbook. It is something of an X-factor. A handful of historians are gifted storytellers. These are the ones who find millions of book buyers. Generally, members of the historical profession are suspicious of such authors and their books. There is silent resentment against them. "If the masses read their books, their books must be substandard methodologically." But the storytellers have an asymmetric advantage over the academic historians. A person who is a gifted storyteller can learn the techniques of historical research. Very few people who are highly competent in historical research become gifted storytellers.

The most successful historians in terms of book sales were Will and Ariel Durant. They were superb storytellers. They did competent research. There are plenty of footnotes in their books. But they told stories better than their peers did. Yet their summary book, *The Lessons of History* (1968), is only 100 pages long. There are a handful of potential connections between certain aspects of life and history: biology, race, character, religion, economics, etc. But the authors described no repeatable patterns. They also did not tell readers how they went about discovering patterns in history. That is because they did not believe in patterns of history. They told great stories, but there is no integrating theme in their stories. Millions of people read their books. They enjoyed reading the stories, but the stories did not shape their thinking in any particular way, except possibly on this issue: the origin of the world was cosmic evolution, not God's creation, the authors insisted. The world is not providential.

Thus, in competition for readers, listeners, and viewers, Christian historians have an advantage over their competitors. They think in terms of God's revelation to man through verbal interactions with men that stretch back to the creation. They have learned their world-and-life view by way of a series of historical narratives. They understand that history is linear from the creation of the final judgment. They understand that what people say and do will have eternal consequences for them. They understand that there is a permanent conflict between the kingdom of God of the kingdom

of man. This conflict goes on continually in every area of life. Nothing is neutral. Nothing is separated from this kingdom conflict. They understand that the world is governed in terms of God's laws, which they sometimes refer to as God's principles. They believe in predictable sanctions in history. God rewards obedience, and He punishes disobedience. In short, there is coherence in history. There is a pattern in history: the transition from wrath to grace.

### **E. Narratives in Humanistic Historiography**

Humanist historians after 1920 have steadily lost faith in any overarching story in history. As they have lost this faith, their narratives have grown weaker. They have increasingly abandoned narratives. They have substituted sociological categories, economic history, statistical studies, and studies that are structured by means of other social sciences. They have lost faith in what was once called "the great man" theory of historical development. They do not acknowledge point 2 of historiography: representation.

Humanists do not see the world in terms of any objective pattern of causation. They have no grand theory of historical causation. Therefore, they have no grand narrative. They do not show their readers or their students how the historical facts they survey in a course or a textbook are related to the lives of the students. They study conflicts in terms of issues other than covenantal issues. From the Greeks until the present, humanists have focused on political confrontations. This is because political confrontations are closer to covenantal confrontations than the other areas of life are. These confrontations are over issues of sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and succession. But political confrontations are historically bounded. Political issues change. There is no continuity in the humanist worldview that provides coherence between the past, the present, and the future. There is no integrating theme that holds together the multitudinous historical facts that students are expected to remember at least until after the final examination.

Other issues besides politics have become popular: economic history, technological innovation, scientific discoveries, gender issues, and multicultural issues. The one issue that is almost never taught in the university is military history. Yet wars are found in every society for which there is a record. Again and again, men go to war. Why? The Bible has an answer. "From

whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:1–3). Humanists ignore this answer. So, I ask: "What are the issues that lead men to go to war? Is there some coherent theme governing military history?" What is known as the fog of war seems to blind the historians. The public is fascinated by military history. Western males enjoy reading about the history of World War II (1939–45). American males read books on Civil War history (1861–65). Yet military historians have little prestige or influence in academia. Military history is interesting to a few humanist historians primarily because of the economic implications of funding armies, or because of the technological developments that result from spending on weapons. But the outcomes of wars hinge too much on specific battles, and the outcomes of battles are problematical historically. How does anyone make sense out of this series of events, expressed in a proverb that goes back to the late fourteenth century. "For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the battle was lost. For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost, and all for the want of a horseshoe nail." No form of popular history is more plagued by this phrase: "if only." If only this mistake had not been made. If only that officer had followed orders. Or my favorite: if only a Confederate officer had not wrapped three cigars in a piece of paper that had on it General Lee's invasion plans for the battle of Antietam (September 17, 1862), and if only he had not left his cigars in the grass when he left the area, and if only two Union soldiers had not discovered the cigars, unwrapped them, and recognized what was on that piece of paper, and if only that piece of paper had not moved up the chain of command to the top. (We do not know who kept the cigars. Historical records are imperfect.)

Humanism is fragmenting. Humanist historiography is fragmenting. This has been going on for a century. The more money that is available to fund research by university historians, the greater the fragmentation and specialization. There is no unifying theory of history to hold the pieces together. "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put him together again."

Humanists have a continuing problem: *they believe in a meaningless universe*. This outlook was expressed by Macbeth at the end of his life.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time.  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

## F. Narratives in Teaching

People can remember events if they know something about the people whose presence was indispensable to the event. If it is difficult to discuss an event and its aftermath without being able to identify whose presence was crucial to the event, the average reader or listener finds it very difficult to remember what the event was, what effect it had, and why.

Very occasionally, there is a geological or biological event that changes history. The bubonic plague from 1347 to 1350 was such an event. At least a third of Western Europeans died. In cities, it was half the population. We do not know the names of most of the people who reshaped society in response to that event. We do know that it changed European thought and culture. It fostered a loss of faith in the church. But there is nothing else quite like that event in Western history. The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 shook more than the city; it shook people's optimism about a providential world. That event took place at the same time that the old order was slipping away in Western Europe. But such natural events rarely have long-term consequences. The so-called Spanish flu of 1917 and 1918 killed tens of millions of people worldwide, but it had almost no cultural effect. It was forgotten within just a few years, despite the huge death toll.

Here is a basic fact of life: *most people cannot deal with long chains of reasoning*. They cannot remember every step. They cannot follow all of the steps. It takes years of specialized training to be able to follow a long chain of reasoning in a narrow academic specialty. In contrast, sequential events lend themselves to creative and exciting stories that stay in people's memories. Sometimes people remember them, but they do not remember most

of the historical circumstances surrounding the event. A major task of the historian is to supply the historical context in such a way that people will remember it. This is not easy.

