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NEUTRALITY, SURRENDER, and SIN

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A young lady came to my office the other day, a student in my course on the American Presidency. She was upset at the presence of theological and philosophical discussion of the implications of Christian versus Humanistic thought for epistemology, ethics, and politics in my course. She wanted to study, she said, "the facts" of the American presidency, not a lot of philosophy and theology. Besides, she had had all that stuff about religious presuppositions and the impossibility of autonomous man's acquiring any knowledge on the basis of his own presuppositions already, in the Religion/Philosophy "Key" course here at Grove City College (and really didn't like it then, either). Now she wanted just "the facts."

Her attitude was more succinctly stated by another student, who had walked out of my course on public opinion and pressure groups, after having become disgusted at my affirmation that the only possible foundation of knowledge for man must be the God of Scripture, that without knowledge there can be no knowledge of ethical principles, that without knowledge of ethical principles there can be no objective ground for preferring the free market economy to socialism or for choosing between the twin evils of anarchism and totalitarianism, that these truths had been proven again and again in humanistic thought and practice, and that the dominant influence of Christianity in Western and especially American history was the reason for our historic, but humanistically-eroding liberty, order and material well-being. Enunciating a sentiment that has since been repeated by many others, this student declared that "religion" (read: Christianity!) has no real place in a political science course.

Substitute for "political science" in that sentence "economics," "sociology," "biology," "physics," or almost any other subject, and you have the dominant attitude among not only pagans, but also many professing Christians today. And with it you have a chief cause of our current civilizational crisis.

The Myth of Neutrality

The guiding assumption of my dissident students and others of like mind is what Rushdoony has most precisely labelled the myth of neutrality. The myth of neutrality consists in the assumption that the mind of man can and does view the world and universe in which he lives from a neutral or objective standpoint. But consider what this entails!

First, the presupposition of neutrality entails an assumption that the mind of man is autonomous, self-sufficient, apart from God's creation and sustenance of the universe and man it is a denial of God's sovereignty.

Second, the presupposition of neutrality, in presupposing man's mind's autonomy, presupposes that man has not fallen, or at least

that the effect of the Fall was not to radically impair both the heart of man, so that his heart is naturally in rebellion against his Creator (Rom. 1), and the rest of the physical creation (Rom. 8:22). Thus, it presupposes that the mind of man is, or can be, normative, and that the mind of man can objectively investigate nature, the physical universe and world, in order to discover the normative teachings or laws of nature. Thus the presupposition of neutrality is basic to all varieties of "natural law" thought, and a denial of the teachings of Scripture.

Third, the notion that theology and philosophy should be omitted from the study of sociology, economics or politics contains a positivistic presupposition that we can have no objective knowledge of metaphysical or ethical matters. From this presupposition follows the assumption that the true guide to the study of, say politics is what men do, rather than what they ought to do. Thus, the focus of most texts and books in political science today is that of an immersion in the present, or, when history is studied, a preoccupation with the actions of men, rather than with, for example, the intentions of the Framers of the Constitution or the unchanging requirements of God's law (Mal. 3:6 Matt. 5:17-19). Either that or we have the substitution of falsifications of the intentions of the Framers and ratifiers of the Constitution, in the interest of pushing the radical reforms intended and anticipated by leftist theoreticians—not to mention falsifications of the word and law of God! It is not a question of the separation of the "is" from the "ought," but rather of the exclusion of the "ought" from the "is."

Fourth, the notion of neutrality presupposes the evolving universe of the Darwinian and Pragmatists, an irrationally changing universe in which God is not the Sustainer of all things and the Providential Author of history, who intervenes in space and time to judge men and nations according to their covenantal faithfulness or apostasy, as well as upholding every atom of the universe by His providential word's power (Heb. 1:3). If the fundamental principle of history is a meaningless flux of change, amidst which nothing endures, then we can, at the very best, merely record the changes and absorb ourselves in the present. Thus, our studies must immerse us in the present, for the past and its beliefs, institutions, customs, laws, etc. must have been outmoded by the change in men's beliefs, institutions, customs, laws, etc. wrought by the flux of history. Thus, to consider seriously the beliefs of the past, or of the Bible, would be to deny the very presupposition of evolution which supposedly allows man to view the changes wrought by autonomous history as an autonomous, neutral observer. To assume otherwise would be to assume, with God's revealed word in Ecclesiastes 1:9 that "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that

which shall be done and there is no new thing under the sun." To assume otherwise is to assume that the Lord changes not, and that not one jot or tittle of His law shall pass away, until heaven and earth pass, till all be fulfilled (Matt. 518).

