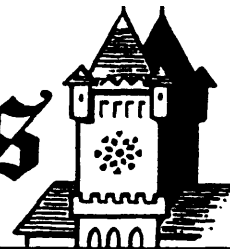


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STUDIES IN BAPTISM

by Ray R. Sutton

No. 13: Baptism as a Boundary

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea... (1 Cor. 10:1-2). For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

Throughout Scripture water is a boundary. At the beginning of the Bible we read, *Then God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse... And God called the expanse heaven (Gen. 1:6-8).* Notice that man lives in the realm between the waters. There is the water above, and the water below, but man lives in neither realm. Thus, the waters represent the edge of the place where man is to live, which explains why waters are often associated with hell and judgment (Ps. 74:12-17).

Between the waters is not the same thing as in the waters. Only those who are judged unto death are actually placed in the water. Two obvious cases in point are the Flood and the Red Sea. Each time, the people of God were kept between the waters on an island of land—in Noah's case the boat represented God's land of salvation—and passed through judgment unto life. But the point we are taking note of is that water in each of these references became a boundary. In the water represented judgment, and between it was the realm of salvation.

These two events in history are called baptisms (1 Pet. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 10:1-2). In each situation, water was a dividing line between God's kingdom and the land of darkness. Moreover, baptism kept them (the people of God) from judgment. At the Red Sea, Paul says their baptism unto Moses brought them through the waters of judgment (1 Cor. 10:2). Thus, water is a boundary, and baptism, specifically, is God's separation of His people from the world of the sea.

Further reading of Scripture reveals that numerous examples of these points exist. In the Tabernacle, the laver of water stood close to the door. One needed God's purification water before he could enter. Without it, man was separated from God. Second, the Jordan river was a dividing boundary. Water surrounded the land as it did the garden. To get to it, one had to pass through the water. Later John

the Baptist baptized in the Jordan. This must be understood as a re-constituting of the land. The people were returning to the original boundary, and being re-purified through baptismal waters. Third, in the Book of Revelation, a sea of glass is before the throne of God (4:6). The saints have been delivered through this sea of tribulation into the presence of God (Rev. 15:2; cf. 1 Ki. 7:23ff). We could list other examples, but we now come to the most important of all baptisms.

Jesus' death, as has been previously stated, is a baptism. It is one that divides in that it separates the Old Covenant from the New (Heb. 8), and the old man from the new (2 Cor. 5:17); it tears the veil in the temple (Mt. 27:51); and it comes between members of our families (Mt. 10:34). Thus, Jesus' baptism separates us from the waters of judgment in every sense. And for this reason, in much of church history, the baptismal font has been placed near the door of the building. To them, baptism unto Jesus was a boundary that separated a person from the world. Two concluding applications are in order.

First, as a boundary, baptism unto Christ separates man from man. Romans 1:18ff. describes the descent of man. In this process, we see man begin to worship the created instead of the Creator. The result is that man worships man, and homosexuality (Rom. 1:26-27) is the ultimate of perverted love which is the product of this false worship. Looking at it another way, in our previous studies on nakedness and God's clothing, we observed that unbelieving man becomes obsessed with his own nakedness. He rejects God's clothing and exchanges it for man-made coverings. To be more precise, and in line with the devolution of man in Romans 1, man begins to wear his fellow man for clothing.

Tom Wolfe, a pop journalist and sociologist, speaks of a telling interview with Marshall McLuhan in a topless bar. McLuhan has been one of the leading spokesmen on communication in recent decades. And he has become a guru on marketing principles for some higher echelon executives. In this encounter with McLuhan, Wolfe speaks in his lucid way of how everyone in his luncheon party was stunned by the atmosphere, everyone that is, except McLuhan.

After describing the dimly lit room Wolfe records McLuhan's analysis of the situation. "When you dim the visual sense . . . you step up the sense of taste. That's why these so-called 'dim-lit restaurants' work. That's why they are literally 'intimate.' You are brought together sensually and sensorially, forced out of isolation of visual man."

Then, after one of the members of the dinner party referred to a waitress as "good-looking," McLuhan added this comment. "Do you know what you said?" said McLuhan.

"Good-looking. That's a visual orientation. You're separating yourself from the girls. You are sitting back and *looking*. Actually, the light is dim in here. This is meant as a *tactile* experience, but visual man doesn't react that way." Finally, McLuhan's summary of the entire place was, "they're (referring to the topless waitresses) wearing us" (*The Pump House Gang*, p. 132).