A good way to help people remember a story is to identify a personal conflict or competition that shaped the story. People like stories about confrontations between good guys and bad guys. Most people want to believe that the historical processes favors good over evil. They want to believe that right makes might, that ethics is more influential than power, and that the pen is mightier than the sword. *They want to believe in cosmic personalism.* That is because they are personal. They want to believe that God is on their side. They want to believe that there is purpose in life, and purpose is always personal. *There is no such thing as impersonal purpose.* They want to believe that their plans will come to fruition because the world is structured in such a way as to favor their efforts. They want to impute accurate meaning to the world around them. They are not sure how to do it, but they want to learn how to do it. Bible-based narratives help them achieve these goals.

There is a parallel in popular literature. People want the same kind of confirmation and reassurance from fictional stories that they want from nonfictional stories. They want happy endings for the good guys. They identify with the good guys in the story. In literature after World War I (1914–18), humanistic authors began to write stories in which the good guys were overcome by the forces of evil. This depresses readers. Even worse is a story in which the readers cheer for the bad guys. A highly creative author can write such a story. This is a lot easier to do in motion pictures than it is in short stories and novels. This is why from the mid-1930s until the mid-1960s, there was a private association made up mainly of Christians who made certain that movies did not end with victory for clearly evil people. It was called the Motion Picture Association of America. It enforced something called the motion picture production code. The movie industry conformed to these standards for three decades. Movie producers did not legally have to conform, but they did not want bad publicity from the MPAA.

As a history teacher, your goal should be to help your audience understand what happened in the past. But it is not sufficient to them to understand what happened; they must also remember why happened. It is easier to personalize historical developments than it is to explain complex reasons for historical developments. Complexity is always a factor in history. There is always vastly more documentation than a historian can ever access, let

alone remember. (See Chapter 12.) The Christian historian should search for *representative historical sequences* that illustrate the biblical structure of history. Even better, a Christian historian should look for individuals who represent a major trend in history. There are always competing trends. There are always people who are committed to a rival worldview. The vast majority of people are unaware of the great dividing issues that have shaped history. Thus, when you can identify someone who articulated a position effectively, and who gained a following, and whose following began to shape future events, focus on that individual. Ask this: “Why was he important?”

I recommended this five-part structure of investigation.

1. Identify the confession.
2. Identify the spokesmen.
3. Identify the media.
4. Identify the funding.
5. Identify the eschatology.

The movement’s confession is crucial. It sets forth a worldview. The confession is the basis of commitment. It shapes people’s thinking regarding God, man, law, sanctions, and time. It shapes people’s thinking about sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and succession. If people will not commit to the confession, the movement will not have any influence until they do commit. But if they commit to the confession and act in terms of it, and if they recruit others, then this movement may become an important factor. There are few movements that achieve this. There are few confessions of faith that achieve this. But there are some, and you should look for them.

Identify the spokesmen. These are the visible leaders. They represent the movement. Their words motivate followers. Every movement has public speakers. Every movement has someone who writes the books and pamphlets. When writing a history of a movement, the historian must search for these people. It is this issue: *representation*. Every movement is represented. (See Chapter 12.) Students will remember their names if the historian tells their stories. The stories must identify their context.

Identify the media. What were the means of public communication in the historical era you are investigating? How did a movement get its message to the public? Every movement offers a gospel: good news. The good news for one group will be bad news for another group. This is the nature



of all good news that is tied to a confession of faith. Consider a contemporary movement. Does the organization publish books? Is it online? Does it have a website? Does it have their own schools? Does it have programs for advanced training? What materials does it use in these programs?

Identify the funding. Every movement has to be funded. Somebody has to pay to get the message out. Who pays? This is not always easy to find out. Read the fund-raising appeals. Find out who donates and why.

Identify the eschatology. What is the movement's vision of the future? What does it promise to members if they sacrifice for the sake of the cause? This is how leaders motivate followers. Without a positive eschatology, it becomes very difficult to recruit new members and retain the allegiance of long-term members.

If you write a narrative, tie it to one or more people who represent the trend you are studying. Then look for representatives on the other side of the confrontation. What motivates them? People are motivated by a confession. They are motivated by money. They are motivated by fame. But if they do not gain a following, they will gain neither money nor fame. This is why understanding representative figures is crucial. Organizations do not form themselves. Individuals start organizations. They provide leadership. They provide vision. The historian who can show which people exercised leadership has a competitive advantage in telling his story. The more that he can tie personal characteristics to the success or failure of the movement, the more easily his students will understand what happened.

Your goal is to affect the thinking of specific students. Your goal is to confirm or change their confession. This means that your goal is to reinforce or change their covenantal commitment. If you are teaching a group of committed students, then your goal is reinforcement. Your goal is also to strengthen them in their ability to articulate their confession of faith. This teaches them to count the costs of their confession of faith. When they read biographies of people who have made major sacrifices to extend a worldview, they will be better judges of whether or not they want to make a full commitment. They will get some sense of what they may be called upon to sacrifice for the sake of the movement. When they learn about how someone else also made a major sacrifice, and that sacrifice led to institutional success, they may become motivated to imitate that person. It is easier to assess the cost that is borne by an individual than is borne by an organization.



## G. Preparation to Teach

The first step is that you have become familiar with the history of the church, both in the West and in the East. Most Westerners know almost nothing about Eastern orthodoxy and Russian orthodoxy. They need to know this, but first they need to know the history of the Western church.

There are numerous studies on this, but the best place to start is the two-volume set by Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*. Read it. Mark it up with a highlighter. Write down the names of people you think deserve a Sunday school lesson. Understand the grand sweep of the church.

The big problem is when you go looking for textbooks that show the history of the church's development in relationship to its impact on the society around it. A good book on this is written by a secularist, Tom Holland: *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (2019). Another is Otto Scott's book, *The Great Christian Revolution: How Christianity Transformed the World* (1995). But the best book is by Joseph Boot: *The Mission of God: A Manifesto of Hope for Society* (2016).

Once you have names of key spokesmen, go to Wikipedia and read the entries. Print out the interesting ones. Then follow through on any bibliographical materials that you find in the footnotes. You have to know something about their background. You have to know the stands that they took and why they took them. Your research should probably take at least two years. You should get comfortable with spending at least an hour a day on this project. You want to be informed about what the church has said and done in the West.

