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BAPTIST REFORMATION REVIEW: What Next?

A review essay by James G. Jordan

Following in the footsteps of Roger Williams (so it seems), the erstwhile *Baptist Reformation Review* has renamed itself *Searching Together*. The Vol. 11, No. 4 issue of this magazine is devoted to "The Gospel and Politics." In the course of this issue Mr. Mark McCulley complains because I did not, in *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture*, deal with *Bap. Ref. Rev.*; rather, it seems I avoided it because its writings so powerfully critique Reformed Christian thought. Well, that's not really true, in that the arguments in *BRR/ST* are about the same as other Baptist and Anabaptist arguments, and these were rather fully dealt with in the book I edited. Also, our purpose in the book was to deal with larger patterns of American culture, not with small-circulation "fringe" theologies (admitting that we also are a small-circulation "fringe" outfit in the American scene as a whole).

Just so that Messrs. Zens and McCulley will not feel despised, let me take some space here in *The Geneva Review* to critique this recent issue of their magazine. First of all, Jon Zens's essay, which is a "Biblical-Historical Study" of how Christians should minister to a pagan culture. Right at the outset Mr. Zens makes the fundamental Thomistic mistake of saying that God deals with men as men, in creation, and then secondly deals with men as fallen or with men as redeemed, in redemption. He makes redemption a second story built on creation. This presuppositional flaw destroys his ability rightly to understand the Biblical evidence he surveys.

Thus, he holds that the Noahic covenant was a re-creation covenant made with all men (p. 3) and that "the foundation of our appeal, then, begins with people as people as they are related to the Adamic-Noahic framework" (p.13). In terms of this Thomistic dichotomy, the social order is common to all men and built on some type of (Klinean) "common grace" Noahic covenant, while the Church is a sub-group within this re-creation order. This is wholly wrong.

In fact, the Noahic covenant was made on the basis of the shed blood of Christ, in whole burnt sacrifice (Gen. 8:20-22). Thus, "common grace" is built on "special grace," not vice versa. What is called common grace is nothing but the crumbs which the dogs eat as they fall from the Lord's Table of special grace. From this we can see that the common social order of all men is based on the redemptive work of Christ and the implementation of that work in the Church, not vice versa. This is God's redeemed world, though there are dogs and slaves living in it as well as sons and daughters. The common social platform of God's house,

in which all five, is established through the implementation of Christ's particular redemptive work. In terms of this, no social order is neutral, and every social order is "sacralistic" (that is, committed to some religion or other). Now, we repeatedly showed in our book that the presuppositions of Baptist and Anabaptist thought are identical with that of Thomistic Roman Catholicism. Zens's essay is but one more case in point.

God does not deal with "men as men," but with men as sinners who have received some benefit from the sacrifice of Christ. Not all men receive the full saving effects of that sacrifice, but all get some crumbs. The crumbs are designed (covenantally) to lead men to desire the Bread of life, just as the Canaanite woman was led by crumbs to desire adoption as a daughter (Matt. 15:21-28). Moreover, the notion that one can even speak of "men as men" indicates the nominalistic belief that the covenant is something adventitiously added to a basic human nature, rather than part of the essence of that nature. On the contrary, we insist: There is no neutral human nature; men are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers. We do not deal with men on any other terms.

Zens makes some of the common mistakes, of course. He opposes eternal spiritual qualities to "temporal things," as if the Kingdom does not embrace both (p.5). He opposes servanthood and dominion, as if Moses were not after all the meekest of men (Num. 12:3) (p.5). He equates outward conformity to God's law with hypocrisy (p. 14), when in fact the Biblical hypocrite is someone whose transgressions of revealed law are obvious and notorious. (Read the descriptions of the hypocrites in the Gospels; their sins are outward and open, things like oppressing widows, heresy, robbing God, adultery, murder. There is nothing subtle about Biblical hypocrisy!) Zens says we must not manifest hatred toward our (and God's) enemies (p.15), which excludes all the imprecatory elements in God's Hymnal—the Psalter! But that is enough on Zens.

McCulley argues that Reconstructionists (us guys) are basically only interested in power. He says that his goal is "powerlessness" (p.30). I wish him well in his goal. At any rate, the fact that he interprets covenant-religion (orthodoxy) exclusively in power categories simply makes him at this point a gnostic, and I have dealt with Gnosticism at length in my essays in volumes 1 and 2 of *Christianity and Civilization*.

For McCulley, "All of Jordan's dogmas are calculated to cause one to seek the props of power!" (p.24); and "like the Marxists, the new puritans. . .are desperate for power" (p.24). Well, I believe McCulley perceives us this way because he interprets reality in terms of power-powerlessness categories (Gnosticism) rather than in faith-faithless/obedience-disobedience categories (Christianity). The Bible teaches us that if we are faithful to God and His Word (law), then dominion (power) will eventually be ours (along with suffering). The fact that McCulley could read so much Reconstructionist literature and still not realize that for us power and knowledge are both subservient to obedience, indicates that he reads with jaundiced eye.