Because McLuhan is self-conscious about his paganism, he has made an accurate assessment of the scene. Men love darkness because light sets up barriers. It separates, visually or not, man from man. And man wants to embrace his fellowman in a perverted narcissistic worship. The tactile experience of McLuhan is a complete sensory relationship that removes the clothing which is necessary to keep man from sin. He is not interested in keeping men separated by morality because he wants men to be one in nakedness. Christ is our clothing, on the other hand, and His boundary is one which severs man from the worship of himself.

Second, as a boundary, baptism is a marker which reminds God's people that they have entered into His kingdom. Too often, Christians are reluctant to base their assurance on the fact that they have been claimed by God in baptism. But what are the signs and seals of the covenant of God? Are they not the sacraments of baptism and communion? True, baptism is not the only sign, but it is one which God has given. Therefore, lest we think we can go beyond God and create better signs, such as conversion experiences, visions, etc., there is nothing wrong with basing the assurance of our salvation, in part, on the sign which is the doorway into the covenant. In the Older Covenant, the nation of Israel built pillars out of stones when they crossed the Jordan river into the Promised land. Every time they looked at this boundary of water they saw a marker. This reminded them that they had crossed God's boundary, and assured them they had truly entered into the promises. Baptism is a boundary which marks no less, and the Church should not think less of the definitive marker God has provided.

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

by Gary North

No. 14: Law Natural vs. Creational

Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth (Prov. 8:14-16).

God speaks in this chapter anthropomorphically as wisdom, a female source of power and blessings "She crieth at the gates" (v. 3). Wisdom contrasts her ethics with Satan's, also female (Prov. 7:10-23). (This feminine identification is peculiar to Proverbs.) The conclusion: all those who hate me, says wisdom, love death (Prov. 8:36b).

The link between *understanding* and *strength* is made explicit (v. 14). Wisdom is a principle of dominion. By following the counsel of wisdom, men attain power over external events. It is in terms of wisdom that kings reign, judges rule, and the nobility retains power. All the judges of the earth hold office by means of wisdom.

By identifying wisdom and God, the Bible proclaims the cosmic personalism of existence. God is sovereign over all kings and rulers. He does not appear visibly behind the thrones of men. Instead, he grants power to those who conform their rulership to the principles of biblical judgment.

Does this mean that all powerful rulers are God-fearing, or at least biblical-law-abiding? No; Canaanite kings were reprobate and had to be destroyed. Does it mean that kings consciously understand that God is sovereign over them? Again, no; only after seven years of madness did Nebuchadnezzar acknowledge his dependence on God (Dan. 4), and Pharaoh never did. Does it mean that there are universally understood principles of natural law to which all rational men have access through human reason? If it does not mean this, it is difficult to understand what it does mean.

The Bible teaches a creational version of natural law theory. It stands in contrast to humanism's natural law theories. Humanistic natural law theory asserts that there are universally valid governing principles in the world that can be discovered through the use of reason, meaning a neutral reasoning process unaided by revelation. Sometimes this reasoning capacity is called "right reason" — wrong reason being the process by which other natural law advocates reach conclusions that the defender of "right reason" disagrees with. The natural man studies logic and facts, and if he reasons correctly, the natural law theorist believes, this natural man can come to understand the governing principles of the universe. This process is inductive: a gathering of facts, coupled with a study of logic, can result in the attainment of wisdom.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that *all creation is revelational*, but that ethically rebellious men hold down (or hold back) the truth in their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-22). Because all creation reveals God, it testifies to the existence of governing principles. Men choose to worship other gods and other principles. What is creational, and therefore revelational, has been twisted by the natural man, who refuses to receive the things of the spirit (1 Cor. 2:14). What is creational is regarded by the natural man as unnatural — unnatural to his ethics and goals.

But all kings and judges rule by means of biblical wisdom. This is what God testifies about Himself. There can be no rule by the authorities apart from wisdom. What can this mean? Clearly, rulers do evil things, and evil rulers do evil things continually. How can they be said to rule in terms of wisdom?

It means that insofar as rulers wish to maintain their power, they must honor certain fundamental aspects of the creation. Satan does this. When he sought to curse Job, he came before God for permission and power (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). He possesses no power apart from his understanding of God. When he tempted Eve, he cited God's instructions to Adam (Gen. 3:1). When he tempted Christ, he cited God's words in the law (Luke 4:3-12). Christ, unlike Eve, cited the applicable passages of the law to answer Satan and then abided by them in order to overcome him. Eve cited the relevant law to Satan (Gen. 3:3), but then failed to act in terms of its requirements. The law offered her guidance to overcome Satan, just as it offered to Christ, but she spurned the law and its guidance, and went into

bondage to her adversary.