You need to get experience teaching. I recommend that your initial audience be Sunday school attendees. Produce a 12-week course: introduction, 10 lessons, and a conclusion. See what interests people. Force yourself to do the research. Get practice talking in front of a group. If this presentation is popular, do another one. Do at least one every year. Your goal should be to produce a dozen of these courses. This is a reasonable goal.

If you are successful as a teacher, set up a WordPress.com website blog and a YouTube channel. Both of these are free. Start putting your lessons online. Create a workbook. Put it in PDF format. Create a discussion leader's guide. Churches need competent Sunday school courses. All that a church needs to use your materials is a large flatscreen TV and an Internet hookup. This is inexpensive these days. Do not wait to do this until after you have

produced a dozen courses. Do it after you have produced the first course, assuming that it was well received.

I recommend targeting adults. Most adults know almost nothing about church history. It is unlikely that they are going to go out on their own to do what I have recommended here. Somebody will have to do it for them. That might as well be you.

## Conclusion

Christians are in a better position to tell compelling, meaningful stories than humanists are. Christians have a view of the world that is providential. It has purpose. They believe that God created it and sustains it. The world is not random. It is structured in terms of a long-term plan: the transition from wrath to grace.

If you can persuade Christians of the truth of what I have just written, that would be a serious contribution to the extension of the kingdom of God in history. If you can persuade them to be confident about what God has done for His church in history, and then begin to take action in their own lives on the basis of this confidence, that would be an even more serious contribution to the extension of the kingdom of God in history.

Christians need to be motivated to take action. They have to understand that what they do is significant in history. Their lives are significant because they are part of a comprehensive providential plan governing all of history. Christians should be looking for ways to serve their fellow man, thereby serving God. They should study the lives of Christians who have made this kind of personal sacrifice, and who have left legacies behind to be imitated and extended. This is why I recommend focusing on biographies. Biographies of successful Christians can be highly motivational.

## Epilogue

I decided to write this book on Wednesday, September 1, 2021. I announced this to my subscribers on September 3. I completed the first draft of the manuscript on Friday, October 22. I posted the Preface on Saturday, October 23. I continued posting chapters every day (except Sundays) for a month. This project took seven weeks. It was a part-time project. I post three articles a day, six days a week, on my website. I also respond to questions posted by subscribers on my site's forums.

As far as I know, nothing like this book has ever been published. This is not a complicated book. First, it offers a thesis regarding the biblical structure of history. It is highly specific: five historical principles in support of a theme. The theme is this: the transition from grace to wrath (brief), followed by the transition from wrath to grace. This is a simple yet comprehensive theme. Second, the book offers a thesis regarding the implicit, unstated humanist theory of the structure of history. Third, it offers a strategy for producing a revisionist Christian historiography that follows the five-point biblical structure of history. Conceptually, this is simple. Once again, I used the five-point biblical covenant model as a cookie-cutter. It works for me, and it works for my readers.

Why am I the first historian to produce anything like this? This is late in an intellectual war that has been going on for over 500 years. Renaissance humanists began offering their version of the history of Western civilization no later than 1500. They launched a successful guerilla operation against the ideal of Christendom. Their historiography reflects this. Humanism's offensive strategy keeps escalating. The Enlightenment after 1700 replaced the Renaissance's guerilla war strategy with a frontal assault. By 1910, secular humanists controlled most of the institutions of higher education in the United States, and all of the most prestigious institutions. Harvard went Unitarian in 1805. By 1870, it had gone secular. Humanists had been in control of higher education in what we call Germany ever since 1800. That was seven decades before the creation of Germany.

Christian scholars have been outgunned for half a millennium. But their surrender had begun at the beginning of the university system in 1100. They relied from the beginning on Aristotle to carry their intellectual water. Unlike the Gibeonites, who hewed wood and carried water for the Israelites, Aristotle poisoned the intellectual well. Christians surrendered intellectual authority—first principles—to Greek humanism by way of Aristotle. They had done this before: their surrender to Plato, beginning in the second century. They never reclaimed this authority in the name of the Bible.

Kant's dualism had replaced the Greeks by the 1880. Yet by 1880, Darwinism replaced Kant in the last bastion of cosmic purpose defended by Kant: intelligent design. Darwinism denied cosmic design until the unplanned evolution of man. Classical education, the ancient Christian compromise with autonomy, was abandoned by higher education. The elective system, pioneered at Harvard after 1870, buried what little remained of classical education. Students were no longer interested.

Today's students are no longer interested in studying history. This offers a great opportunity to Christian historians. Meanwhile, humanist historians are moving from offense to defense. They have lost faith in both history and historiography. This loss of faith began no later than 1930. It has escalated since then. Students today are abandoning a visibly sinking ship.

Becker in 1931 announced everyman his own historian. Today's historians-in-training are steadily shrinking in number. Beard in 1933 described written history as an act of faith. Today, few disciples are committing to this faith. I am a modern-day Becker. I want every Christian to be an historian. I am also a modern-day Beard. I want far more Christians self-consciously writing history as acts of faith. I offer this book as both a recruiting tool and a training manual. It is one more step in a long walk: the transition from wrath to grace.

# Appendix

## A BATTLE OVER NARRATIVES

*And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:12).*

### A. The War Over Historiography

There is an old political slogan: “You can’t beat something with nothing.” It applies to everything. It is not limited to politics.

In this book, I have shown that there has been a continual war between humanism and biblical religion that stretches back before the birth of Christ. It stretches back to the humanism of classical Greece and Rome. This war has involved every area of life. It is a war between two kingdoms. The word “kingdom” is best understood as “civilization.”

Conflict between Christianity and imperial Rome was a life-and-death matter. While there was relative peace for Christians through most of the years from Nero until Constantine, there were occasional decades in which the persecution was fierce. This strengthened the church. It strengthened the testimony of Christians. It was because of the inconsistency and lethargy of most Roman emperors that they did not constantly persecute the church in an attempt to stamp it out.

When Constantine came to power in A.D. 312, the persecutions stopped. Christianity became a legally protected religion. Within half a century, it became the only legal religion. Only during the brief reign of Julian, known as Julian the apostate in Christian circles, was this reversed. That reversal lasted for less than two years: 361–63. From the second century forward, Christian scholars began to challenge classical culture, although in a somewhat compromised way. Van Til discussed these compromises in his syllabus: *Christianity in Conflict* (1962) and in Chapter 4 of his book, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (1969). By the fourth century, Christian scholars were becoming more consistent in their rejection of classical culture.