Isn't it interesting, that the presuppositions at the root of the myth of neutrality are all precisely the presuppositions of Adam in Genesis 31-5? Adam presupposed that the serpent's word, not God's word, was true (vs. 1, 4); that circumstances had changed in such a way to overthrow the absolute authority of the Creator over the creature, or that the Creator had never had absolute authority over the creature; that God's ethical law-word was not authoritative; that the declared penalty for breaking God's covenantal law was invalid or unenforceable; that the creature, man, can know the objective reality of the creation apart from the word and presupposition of the Creator; and that man can live on the basis of the authority and power of man, the creature's, word, apart from the total law-word of his Creator.

The temptation to which Adam (and Eve) succumbed was essentially the very first temptation of the devil to Jesus (though it could be seen to embody our Saviour's other resisted temptations as well). Our Saviour and Lord did not make a neutral reply to the Tempter, nor did He ground His answer on the myth of neutrality. For He replied, most authoritatively, from God's law: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4, quoting Deut. 83).

The fact is, the myth of neutrality presupposes some highly **unneutral** things about God, man and the universe. The fact is, the myth of neutrality presupposes some mighty unscriptural things about God, man and the world. The fact is, the myth of neutrality assumes some powerfully **anti-scriptural** things about God, man and the world. The fact is, the myth of neutrality **is unneutral**.

The fact is, man cannot be neutral about God, the world, or himself.

"Just the Facts, Ma'am"

Consider the "natural" universe, the world around us. How can one be neutral toward "nature," in light of the overwhelming, awe-inspiring, beauty, grandeur and order of the "natural" formations we see—gigantic boulders, wooded hills, snow-capped mountains, vast deserts, powerful thunderstorms, rivers, falls, icebergs, mighty oceans? How can one be neutral toward the multicolored beauty of Fall and Spring, or even toward the chilling, numbing cold of winter, or the stifling, searing heat of Summer, or of the tropical jungle? What of the immense, incomprehensible distances of space and time? Of the immense, micro-distances of the world of the germ, the atom, and the subatomic particle? What of the force, fury, order and beauty of the animal world—and of man? What of the intricacy, complexity, order and harmony and awe-inspiring vastness and grandeur of the totality of the visible and invisible world and universe? It is impossible to be neutral in our estimation of these things. One may celebrate them, or fear them, or alternatively enjoy and shrink from them, but one cannot be neutral toward them.

Thinking about the world and universe we live in is impossible without confronting the religious questions of its, and our, origin, significance and destiny. And these are inescapably theological questions. The world, the universe, and its contents either point, theologically and philosophically, to the God of the Bible, or they point to a non-sovereign god, or gods, or to no gods. These are the only philosophical alternatives. The fact is that no one is or can be neutral as to these alternatives either he or she believes in the God of Scripture or he or she doesn't. This, from the biblical perspective, is the only **alternative**. Neutrality toward nature, and toward the Creator and Sustainer of nature is an existential impossibility.

This is especially the case because man, fallen or not, is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27), created with an innate knowledge of God (Rem. 1), and created to live in a world and meaningful

universe which declares every day the existence of God: "The Heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." (Ps. 191, 2)

Many students, professors and others want to study political science, economics, sociology, biology and other subjects from "neutral" perspective; but neutrality toward nature and the things we observe in nature is an impossibility. As we have tried to show in past issues of OCCUPY!, it is not only an existential impossibility but also an epistemological impossibility, since fallen, finite men in this fallen world necessarily and inescapably think in terms of religious presuppositions. Now, the claim to be able to study politics or economics or any other subject without studying what the Bible has to say about the various phenomena connected with these topics is the claim to be able to think without presuppositions, to think neutrally, to let the "facts" assemble themselves before one's "scientifically" observing mind. As Bahnsen has succinctly pointed out, however, Holy Scripture as well as philosophy clearly show that such presuppositionless thinking is an impossibility