Power therefore is a product of ethical actions that are in conformity to the law. Weakness therefore is the product of ethical action not in conformity to the law. As men seek power, they discover regularities: by following the terms of the law, they increase their power. Biblical law is a tool of dominion. Inductively, power-seeking men learn to honor those regularities of creation that bring them power.

The revelation of God's law in the Bible speeds up the process of discovery. Without biblical revelation and special grace, men eventually refuse to follow the logic of creational law. Because men are perverse, and because God's mercy restrains His immediate wrath, rulers fail to discern the comprehensive law-order which undergirds human power. They abandon the law. They are not immediately destroyed. They teach themselves a false lesson, namely, that ethical rebellion pays high dividends. They misinterpret the creational law-order.

The "trial and error" method of discovery leads men to an understanding of some of the principles of power, and so they rule in terms of them. But men's willful rebellion, coupled with God's temporal mercy, eventually brings weakness and external defeat, as in the case of Egypt in Moses' day. Without the restraint of special grace — regeneration and revelation of God's law — rulers cannot perpetually maintain their control over external reality. Wisdom is ultimately presuppositional: men are to begin with wisdom; they cannot come to understand all of its rules and then conform themselves to these rules by means of inductive, trial-and-error reasoning. Therefore, natural law theory leads to natural weakness and defeat. It elevates the powers of unaided human reason, which is at war with wisdom's understanding.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALENDAR

by James B. Jordan

No. 19: Three Types of Religious Calendars

This essay is an expansion of my remarks in the previous essay (No. 18: Repetition, Variation, and Development). I should like to discuss briefly three types of religious calendars: the purely pagan, what I shall call the "mixed" type, and the Biblical type.

In a recent essay in *The Intercollegiate Review* (17:2, Spring/Summer 1982), Thomas Molnar has cited a description from D. H. Lawrence of the purely pagan worldview: "[Whether in the deer dance, the snake dance, the corn dance, or other ceremonies] with the Indians there is not god. The Indian does not consider himself as created, and therefore external to God, or the creature of God. To the Indian there is no conception of a defined God. Creation is a great flood, forever flowing, in lovely and terrible waves. In everything, the shimmer of creation, and never the finality of the created. Never the distinction between God and God's creation, or between spirit and matter. [Parenthetically, let me (Jordan) remark that the first distinction is Biblical, the second "mixed."] Everything is the wonderful shimmer of creation, it may be a deadly shimmer like lightning or the anger in the little eyes of a bear. . . . Creation contains the unspeakably terrifying enemy, the unspeakably lovely friend. . . . Everything is very soft, subtle, delicate. [In the dances] there is none of the hardness of

representation. [The dancers] are not representing something, or even playing. It is a soft, subtle *being* something.. ." (*Mornings in Mexico and Etruscan Places*, Penguin Books, 1975, pp.61 f.)

Lawrence uses the term 'creation: but it would be better to use 'being,' for the pagan conceives himself as dancing in time with *being*, and *being* is all that is. The term 'creation' implies a Creator. Molnar comments significantly, "The intriguing thing here is that the human actors, both the magicians and the other tribesmen, do not perform before a divine witness, they behave like integrated parts of an undifferentiated cosmos of which all other parts are of equal rank and value [This type of] civilization does not issue in a *language*, because the communicators and those to whom the communication is addressed are indistinguishable." This is the type of culture termed "archaic" by Mircea Eliade in his innumerable writings, because Eliade thinks such cultures are older on the evolutionary scale than our own. As Christians we should say that such cultures represent paganism in its most fully developed form, when there are no longer any holdovers of primordial revelation.

In such pagan cultures, liturgy is not a dance performed before God's throne, nor does the liturgy communicate truth to men. For them, liturgy is participation in *being*. The variation in the seasons shows the pagan which kinds of *being* are foremost at the time, and so he dances a corn dance, or a bear dance, according to the season when such manifestations of *being* are most prominent. He has a "year of the pig," or a "year of the dog," according to what the seasons and stars tell him. This is the pure pagan form: all *being* is the same, and the purpose of the calendar and its liturgy is to enable men to participate in *being* most appropriately in order to find some type of fulfillment.