This had repercussions in every area of scholarship. This included historiography. Collingwood discussed this in his book, *The Idea of History* (1946). Collingwood wrote:

Eusebius was only one of a large number of men who were struggling to work out in detail the consequences of the Christian conception of man; and when we find many of the Fathers like Jerome, Ambrose, and even Augustine speaking of pagan learning and literature with contempt and hostility it is necessary to remind ourselves that this contempt arises not from lack of education or a barbarous indifference towards knowledge as such, but from the vigor with which these men were pursuing a new ideal of knowledge, working in the teeth of opposition for a reorientation of the entire structure of human thought. In the case of history, the only thing with which we are here concerned, the reorientation not only succeeded at the time, but left its heritage as a permanent enrichment of historical thought (p. 51).

He then went on to make a very important observation. It had to do with their view of history. For the first time, Christians began to view the past as part of a grand narrative. Historical events are aspects of the providence of God. They are not random. They are not limited to a particular society. They are part of a universal history of mankind. At the center of this history was Jesus Christ.

The conception of history is in principle the history of the world, or struggles like that between Greece and Persia or between Rome and Carthage are looked at impartially with an eye not to success of one combatant but to the upshot of the struggle from the standpoint of posterity, became a commonplace. The symbol of this universalism is the adoption of a single chronological framework for all historical events. The single universal chronology, invented by Isidore of Seville in the seventh century and popularized by the venerable bead in the eighth, dating everything forward and backward from the birth of Christ, still shows where the idea came from (p. 51).

Collingwood said that there was a self-conscious reversal of this historiography during the Renaissance. Renaissance humanists did not accept

Christian historiography. They did not accept the Christian view of divine providence.

At the close of the Middle Ages one of the main tasks of European thought was to bring about a fresh reorientation of historical studies. The great theological and philosophical systems which had provided a basis for determining the general plan of history *a priori* had ceased to command assent, and with the Renaissance a return was made to a humanistic view of history based on that of the ancients. Accurate scholarship became important, because human actions were no longer felt to be dwarfed into insignificance in comparison with a divine plan (p. 57).

From the Renaissance until today, Christian historiography has been in retreat. Ever since 1750, it has barely existed. Yet the universalism of historiography, which has centered on the concept of world history, still exists. This idea is not consistent with humanistic presuppositions regarding the interpretation of the past: the cacophony of the epistemological principle of “every man his own historian.” (See Chapters 8 and 9.) Nevertheless, some humanists still cling to the idea that there is a universal history of mankind. Those humanists who favor the creation of an international new world order are echoing Christian historians of the fourth century.

Protestant higher education has never presented a detailed history of Christendom. Protestant scholars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries generally accepted the medieval Catholic criteria for education: the trivium and the quadrivium. These topics were based on Greek categories. Pre-college students were compelled to learn Latin in order to get into college. In college, they studied the documents of classical paganism. This tradition was dominant in higher education until the late nineteenth century in England and the United States. Then Darwinism replaced classical education. After Christians began to surrender control over higher education at the end of the nineteenth century, they surrendered to the interpretation of the past by Enlightenment humanists. Christian parents have been content with humanist textbook histories of their nations and of Western civilization. The general thrust of these textbooks’ message is retained by the public: progress is based on the innovations and discoveries of autonomous men who live in religiously pluralistic nations. By accepting this narrative, Christians have forgotten Moses’ warning:

Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:14–18).

More to the point, they have forgotten that Christ's resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God replaced the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. At that point, the world entered God's new world order. In his book, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (1967), Rushdoony spelled out some implications of the bodily resurrection of Christ.

The purpose of Biblical history is to trace the victory of Jesus Christ. *That d not merely spiritual; it is also historical.* Creation, man, and man's body, all move in terms of a glorious destiny for which all creation groans and travails as it awaits the fullness of that glorious liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18–23). The victory is historical and eschatological and it is not the rejection of creation but it is fulfillment.

This victory was set forth in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who destroyed the power of sin and death and emerged victorious from the grave. As St. Paul emphasized in I Corinthians 15, this victory is the victory of all believers. Christ is the firstfruit, the beginning, the alpha and omega of the life of the saints. Had Christ merely arisen as a spirit from the grave, it would have signified his lordship over the world of spirit but His surrender of matter in history. But by His physical resurrection, by His rising again in the same body with which he was crucified, he set forth His lordship over creation and history. The world history will see Christ's triumph and the triumph of His saints, his church, and



his kingdom. History will not end in tribulation and disaster: it will see the triumph of the people of God in the manifestation of Christian order from pole to pole before Christ comes again. The doctrine of the resurrection is thus a cornerstone of the Biblical dimension of victory (p. 25).

This is why I am calling for a reconstruction of historiography along biblical lines. This reconstruction is mandatory because history is structured in terms of the biblical covenant. To be faithful to this structure of history, Christians must rethink history in terms of a different system of interpretation. They must reject humanism's historiography.

When Christians read history books, they should have in the back of their minds a Christian principle of historical interpretation. This interpretation is based on the revelation of God in the Bible. This interpretation is based on the revelation of God in Genesis 1: the sovereignty of God. He created the world out of nothing. He sustains the world. He will judge the world.

Christians should not be so naïve as to expect to be able to beat something with nothing. They have to beat something with something better. Yet they are starting today with almost nothing, academically speaking. They will get little or no help from Christian history professors in Christian colleges, let alone Christians teaching in secular universities. They should begin here: a grand narrative of the universal history of man from the creation to the final judgment of all mankind. This is what humanism denies.

## **B. The Bible's Narratives**

The Bible is mostly a series of historical narratives. In the Old Testament, there are a few books that are not narratives: Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Job. The minor prophets wrote during specific time periods, but these are not major historical narratives. The major prophets did offer historical narratives. In the New Testament, the four Gospels and the Book of Acts are historical narratives. The other books are epistles.

The New Testament offers Christian theology. Some of this theology was announced by Jesus, and the Gospels record these presentations. The epistles focus on theology. These provide the main integrating principles

of theological interpretation. They enable people to understand the meaning of the historical narratives of the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Book of Acts. They also enable Christians to understand the principles that undergirded the narratives of the Old Testament. Put differently, the New Testament is a commentary on the Old Testament. The New Testament was the product of about 1500 years of written revelation. Theologians call the integrating theology of the New Testament systematic theology. They call the development of this theology from Moses until the Book of Revelation biblical theology. Both are necessary for understanding God's revelation to man. Both are necessary for understanding the principles that undergird history and historiography.