... we know that presuppositionless impartiality and neutral reasoning are impossible and undesirable because God's word teaches that (1) all men know God, even if suppressing the truth (Rem. 1); (2) there are two basic philosophic and presuppositional outlooks—one after worldly tradition, the other after Christ (Col. 2); (3) thus there is a knowledge falsely so-called that errs according to the faith (i Tim. 6) and a genuine knowledge based on repentant faith (ii Tim. 2); consequently, (4) some men (unbelievers) are "enemies in their minds" (Rem. 8) while others (believers) are "renewed in knowledge" (Col. 3), and characteristic of these two mind-sets is the fact that the former cannot be subject to God's Word (Rem. 8) but sees it as utter foolishness (i Cor. 1), while the latter seeks to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (ii Cor. 10) in whom is found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2) because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1). ("Inductivism, Litterancy, and Presuppositionalism," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, Vol. 20, No. 4, Dec., 1977, pp. 300-301)

The Bible-believing Christian must affirm that Jesus is who He says He is, when He says "I and the Father are one" (John 1030). From this it follows that He is one with the Creator, that He was and is the Creator (John 1:1), and that He is also the Lord of heaven and earth, the giver of life, breath and all things to all, the Sustainer of the earth, in Whom we live and move and have our being, the determiner of the times of men and nations, who will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17). Since this is the case, it is not surprising that all power is given Him in heaven and earth (Matt. 2818), for He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3). From this it is easily seen that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 241). It follows, of course, that His word and law is authoritative over all areas of life, over both faith and practice, since it is His word that sustains all things, and that all of His inspired, enscriptured word is authoritative for instruction in righteous doctrine and practice (ii Tim. 316). The only acceptable and proper epistemological, moral and practical response of the Bible-believing Christian, then, is to "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." (Prov. 35).

In light of these considerations, it is obvious that neutrality is an ontological, theological, physical, historical, existential, epistemological, cultural, sociological, economic and political impossibility. Rather than attempting to adopt the mindset of the pretended "neutral" observer or student of all things, the Christian

must adopt the mindset of the biblical prescription

This mindset submits to Christ's word, just as the wise man builds his house upon a rock (Matt. 7); and it views the alleged foolishness of preaching as indeed the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1). Presuppositionless neutrality is both impossible (epistemologically) and disobedient (morally). Christ says that a man is either with him or against him (Matt. 12:30), for "no man can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). Our every thought (even apologetical reasoning about inerrancy) must be made captive to Christ's all-encompassing Lordship (11 Cor. 10:5; 1 Pet. 3:15; Matt. 22:37). (Bahnsen, p. 301)

The fact is that no one can view the world and life from a neutral perspective. That fact is that making every thought captive to Christ is the only philosophical, epistemological, intellectual, ethical and practical alternative open to the Christian.

Serving Two Masters?

Neutralism, the doctrine that men—and particularly Christians—must or should approach the study of economics, politics or any other subject with a "neutral" mind, should "let the facts" of that subject "speak for themselves," is at best an impossibility and an exercise in intellectual schizophrenia. It is impossible because the facts cannot speak for themselves in any other way than God's plan and providence decree, nor in any other way than God in His self-consistent word proclaims. It is impossible because it is impossible for finite, fallen man to perceive or know the world upon the basis of anything other than a priori (unproven) presuppositions—presupposed ideas about reality which are both unneutral and religious. Neutralism is intellectual schizophrenia because it commands man to do that which is contradictory as well as impossible to both assume that God exists (else, how could there possibly be order and rationality in the world?) and to deny that the true God, the Sovereign God of Scripture, whose word upholds all things, in whom all things consist, does not exist (else, how can man possibly presume to know politics, or anything else, apart from God's word?). Since God's word speaks to all things, as well as upholding all things, and since His command is that we are to make all our thoughts captive to Christ (11 Cor. 10), neutralism and its cousin to intellectual schizophrenia is a sin of omission.

But, more neutralism and its consequent intellectual and scholarly or theoretical schizophrenia is a serious sin of commission. For neutralism is nothing other than a sophisticated **excuse** for the pretended autonomy of man's thought. An excuse, moreover, which seeks to banish the Sovereign Lord of Scripture to a tiny, "religious" corner of His self-created, self-sustained universe, in order that 'would-be-autonomous' man, His creature, can strut the stage of thought and life alone, unrestrained by any authoritative word from his Creator. To banish God and His word and law from all areas of life and thought but the "religious" is to deny the plain teaching of the Scriptures, and to make "autonomous" man, in fact, the true measure of all things, rather than God. To restrict "rational"-Christianity to a mere corner of the **universe** and life is to deny the manifest **tenor** and content of **biblical** theology and teaching, and to deny the **lordship** of Christ.