His gnostic assumptions come out on p.21, "The Calvinist emphasis on grace is lost in the process. The assurance of salvation is replaced by a 'covenant theology' in which blessing is conditional." What McCulley believes is that because God saves by grace, man must be wholly passive; and because God is all-powerful, man must seek powerlessness; and because God is the Executor of wrath,

men must seek never to execute His wrath (p.28), even, suppose when He has commanded them to do so! McCulley has God and man on a continuum of being, so that when God does something, it means man cannot also do it. He does not understand Genesis 1:1. Calvinism teaches, on the contrary, that it is precisely because God saves by grace that men must labor to persevere; that it is just because God is omnipotent that His image is to exercise dominion under His law that it is just because He is the bringer of wrath that His image must, guided by His law, execute His judgments on the earth.

McCulley objects to "puritanism" because it is a public religion (p.27). As I wrote in *Christianity and Civilization* No. 1, however, (p.85): "All areas of life, says the orthodox, are claimed by Christ, and must answer to Him. There is a kind of Christianization appropriate to the state, and another kind appropriate to the individual. A Christian state is one which conforms to revealed Divine law. A Christian church is one which properly administers the preached Word and sacraments. A Christian person is one who is converted in his or her heart." McCulley does not seem to understand this.

Finally, spurious assumptions about the "new covenant" abound in the background of McCulley's essay. In fact, the New Covenant is the Old Covenant in Resurrection form. The Law was taken into Himself by Christ (Col.2: 14), died in Him, and was raised in Him. Obedience to God's Law has always been personal obedience to Christ (Ex. 23:20-22). If the resurrected Christ is wholly other than the Jesus who died, then the New Covenant is wholly other than the Old; but if He is the same Christ before and after His glory, then it is the same Law before and after. The differences in administration do not entail a difference in moral standards. (See my early essays on the Calendar in *The Geneva Papers* for more on this.)

We dealt with all of this in *Chr. & Civ.* No. 1, and are dealing with it more in No. 2. Zens and McCulley have nothing but the same old stale errors to offer us, and until they come up with something new, we shall continue to devote our attention elsewhere.

G. W. Ahlström, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine*. Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1982. Kivar. xiv+ 112 pages. Fully indexed. 40 Guilders (approx. \$15.00). Reviewed by James B. Jordan.

Ahlström's viewpoint is that of the superradical modern textual critic, not that of Christian faith. He assumes that the history of Israel as recorded in the Bible is fiction, and that polytheism was the true religion of Israel until at least after the Exile. He assumes that the religion of the Hebrews was essentially no different from that of the other Near Eastern peoples. As a result, the Christian reader must read with a very critical eye.

Possibly, of course, such a book as this will still be of help to the Christian scholar. Ahlström is concerned to show how the king, as the chief agent of the nation's god, engaged in building cities and temples as headquarters for administration and worship. He points out, for instance, that city architecture commonly included an acropolis or high place within the city's walls, as a separated center of the city. Within the acropolis were the palace and temple

complex. This architectural model was used by both pagan rulers and by Hebrew builders. Not only was Solomon's Jerusalem built according to this plan, but also the various places of worship which were used during the period between the Philistine capture of the Ark and the building of Solomon's Temple. Thus, the descriptions of Ramah and Gibeah in I Samuel 9 & 10 indicate a city with a separate acropolis inside, and a gate leading from the larger city into the high place of worship. This, of course, fits the pattern established in Genesis 2, with the Garden in the middle of the land of Eden.

Also, based on his basic paradigm, the author demonstrates the likelihood that Omri included an acropolis-sanctuary when he established Samaria as the capital of Northern Israel. All the same, because of his presuppositions Ahlström does not distinguish between on the one hand the statist, chain-of-being society of paganism and of Jeroboam's pseudo-Yahwism, which made the king God's automatic spokesman on earth; and on the other hand true Biblical religion, which made the king God's administrator only so long and insofar as he conformed to the ethical requirements God had given in the Torah. Thus, Ahlström spends most of his time arguing against the text of Scripture in the interest of proving his preconceived notion that Israel was no different from the other nations in this respect.

This book will be of interest only to Old Testament scholars and academicians. The most valuable Christian treatment of these matters remains E. C. Wines, *The Hebrew Republic*, available for \$8.00 from the American Presbyterian Press, Box 46, Uxbridge, MA 01569; a volume which I highly recommend to all pastors and Christian thinkers for serious study and reflection.

R. P. C. Hanson, *The Life and Writings of the Historical Saint Patrick*. New York: Seabury, 1983. Hardcover. 138 pages. Fully indexed. \$11.95. Reviewed by James B. Jordan.

Hanson argues from Patrick's *Concession* that he was not trained in the use of Latin, and that is why his two surviving works are in such poor Latin. Using this as his basic criterion, Hanson easily dismisses other works ascribed to Patrick. Careful analysis of these writings and cultural conditions enables Hanson to set Patrick's ministry from about 430 to 460. Hanson shows that the various legends surrounding Patrick's ministry all arise a couple of centuries later, and for political reasons, and thus cannot help us in learning about the man. Thus, we are left with what Patrick himself says in the *Concession* and in the *Letter to Excommunicating Coroticus*.

Hanson's introductions to Patrick, his life and times, character and labors, are scholarly yet eminently readable. His translations of the two works are clear and fresh, and his annotations are most helpful. Unquestionably this will be the standard work on Patrick for many years to come.

Patrick emerges as a strongly evangelical Christian, tied to his special task by special visions from God. His writings, while brief, have always been of inspiration to the Church. One hopes that this volume will be issued in paperback soon, to make it more readily available to students and laypersons.

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