The Bible does not offer a system of logic. It offers the foundations of a system of theology. Christian logic is an extension of theology. It is not autonomous. The Greeks were the first society to produce specialists in forms of logic that were self-consciously independent of supernatural religion. Greek logic asserted of the autonomy of man's mind. It was impersonal. It offered principles of interpretation, but these principles were in opposition to each other. *All humanistic philosophy is a combination of rationalism and irrationalism.* In one of his dozens of analogies, Van Til described the condition of the non-Christian philosopher.

The fulcrum for both the modern and the Greek dialectical see-saw, between pure rationalism and pure irrationalism, is, as earlier, noted, the would-be autonomous man. If man refuses to see himself as a creature of God, or, more pertinently, as a sinner rescued by Christ, then he will quite naturally continue to go up and down, up and down, on this see-saw. When the *rationalist* is up, he proposes to have defeated the irrationalist. When the *irrationalist* is up, it is the reverse. But, if this spectacle were not enough to frighten you, then think of the fact that "the rationalist" and "the irrationalist" are really not separately existing entities at all, but rather, opposite, co-existing aspects of the one and indivisible would-be self-sufficient *homo sapiens*. (Van Til, *Who Do You Say That I Am?*, p. 24)

To this irreconcilable dualism in the principles of interpretation is added historical flux. The timeless logic of man is incapable of making sense out of the constant flux of history. This was Van Til's position. It is my position.

### **C. The Grand Narrative**

In Chapter 1, I discussed the doctrine of the Trinity. It solves the philosophical problem of the one and the many. The Godhead is one, but it is also made up of three Persons. It is unified, but it is plural. The creation reflects this combination of unity and plurality. The species do: male and female. The family does: parents and children. God holds collectives responsible for what they do. This was the message of the Old Testament prophets. God also holds individuals responsible for what they do. This culminates in the day of judgment (Matthew 25).

This is why every historical narrative is part of a larger historical narrative. God imputes meaning to all narratives. God evaluates people's words and actions in terms of standards that apply to individuals and collectives. He brings judgment in history and in eternity in terms of men's performance in relation to these permanent standards. Because individuals are made in God's image, they can understand how their own performance compares with permanent standards. They can do the same with collectives. When Isaiah came before the people of Judah, he listed their individual and corporate sins. He knew they would understand his message. He told him that God would hold them responsible for obeying his message. He appealed to their memory of Israel's past: "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city" (v. 26). The Israelites' memories of the distant past condemned them.

In defending himself against the illegal Jewish court, the deacon Stephen presented a synopsis of the history of Israel (Acts 7). He did so primarily to condemn them, not to gain a verdict of "Not guilty." His presentation was confrontational. Israel's narrative culminated in the ministry of Jesus Christ: "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David" (vv. 44–45). He ended his covenant lawsuit against them with this: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of

whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it" (vv. 51–53). Despite the fact that they did not have the authority to execute anyone, they stoned him to death.

The grand narrative of Israel ended in A.D. 70, when the Roman legions captured the city and burned the temple. That ended the sacrifices. That fundamentally changed the religion of Israel. The Sadducees had been in charge of the temple. The temple was no more. Their rivals, the Pharisees, took over the leadership of Israel, and they maintained it until about the middle of the nineteenth century. The fall of Jerusalem was the origin of what we call today Judaism. Herbert Danby's Introduction to his book, *The Mishna* (1933), correctly described the victory of the Pharisees. "Until the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70 they had counted as one only among the schools of thought which played a part in Jewish national and religious life; after the Destruction they took the position, naturally and almost immediately, of sole and undisputed leaders of such Jewish life as survived. Judaism as it has continued since is, if not their creation, at least a faith and a religious institution largely of their fashioning; and the Mishnah is the authoritative record of their labour. Thus it comes about that while Judaism and Christianity alike venerate the Old Testament as canonical Scripture, the Mishnah marks the passage to Judaism as definitely as the New Testament marks the passage to Christianity" (p. xiii). Jacob Neusner, the incomparably prolific Jewish author (1,000 books), described what followed. The Pharisees rewrote the narrative. He added that "the rabbis of late antiquity rewrote in their own image and likeness the entire Scripture and history of Israel, dropping whole eras as though they had never been, ignoring vast bodies of old Jewish writing, inventing whole new books for the canon of Judaism. . ." ("Two Faiths Talking about Different Things," *World & I* [Nov. 1987], p. 690).

Christians and Orthodox Jews do not invoke the same narrative. They share many of the books. They sometimes share certain ethical teachings found in the Old Testament. They share the stories in the Old Testament. But the narratives are different. The New Testament interprets the Old Testament for Christians. The gigantic rabbinic oral tradition in the Talmud interprets the Old Testament for Orthodox Jews. The narratives after the fall of Jerusalem deviate decisively. So, the grand narrative of Christianity is fundamentally different from the grand narrative of Judaism. There are also

divisions within Christianity regarding the grand narrative. There are also divisions within Judaism regarding the grand narrative.

The grand narrative of Christianity ends in the final judgment. The doctrine of the final judgment declares that God looks back at the performance of everyone in history, and He makes judgments regarding their performance. That is to say, He imputes (declares) success or failure in history in terms of two general judicial categories: saved and lost. Then, within these categories, He imputes performance, and He punishes and rewards accordingly. Covenant-keepers will receive rewards in terms of their performance. This is based on the grace that God showed to them by redeeming them because of their faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9). This also includes their works (Ephesians 2:10). There will be winners and losers on the day of final judgment. This will determine each man's inheritance when he enters the new heaven and the new earth.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:11–15).

Everyone will go through this judgment. This is why there will be a grand narrative. The grand narrative is a result of the decree of God. God will pass judgment on His own work, by way of covenant-keepers, retroactively at the final judgment. He did the same at the end of day six in the creation week. The doctrine of the decree of God, when coupled with the doctrine of the final judgment, is the foundation of the concept of the grand narrative. Any denial of the existence of this grand narrative is an attempt by covenant-breakers to escape the implications of the final judgment. They do not want to accept that doctrine, and therefore they reject the doctrine of the grand narrative.