Neutralism is in fact **practical** naturalism, in that it holds that the universe is in effect self-originating and self-sustaining, and that the universe and the non-"religious" actions of men can be understood apart from God and His word. At best, it substitutes, in effect, an "Unknown God" (Acts 17:23) and an autonomously-existing "natural law" for God's revealed law. But without the self-revealing God of Scripture, there can be no objective natural law, and hence no sure standard of action for men in ethics, economics, politics or any other sphere. Moreover, without introducing the self-revealing God of Scripture into the study of ethics, politics and other subjects the

mind of man is left free to "autonomously" reinterpret the nature of nature, so that the philosophical "slippery slope" which runs down into the abyss of moral formlessness and venerated evil is made the broad road which leads to the destruction of human thought and civilization and life. Many there be, 'in the history of man and especially in the modern era, who go in thereat. And by removing the great, impregnable Bulwark, the sovereignty of God and the authority of His law-word in all spheres of life, from athwart the broad roadway of the study of man and things, neutralism has but greased the highway down to the precipice.

Nor does neutralism restrict itself merely to "secular" matters. Neutralism is not neutral. It is a positive assertion and doctrine. It is a positive denial of the teachings of Scripture. Hence it is also a positive denial of the fullness of the biblical mandate for Christian thought and life. Consequently, it is also a positive denial of the truth and urgency of the biblical mandates for culture, education, economics, science and politics. It is nothing less than **practical deism**, agnosticism or **atheism**. By banning "theology" from all subjects but "religion" it exiles all that is higher, nobler, true, foundational, permanent, and good.

The destructiveness of neutralism is manifest in its application to education. Great men of God, such as R. L. Dabney, saw this long ago, in the post-"Civil" War statist takeover of "public" schools:

The Redeemer said, "He that is not with me is against me." There cannot be a moral neutrality. Man is born with an avowed and **ungodly tendency**. Hence a **non-religious** training must be an **anti-religious** training. The more of this, the **larger** the curse. But the American commonwealth has expressly pledged herself to a non-religious attitude. Hence, she cannot, by her State-action, endow or inculcate a particular religion. While the population of some states was homogeneous, this radical difficulty was not seriously felt: the people of a Protestant state, like Connecticut, could quietly overstep the true history of their own constitution, in favor of **Protestantism**; and there was nobody to protest. But now we have Papists, Unitarians, Chinese, Jews and Atheists by the myriads; and they will not acquiesce in the wielding of State-power, in which they have equal rights, for the partial advantage of a creed to which they are opposed. The result will be, that their protests will triumph, as they do now, in many States; and we shall have a **generation** of **practical** atheists reared "on State account" . . . ("Free Schools," in Dabney's *Discussions*; (Ross House Books, P. O. Box 67, Vallejo, CA 94591; p. 261; emphasis added.)

Where the doctrine of neutralism is applied to Christian schools, colleges and seminaries, we have nothing less than the same result. Where well-meaning Christians buy humanistic textbooks for their Christian schools, or order humanistic textbooks supplied by the state government for the education of their children, there is a tacit assumption of neutrality (assuming that there are alternative sources of texts). Where Christian teachers or professors exclude the teachings of Scripture from the study of their subjects, where they fail to attempt to systematically apply the teachings of Scripture not only to the subjects at which they are "specialists" but also to all subjects that they study, and to all the subtopics of their fields of expertise, there is an assumption of neutralism. The result is at least the tacit teaching to their students that God's word does not apply to these subjects, that we are not to make all thoughts captive to Christ, that Christ is not Lord, that God's authority and word is limited, and that man is autonomous. In other words, we have what Dabney most accurately termed **practical** atheism taught to covenant and other children in ostensibly Christian schools, colleges and seminaries. The only difference is that it is financed by Christian parents and contributors, and not via governmental theft, as in the state schools.

Christians are to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1). We are to be discerning, to understand the difference between good and bad (1 Ki. 39), to discern between perverse and godly things (Job 6:30). The means of our discernment are nothing else than the Holy Spirit and the word of God; because the word of God is sharper than a two edged sword, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). The way to truly "get to the heart of the matter" is to study the word of God, and to apply the word of God as the yardstick by which to evaluate the word of man: not the reverse. The natural man, the "neutral" man, cannot receive or know the things of the Spirit of God, for he cannot spiritually discern them (as can the Bible-studying Christian), and therefore considers God's word's truths to be foolishness (1 Cor. 2:15). To teach and practice neutralism is to deny all of these scriptural truths, and hence to remove the biblical armor of oneself and one's Christian students, expressed so pointedly in the admonition that Christian must "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8).