Where primordial revelation still held sway to some extent, as in ancient Greece or in the ancient Near East, *being* is divided into higher and lower categories; that is, there is a *scale of being* running from fullness of *being* to pure *non-being*. The "better" things are fuller in *being*, such as nobility, truth, and beauty (spirit); while "mud, hair, and manure" (matter) are close to *non-being*. The goal in such "mixed" cultures is to acquire more and more *being*, and to lose *non-being*. The purpose of liturgy and of the calendar is to help men pull *being* down into themselves, and to pull themselves up the *scale of being*. In liturgy, directed by the calendar, men can work up the scale to become gods. I discussed this more fully in the previous essay.

The heathen cultures, both pure and mixed, do not distinguish between ontological realities and ethical relationships in the way Biblical religion does. For the Bible, God created the world, and there is no variation in *being* in it. *Being* is not the issue, for there is no such thing as *being*, there are only beings. But for the pagan, the maintenance of the world in proper ethical balance depends on getting it in proper ontological (*being*) balance. The events in the pagan calendar are designed therefore to prevent the cosmos from sliding down the *scale of being* into chaos (in the mixed type), or to prevent man from getting out of whack with the rhythm of *being* (for the pure type). By maintaining the world in the fullest possible ontological status, order and morality can also be maintained.

Not so for Biblical religion. Because of the doctrine of creation, the notion of the world's sliding down toward *non-being* is a meaningless notion. Moreover, such chaos and disorder ~~as exist~~ in the world have an ethical root in the rebellion of man. Thus, the reestablishment of proper ethical relationships between God and man is foundational to the maintenance of social order. The *festivals of Israel* were *symbolic* reminders of *ethical relationships* and *ethical history*, not ritualistic reenactments of *ontological relationships* and *cosmic rhythms*.

The continued existence of Israel was, indeed, contingent upon the proper and continual observation of the *feasts*, not because these feasts mechanically kept Israel from sliding into chaos, but because they were sacramental and pedagogical concentration points of the ethical relationship of the people with God. The sabbaths and feasts of Israel were sacramental in that only at these times was heaven opened, and only at these times could the priests enter God's holy places and worship Him (Heb. 9:8). In the New Covenant, as we have argued throughout these essays, heaven is always open, and so the special sacramental significance of sabbaths and feasts no longer applies. The pedagogical value, however, remains, and this will be the subject of future essays.

In the history of the Christian church, the influence of

paganism can be seen quite powerfully. In this area Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism maintain the "mixed" view of the calendar, despite Christian influences. They confuse ethics and *being*, which was what Luther's distinction between faith and works was designed to counter. This confusion is the heart of Thomism, old and new. Since the Roman (and Eastern) systems are infected with the notion of a *hierarchy of being*, the observance of festivals for them is not merely pedagogical or even sacramental, but is tied to a scheme of salvation in which men are saved by getting *being* into themselves (the infusion of "grace") and becoming in some sense or other "divinized."

The fact that paganism perverts God's calendar, or that pagan ideas have crept into some quarters of the church, is no reason to reject the use of a calendar, however. Merely reacting against Rome has infected some parts of Protestantism with a false hermeneutic, until it becomes more important to be unlike Rome than to be true to the Bible. We have to say, however, that the rhythms in creation are designed as general *revelation*, and that to take notice of these rhythms is not to fall into paganism, but to listen to the general word of God. As we have seen, and shall see, the Bible keys significant redemptive events to the rhythms of the seasons, and this is for pedagogical purposes. We only slight ourselves if we ignore this.

February, 1983

. SPECIAL NEWS BULLETIN !!! . . . FLASH . . . ATTENTION !

Due to the rising cost of printing and mailing, Geneva Divinity School announced that it must put its mailing list on a weight loss program. Operation "Trim-the-Fat" is due to begin March, 1983. According to a reliable source, here are the ground-rules:

- 1) It costs \$20.00 per year per person to mail the newsletters.
- 2) Each person that receives *Calvin Speaks*, *The Geneva Papers*, *The Phineas Report*, and *The Geneva Review* must donate at 1 east once during each calendar year.
- 3) Beginning in March, those who have not donated will be deleted from the list. The TANSTAAFL rule comes into play here ("TANSTAAFL" - There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch) .

A spokesman for Geneva Divinity School asked us to remind their readers of this important new development.

- Calvin Jean (Reformed Wire Services)

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