### **D. Rival Narratives**

There are as many narratives as there are historians, and just about everyone is an historian. Everyone has some concept of the past. Everyone has received stories of the past. Public school systems inculcate stories about the national past. Politics has governed national stories for as long as there have been national stories. But there has never been unanimity among the storytellers. There have always been rival stories. Some of these rival stories reflect separate worldviews.

This is why Christians who begin to study history as a way to fulfill their obligations as covenant-keepers have to be aware of the existence of these rival stories and rival worldviews. They have to evaluate the rival narratives in terms of what the Bible reveals about God, man, law, sanctions, and time. They must also assess the reliability of the documentation for these rival stories. They must investigate the coherence between the documentation and the interpretations given to the documentation by rival storytellers.

This is hard work. This is not work for intellectual sissies. This will lead to confrontation at some point. In the case of narratives that are widely believed by the intelligentsia of a nation, who have an interest in making certain that rival interpretations do not gain a wide following, the confrontation can be expensive in terms of lost reputations, lost jobs, and videos removed from social media sites. But it is not like the Soviet Union under Stalin in the 1930s. There are outlets for rival views, and people who espouse rival views do not get sent to the Gulag.

To develop a narrative within the framework of the Bible's grand narrative, Christian historians must develop good judgment. They must develop Bible-informed wisdom. They must develop the ability to interpret historical documentation of events in terms of biblical revelation, church history, and the many challenges to Christianity from covenant-breakers throughout history. I discuss this exercise of judgment in Chapter 14. The discipline of historiography is like all other disciplines. It requires years of study. It requires years of on-the-job training. It requires above-average intelligence. It requires people to have what is sometimes called a feel or knack for the discipline. It requires the ability to compare evidence and to compare rival historians' handling of the evidence. Above all, it requires a Christian historian to go public with his narrative. There is an old political slogan: you cannot beat something with nothing. It is not sufficient to poke holes in a

rival narrative if you do not have an alternative.

There is a tremendous advantage for being the first person to issue a narrative of a recent event. This usually is a government agency whenever the interests of the government are involved in the narrative. The government will use the media to get the official story to the public. This story will have a tremendous advantage. Anyone who challenges this story will have to have a powerful case. Also, there will be more than one challenge. The various rival stories that challenge the official story will tend to cancel each other out. The official story will still remain the dominant story in the thinking of most voters.

What is true of specific events is also true of the narratives in the public high school textbooks. These grand narratives change over time. It is difficult to trace these changes. One reason why it is so difficult is that research libraries do not store old public school textbooks. Only a handful of specialized research libraries in the field of public education have collections of old textbooks. Next, the historian would like to find out which were the dominant three textbooks. This is not easy to discover. Sales records are not available, at least not in today's research world. Thus, any historian who attempts to trace the interpretations of public school history textbooks has a formidable task. I am aware of only one such survey on the textbooks in the United States, and it was published in 1979: Francis FitzGerald's *America Revised*.

FitzGerald made a curious discovery. A single author dominated the teaching of American history in American high schools from 1911 until the mid-1960s: David Saville Muzzey. He was a theologically liberal Presbyterian who was a political Progressive. He believed in the modern welfare state. He was also a strong nationalist. There were some years in which his textbook outsold all the other textbooks combined. No one could explain the popularity of this textbook. There is a Wikipedia entry on him in 2021. It has not changed in several years; I keep checking. It has a total of four sentences. Yet he probably taught 100 million Americans what little they knew about American history. The government was not in charge of this narrative. No one was in charge of it, other than the author. Because of the enormous sales of the books, no publishing committee told him what to write. In terms of the number of people he influenced, he is probably the most important historian in American history. I have collected several editions of his textbooks. I plan to put them online free of charge just for the historical record.



Today, one individual is more responsible than anyone in the world for delivering historical narratives and narratives in other fields to millions of students: Salman Khan. The Khan Academy teaches more students than any organization ever has. The videos are online for free. They are used all over the world. This project began in 2006 as an afterthought. The creator did not set out to start an online school. No government controls what he says. He was not trained as an historian. He was trained as an engineer at MIT and as an entrepreneur in the field of finance at the Harvard Business School.

### E. The Structure of the Narrative

I have said the general narrative is this: the transition from grace to wrath the transition from wrath to grace. What is the structure? It is based on God's five-point covenant model: *transcendence, hierarchy, ethics, oath, succession*. The acronym is THEOS. These are best understood by five questions:

1. Who is in charge here?
2. To whom do I report?
3. What are the rules?
4. What do I get if I obey? Disobey?
5. Does this outfit have a future?

In terms of social theory, these are the five points: *sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, succession*. Western social theories deal with each of these five points in some way. I taught two years of Western literature to high school students using this five-point structure.

If you are studying the history of a society, find out what members of the society believed about the society's origins. Then you must discover the general attitude toward the future. How did people view the final judgment? Did they have a concept of the final judgment? How did this attitude affect the way they live their lives? To discover this, you must find out what their concept of law was. Then you have to find out if they believed that obedience to the law will result in personal and corporate blessings. Who imposes these sanctions? In other words, to whom did they report? Until you know the answers to these questions, you are not ready to write the narrative. There are many other questions you can ask that ought to be answered, but these five are crucial.

In 1988, I was discussing the history of Western civilization with a stu-



dent intern working for my Institute for Christian Economics, Ruben Alvarado. He knew of the covenants five-point structure. He mentioned in an offhand comment that the chronological history of Western civilization is structured in terms of the five points, in the same order. It took me about 60 seconds to recognize the truth of what he said.

1. The Nicene Creed (325): God
2. The Papal revolution of 1076: dual hierarchies (state, church)
3. Scholasticism/Aristotelianism (c. 1100–): dual law-orders (civil, canon)
4. The Protestant Reformation (1520–) rival oaths/sanctions
5. Darwinism (1859–): time/eschatology

## **F. Entrepreneurial Alertness**

Beginning in 1973, the free-market economist Israel Kirzner began to write extensively on entrepreneurship. He became one of the premier economists in this specialized niche of economic theory. He stressed that entrepreneurship is based on alertness. An entrepreneur sees an opportunity that other people do not see. He takes advantage of it by purchasing tools of production, raw materials, and labor services in order to produce consumer goods and services. His competitors did not see the opportunity, so they did not enter into the marketplace to compete against him in the purchase of economic inputs. He was therefore able to buy them less expensively than otherwise would have been the case. Entrepreneurial profits come from sales revenue that is above the total costs of production resources.