The counsel to adopt a "Christian" neutralism is a counsel to serve two masters, for neutrality presupposes that a man—even a Christian man!—can be neutral toward the Lord Jesus Christ's command to make all our thoughts captive to Him, to His obedience (II Cor. 10:5).

To obey the Lord's command (through the Apostle Paul) to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ is to recognize that we are in a **war**, to recognize that our weapons in this warfare are not carnal, but spiritual (vs. 3, 4); to recognize that our spiritual weapons must be every **word** that proceedeth from the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; II Tim. 3:16; Prov. 3:5; Rev. 1:16 Heb. 4:12); to recognize that our godly weapons are "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" and are the casting down of imaginations and destruction of would-be-autonomous arguments and every high thing or proud obstacle that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (II Cor. 10:4, 5); to recognize and obey the Lord's crestion ordinance and repeated command to have dominion over the earth, under His word and law, to occupy for Him, till He comes (Gen. 1:26-28; 9:1-17; Luke 19:13). To obey the Lord's command to bring every thought into captivity to Him is to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20), upon the precise recognition that all power in heaven and earth is indeed given to Christ (Matt. 28:18). It is also, in a fuller sense, to recognize that [just because God is sovereign over heaven and earth, and precisely because He has said "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18)] His Great Commission is also a divine guarantee. The godly use of the spiritual weapon of His word, as it wins both arguments and souls to the cause of Christ, and as its truths and laws are observed, acted upon, by the nations (Matt. 28:20), will produce victory for Christ's church over the foes of her Lord (1 Cor. 15:24, 25), as God

makes Christ's foes His footstool (Heb. 1:13; 10:13; Ps. 110:1; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:43; Acts 2:35).

To counsel an attempt to require a "Christian" neutralism is to deny all of these biblical truths and injunctions. It is at best to counsel man to sewe two masters. But to dare to counsel or require Christian men to be neutral toward all subjects but "religion" is to set oneself up as judge over the plain teaching of the word of Almighty God: it is to make ourselves the number, the measure it is to compare ourselves with ourselves, to measure ourselves by ourselves. But the Bible says that making ourselves, rather than God and His word, the standard is unwise (II Cor. 10:12, K. J. V.), without understanding (R. S. V.), foolish (N. E. B.). It is no wonder, then, that we have it on the highest possible Authority that

No man can sewe two masters for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot aewe God and mammon. (Matt. 6:24)

Mammon or God?

To counsel **Intellectual** neutrality is to counsel man to serve two masters. But to serve two **masters** is an impossibility. Thus, one must either serve the Lord, or serve **mammon**, the desires of the self. But to serve the self is to make **oneself** the **standard**, not God's word, and this is the essence of Satan's **temptation** of Adam and Christ. To make oneself the **standard** is, then, **nothing** fees than to surrender to the very essence of **sin**, the desire to be as God, determining good and evil, apart from God's word, in rebellious rejection of God's word and law, for **oneself** (Gen. 3:5).

Whether this is done for money (**remember**: the love of money is a root of all evil: I Tim. 6:10), or for any other reason, neutrality is the serving of the self and the practical exaltation of one's sinful impulses and vain imaginations over the authority of the word of God. No matter how subtle, it is the surrender of every precept of Scripture and of our Lord's Great Commission: How can one make all his—anyone else's—thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ by treating all subjects but "religion" as neutral ground? To surrender to the epistemology and methodology of neutrality, whether academically or practically, is nothing less than sin and the surrender of the word and kingdom of Christ to the kingdom of Satan. Or is some power, some master, other than either Satan or Christ the alternative master whom ungodly men sewe?

The Bible-believing, kingdom-sewing, covenant-keeping Christian has no other alternative than this Will he sewe mammon, or Christ?; Satan, or the Lord of Hosts? The only possible choice for the Christian is not neutrality, but that of Joshua "... choose ye this day whom ye will serve: whether the gods which your fathers sewed which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will sewe the Lord." (Josh. 24:15)

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