

Genesis 1:26-28

COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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The Covenant and Ecclesiastical Worldviews

The classic image of polarity between east and west appeared in the popular movie,

Perhaps you remember. Jones pulls out his gun and shoots an Islamic warrior who expects to have a sword fight. The scene captured in a graphic sort of way the difference between the worldviews of east and west. The old, antiquated, bedouin, agrarian world of the muslim knight, and the modern, daring, bold technological world of western ingenuity. Somewhat reductionistic, I know. But not a bad snapshot of two contrasting worldviews. And, the differences are undeniable in spite of the naive global blindness of present day new world orders.

Ecclesiastical Worldviews

The Indy-meets-muslim is a metaphor of the contrast between secular worldviews. I want to take a slightly different approach to worldviews. Most studies analyze worldviews in terms of philosophy if they are secular, or theology if they are sacred. Both are joined together, however, by the assumption that ideas determine a person's worldview. There is really no difference. "A philosophy and a theology are ideological." This is gnostic, the belief that knowledge saves or is ultimately determinative. This is not the case because man is essentially religious and not rational. Ideas have their place, but they are not ultimate. God is, And since He is a person who personally created a person to live in union with and worship Him, man is essentially a religious creature whose worldview is primarily determined by what he worships. Homo sapiens is a doxological creature, He is designed to do obeisance. He cannot escape the urge to genuflect. What, how, when, where, and why man worships forms the real basis of his worldview.

To understand a civilization's cultus is to understand its culture. I could spend an entire lecture on this, and perhaps I should. Worldview is seldom if ever approached from the perspective of ecclesiology. The relationship is critical.

Ecclesiology determines worldview. Rather than critique every ecclesiology, however, I will only explore two ecclesiastical worldviews: the Eastern Orthodox Church (Autocephalus as well as Autonomous branches), and the Western Church in its Roman and Protestant expressions.

Some Clarification

A few clarifications are needed. Since I am only going to consider two basic ecclesiastical worldviews, I must explain why I am for the most part lumping together the Roman and Protestant Churches. The Russian Theologian, Alexis Khomiakov has described these churches as two sides of the same coin. [W.J. Birkbeck, *English* (London, 1895), p. 67. Also cited in Timothy Ware, *The* York: Penguin Books, [1963] 1983), pp. 9-10.] In one

definite sense he is right. The Roman and Protestant Churches can be considered in many respects as a unit. Much of the essential theology of Rome is the same as Protestantism, with a few exceptions. After all, the Reformers did claim to be reforming the Catholic Church back to its original intent. And, Rome and Protestantism have come to share many of the same problems because of their similarities.

For Khomiakov, the "Pope was the first Protestant," the "father of German rationalism." There is much truth to these statements. Bishop Kallistos Ware, an Orthodox scholar who teaches at Oxford, says, "Protestantism was hatched from the egg that Rome laid." [Ware, p. 10.] Khomiakov and Ware understand both churches as schismatic in nature, as well as structural and rationalistic in worldviews, which we will consider in a moment. Although I do not agree completely with Khomiakov's analysis of the Western Church, I think he has made some significant observations about the two. The oppressive consolidation of the Pope effectively elevated the individual, in this case over the Western Church, and eschewed the corporate expression of the Spirit. And, in the West the individual took precedence over the corporate, the same principle that produced German rationalism and the subjectivism of Kant.

On the other hand, a similar statement to Khomiakov's was made to me about the inherent continuity between Protestantism and Orthodoxy by an Oxford scholar, an Anglo-Catholic, who is not fond of either view. He spoke of the Reformers' love for the Eastern Fathers, especially Calvin. The Reformers did draw much of their theology of the Holy Spirit from the Eastern Church. They shared a more decentralized view of church as well, opposing the centrality of the Pope. These reformed and evangelical principles, according to my Oxford friend, open the door to Orthodoxy. So, the two sides of the same coin analogy could apply to Rome and Protestantism in one sense, but to Orthodoxy and evangelicalism in another sense. Nevertheless, I generally agree with Khomiakov's brilliant analysis. I will largely (although not exclusively) consider the Western Ecclesiological worldview as a single block of theology.

In general, Western and Eastern ecclesiastical worldviews can be described as forming around one of two paradigms, the verbal or juridical in the West and visible or global in the East. One is primarily Word oriented. The other is mainly visually focused. It is not that either one is without each aspect. The Eastern Church has a high view of Scripture and produced a corpus of theology and writings, particularly in Russian during the last century. And, the West has certainly emphasized the Sacraments, built large glorious cathedrals and advanced a type of globalism through its triumphalistic view of the church. Both churches, however, have taken on certain distinctive that fall into the general categories of verbal and visible.

The Verbal Worldview of the West

In the West, a juridical ethos appeared quite early. Some have suggested that this was the intervention of a Roman ethos [F. W. Dillistone, *and the Contemporary World* (London: Epworth Press, 1973), p. 30. Professor Dillistone was Canon Emeritus of Liverpool Cathedral and Fellow Emeritus of Oriel College, Oxford.] Perhaps this was nothing more than an extension of the Semitic beginnings of Christianity in Jerusalem. Whatever the source, it is certain that legal and verbal structures were self-consciously 'advanced by Tertullian in the second century. "In the late second century Tertullian became a major figure in the life of the Church and applied the language and methods of the skilled jurist to the formulation of Christian faith and practice. From now onwards legal maxims and principles would have a place in the development of Christianity and the influence of the Latin West would be increasingly felt" [Ibid., p. 30.]