I believe that something similar applies in every field. It may not be governed by the pursuit of money, but success in a field is usually dependent upon the ability of an innovator to spot an opportunity that his competitors do not perceive. He then pursues it with time, money, and courage.

Anyone who expects to produce something of value in the field of historiography should be familiar enough with a specific area of historical investigation to enable him to see anomalies in the textbook narrative. I have said that breakthroughs usually begin with this observation: “That’s strange.” Something does not seem right. In the field of history, something took place that previous historians’ narratives ignored or de-emphasized. The documentary evidence and explanations they provided for a particular

event do not seem sufficient to explain the event. How did the event take place? What is missing from the previous explanations?

The proper procedure in searching for revisionist history projects is to read the major books and monographs on the topic. This gives you a sense of the prevailing interpretation of the topic. I recommend that you mark up the books. If you find ideas that you want to save, store them in some electronic format, such as Evernote. The goal is to become familiar with the arguments and the sources of documentation for the prevailing narrative. Next, read an equal number of books and articles that challenge this narrative. This will give you a sense of the existing narrative's vulnerability. Be familiar with the logic of the critics and the kinds of documents they rely on. Almost no one goes through this procedure unless he is writing a master's thesis. I adopted this procedure when I wrote *Marx's Religion of Revolution* (1968) in my spare time in graduate school.

If, after going through the critical literature, you think you can improve on the existing narrative by taking another approach, you should consider moving ahead with the project. If you see something that all sides have ignored, something that may be crucial for a better understanding of the historical topic, you should begin a search to see if someone else has offered a similar insight. If so, go to the book or article, and follow the footnotes. If no one has offered something unique, you should seriously consider devoting sufficient time to write several articles, a monograph, and produce several online video introductions to your thesis. Expect to spend at least two years and maybe longer on researching and writing your monograph.

Your monograph should answer the critics of the original narrative. It should also improve or even dramatically modify the existing narrative. Then self-publish the book if you cannot find a book publisher. Get your thesis in front of the public. It would be wise to set up a website devoted to the topic. Cover the basic themes in a series of entries. Respond to any critics of the thesis. Be prepared to be ignored. There may not be any critics of the thesis. Potential critics may never hear of the book, let alone read it.

Be prepared to write a second edition if someone raises legitimate concerns about the accuracy of your presentation. Be prepared to abandon your thesis. But almost nobody ever does that. They prefer to defend what they have put in print.

Be sure that your book, online videos, and website do not deviate from the overall theme of the great narrative: the transition from wrath to grace.

Also, be sure you have done justice to explaining and defending how the five points of the biblical covenant apply to the topic you selected for historical revision: God's transcendence, covenantal hierarchy, biblical ethics, God's sanctions, and succession in history.

In making the presentation, you must pursue three goals, in this order: accuracy, clarity, and persuasiveness. If the book fails, let it fail because you were not a good enough marketer or because people are just not interested in the topic. My book on Marx failed, except for winning me a Weaver Fellowship from the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. I doubt that members of the committee read the book, but the fact that it was published persuaded them to give me the fellowship. I have almost never seen it footnoted except by Rushdoony, who helped get it published. It did not receive a lot of book reviews. As far as I know, there were no reviews in academic historical journals. For me, it was an important academic exercise. I had been thinking about Marx and Marxism ever since 1956. I wanted to be clear regarding what I had rejected. I offered a unique thesis: Marx's worldview was an extension of the chaos cults of the ancient world. I learned about this from Rushdoony. I have never seen anybody else present that thesis and then document it in detail. Today, nobody cares. Marxism is a dead philosophy. My book did nothing to bring Marxism to its well-deserved end. But at least it demonstrated that it is possible to write a serious academic critique of a prominent worldview by means of an appeal to the Bible and the Christian worldview. It also demonstrated to me that I was capable of doing serious academic research. That gave me confidence five years later when I began working on my economic commentary on the Bible.

## **G. Models of Christian Historiography**

If we are speaking of books, there are not many. I did my best to write self-conscious Christian historiography in my history of the Northern Presbyterian Church: *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (1996). I also attempted to do this in my introduction to Christian historiography: *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (1989). Chapter 5, "Halfway Covenant Historiography," is a critique of three major Protestant evangelical historians: Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden. I was responding to their book: *The Search for Christian America* (1983), in which they concluded their search by saying that there is no such

a thing as Christian America, and has not been since 1788. Why not? Because of the Constitution. They placed too much emphasis on this political document. In Part 3, I discussed in detail the origins of the United States Constitution, which is unquestionably a humanist document. I later turned that section of the book into a separate volume: *Conspiracy in Philadelphia: The Origins of the United States Constitution* (2015). My response to Noll, Hatch, and Marsden was this: the general society of America was Christian in that era, and remained Christian until the second half of the twentieth century. The Constitution was judicially humanistic, but it was limited to only one covenant: the state.

Earlier examples of self-conscious Christian historiography are two books by R. J. Rushdoony. By far his most important book in the Christian community was this: *The Messianic Character of American Education* (1963). In that book, he discussed in detail with full documentation the humanistic religious motivation of two dozen of the major founders and developers of progressive education. There had never been any book like it, and there has never been any book like it since 1963. Also important is this book: *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (1971). Part I discusses the problem of the one and the many in eight chapters. Part II, "The Ground of Liberty," contains seven chapters. Then comes the most important sections of the book. Part III, "The Continuity of Being": chapters on Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, the chain of being, the Bible and the concept of being, and being in society. Part IV: "The unity of the Polis," is a detailed study of the history of classical Greece. Part V, "Rome: The City of Man," contains 11 chapters on the final days of the Roman Republic and the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Part VI, "Christ: The World De-Divinized," is a study of the conflict between the church and the Roman Empire. It covers mysticism, Gnosticism, family, abortion, Emperor worship, and other issues. It has 21 chapters. The later sections of the book continue the narrative up to the 1960s. These chapters are not as impressive as the chapters on Greece, Rome, and the early church, but they show consistency between his idea of history as providential and the development of history in terms of that theme.

It is worth noting that Rushdoony did not have a degree in history. As an undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley, he majored in English. He received his master's degree in education. Nevertheless, for a graduate history seminar taught by the famed medievalist, Ernst Kantor-

wicz, he wrote a 600-page term paper on church-state relations in Great Britain from 1500 to modern times. He knew how to do basic research.

Some of the most impressive Christian history books were written by a sociologist, Rodney Stark. They have sold well. They include these titles: *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (2001). The fact that was published by Princeton University press is remarkable. Princeton University Press also published his 2003 book: *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-hunts, and the end of Slavery*. In 2005, Random House published *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*. In 2006, Harper-One published *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome*. In 2014, ISI Books published *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*. In 2015, ISI Books published *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious than Ever*. He writes well, and he writes fast. I first discovered him in 1996, after I had finished *Crossed Fingers*. I came across a jointly authored book by Stark and Roger Finke: *The Churching of America* (Rutgers University Press, 1992). I added Appendix E to discuss the book. From the moment I read it, I regarded it as the best history of American Christianity I had read. Neither of them was an historian. They were both sociologists. Even more astounding, they were sociologists who wrote clearly.

All of the books that I have listed here were published after 1960. Rushdoony's books were published by an obscure Calvinistic publisher. No other publisher would have published his books. Prior to 1960, examples of self-conscious Protestant Christian historiography are not simply few and far between; they do not exist. You cannot find a Protestant evangelical historian who put into print what his philosophy of history was, and what relation this philosophy of history had with the Bible. You cannot find books written by Protestant evangelical historians who present their histories in terms of an explicitly biblical philosophy of history.

There were Catholic historians before 1960 who did attempt to study history in terms of their understanding of Christianity. One of the most famous of these was Lord Acton. He wrote in the late nineteenth century. He had a comprehensive understanding of the past. But he never wrote a narrative of Western history. He talked about writing a history of freedom, but he never got around to it. Another major historian in the next generation was Christopher Dawson. He was self-consciously writing as a Cath-

olic historian. He shared faith in the synthesis of Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy produced by Thomas Aquinas. Acton and Dawson both believed in Aristotelian logic. They both believed that a combination of biblical truth, church pronouncements, and Aristotelian logic could be used to make sense of historical documents. They had no successors who became full-time historians. When he died in 1970, Dawson was regarded by younger Catholic historians as a relic. He had been a dedicated Catholic traditionalist, a defender of the medieval synthesis known as scholasticism. The intellectual effects of Vatican II (1962–65) by 1970 had eliminated scholasticism's influence in Catholic scholarship. This had taken less than a decade. (An excellent study on the speed of this transformation is Malachi Martin's 1987 book, *The Jesuits*. Another is Gary Wills' 1972 book, *Bare Ruined Choirs*.)

## Conclusion

Christians should become revisionist historians. Of course, the vast majority of Christians will not do this. The vast majority of Christians do not read extensively, especially in the field of history. I am speaking of Christians who are serious about understanding history and serious about their faith. They should train themselves to become revisionists when they read history books and materials. They should think through the implications of what they have read in terms of the biblical structure of history. They must be aware of the inescapable fact that there is no neutrality anywhere in the world, including interpretations of the past. They should read book reviews of the materials—book reviews written by self-conscious Christian historians. They must re-think what they have read in terms of an explicitly Christian worldview.

Let me provide an example of the non-neutrality of historiography. Humanists suppress information about Christianity's contribution to Western civilization. The career of the great physicist and great historian of medieval technology, Pierre Duhem (1861–1916), is representative of this attitude. He wrote 10 volumes on the development of science in the late medieval era: *Le système du monde*. He said the Catholic Church was behind much of this work after 1250. The first five volumes were published between 1914 and 1917. Then opinion turned against him within the French academic establishment. His publisher refused to publish the next five volumes. That

blackout lasted for almost four decades. Only the threat of a lawsuit by his daughter finally forced the company to publish them from 1954–59. Had it not been for the efforts of physicist-priest Stanley Jaki (1924–2009), this story would have remained unknown. The Wikipedia entry on Duhem in September 2021 does not mention this suppression. You can read the story of this censorship here: <http://bit.ly/DuhemSuppression>.

Jaki's books are fine examples of historical revisionism, especially *The Road of Science and the Ways of God* (1978) and *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (1974). He stressed the importance of the linear view of time in the development of science. This uniquely Western view of time came through the Bible by way of Christianity. His books on this topic have not been reprinted, and used copies sell for hundreds of dollars on Amazon.

A small number of Christians should become amateur historiographers. They should write book reviews and post them on their blogs. They should teach Sunday school courses on aspects of Christian history. They should write short articles about historical matters of interest to them. They should publish these articles on their blogs. In other words, they must share what they have learned.

A tiny number of Christians should become full-time historians. Maybe they should teach high school. Maybe they can teach in a Christian college. They have an obligation to write books that revise the prevailing humanist accounts of the past. They may have to self-publish these books, but they must publish them. They must rethink and re-examine the narratives that they had been presented in the public school systems, from the early grades through graduate school.

We have seen this kind of revisionism since 1960 in the field of six-day creationism. Christians have begun to re-think a century of compromise (1860–1960) with the timeline of evolutionism. This has been vital work. But it is not sufficient to begin to rethink the principles of historical geology and evolutionary biology in terms of the Bible's revelation concerning creation. That task is necessary, but it is not sufficient. The reconstruction must be applied to every academic discipline. This includes the study of history.

I made this case in my 1988 book, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview*. I challenged believers in the six-day creation to begin to extend their work beyond historical geology and biology. There



was virtual silence in response to that book. So, I am now calling on Christians once again to rethink the basics of academic disciplines in terms of the concept of creation and providence. It took me six decades to produce a Christian reconstruction of economic theory. It can be done in other academic disciplines. It must be done.

This reconstruction begins with you. You must be aware of the conflict between humanists and Christians with respect to the structure of history and the discipline of writing history. You must recognize that there is a war going on. You must understand the nature of this war. You must understand the rival views of God, man, law, sanctions, and time. You must understand the rival views of sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and the future. Then, as you read history, and as you teach history to your children or in Sunday schools, you must discipline yourself to present a biblical view rather than a humanist view. Baptized humanism will no longer be trusted to lead Christians out of the wilderness and into the promised land. We need a new generation of the conquest.