The verbal and legal emphasis did not stop with Tertullian. "When, some two centuries after the time of Tertullian, Jerome performed the herculean task of translating the Hebrew and Greek Bible into Latin, he employed a host of terms and notions drawn from the sphere of legal practice. To a marked degree, the Bible came to be regarded, amongst peoples influenced by Rome and its language, as a supremely authoritative law-book, a revelation of the Divine will for the total organization of individual social life. And thereby the idea which had first gained prominence in ancient Rome, an idea which has been called one of the most ambitious in all human history, seemed possible of attainment within a Christian context" [Ibid., p. 30.]

And what was this ambitious idea? "This idea, in its pagan form, declared that the Pax Augusta had brought to fulfillment a process which had begun at the very dawn of human history. Now, it was affirmed, a stable and lasting civilization had been erected on the ruins of the discredited and outworn systems of the past. . . . A visible order was in process of construction over the whole of the inhabited world. For Christians to have entertained any such idea of their own destiny would, until the conversion of Constantine, have seemed sheer madness. But, with the empire unified under a Christian Emperor, with the growing power of the Bishop of Rome, with the Church beginning to possess impressive institutional forms of ministry, buildings and liturgies and above all a divinely authorized Law-book, the vision seemed not to be so fantastic after all. These developing institutions seemed to be symbols of God's Kingdom establishing itself amongst men, His eternal laws now revealed being openly expressed through the symbolic structures of the Christian Church" [Ibid., pp. 30-31.]

The verbal and legal emphases developed together. Both fed each other. If God used the Word to create, He used it to judge, hence, the juridical theme that has become so tied to the verbal. The legal terminology of Tertullian and Jerome paved the way for a judicial theology that ultimately brought about a revived interest in Scripture. Augustine's doctrines of depravity and predestination led to Anselm's penal substitutionary view of the atonement, and finally, the Reformational position on soteriology, a judicial kind of justification, a declared righteousness. But this judicial theology could only be true if God had definitively passed judgment in and by the Word of God. And so, the primacy of Scripture as the revealed Word of God has led the Western Church to a worldview of the verbal that has in turn brought about a legal structure. This cannot be fully appreciated until we have considered the profound emphasis on the verbal in the West. The extent and profundity of this verbal paradigm appears in the West's view of architecture, the episcopacy, Scripture, law and covenant. We shall look briefly at these.

Architecture

West? Victor Hugo wrote that in the Middle Ages men had no great thought that they did not write down in stone. Buildings, especially churches, became verbal expressions by means of the visual. Peter Gay in *The* said the following about Medieval churches, "Medieval churches have been called silent sermons and religious dramas in stone. The names are apt: the foundations of the church bore more than a load of masonry. They groaned under symbolic meanings" [Peter Gay,

York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966) p.

249.]

The writings of St. Augustine impacted the West's view of architecture. "His concern for order, proportion, shape and above all number, his writings on music and geometry and mathematics all influenced the medieval artist as he sought to express in visible concrete form the realities which transcended human experience. The square, the circle, the equilateral triangle: the numbers six and seven and twelve: ratios and conjunctions and harmonies – all these were of immense significance for they could lead the mind of man beyond the variegated world of appearances to the ultimate order" [Dillistone, *Symbols*, p. 45.]

The last statement summarizes Augustine well. For him, words and numbers expressed themselves in the visible for the purpose of taking man beyond the world of appearances. "There was a sacred language of art, so that every aspect of invisible reality – divinity, bliss, providence – together with every regularity of the natural order, had its appropriate symbolic expression. The orientation of the building, the manipulation of light, the grouping of figures all had their symbolic conventions. Above all the sign of the Cross made by the transept separating the choir from the nave, a sign which was also the pattern of man himself, stamped upon the spatial environment the mark of God's eternal sacrifice. In the house of God men gained a foretaste of heavenly splendor. Indeed it is recorded that when in 1130 the new choir of Canterbury Cathedral was dedicated, the ceremony seemed to contemporaries more splendid than any other of its kind since the dedication of the temple to Solomon, And as the assemble chanted 'Truly is the house of God and the gate of heaven,' King Henry swore with his royal oath, 'truly this sanctuary is awesome.'" [Ibid., p. 45.]

Thus, the buildings and churches of the West became clarifying structures. They spoke words. They communicated what was the common man could not read. He could read what was not written. He saw the cathedral as a visible structure of the verbal sentence. And so, the verbal paradigm produced structure.

The Episcopacy

The relationship between word and structure appears elsewhere. Just as the outward structure of architecture became an expression of word and law, so the hierarchy of the church represented the same. For many of us Protestants, this may be a difficult concept to understand. But if we think about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the rationale for hierarchy becomes apparent.

The Holy Trinity is Singular and plural. This translates into organizational principles of singularity and plurality. Just as God is One, there must be a visible leader. The person will represent the oneness of the organization. He will even embody all that the larger group is. This singularity is inescapable for there will always be a hierarchy, whether stated or unstated. On the other hand, just as God is Three Persons, so there must be plurality of government. The many must have expression and voice. in the Church this has come to be known as the priesthood of all believers, as manifested in representative lay leadership in the form of boards, sessions, consistories, vestries and so forth.

in the Western Church, this Trinitarian balance of hierarchy

aspects of singularity and plurality shaped the West at important moments. In particular, however, the paradigm of the Word resulted in hierarchy through the legal emphasis. In a legal structure, someone must be the judge. Someone must have the final decision, even with a jury. But juries did not develop until later in English history, which meant that there was an even greater accent on the role of the judge. In the Church, this became the bishop. He was the judge who spoke on behalf of God. When the Roman Empire crumbled, the Church was called upon to provide a replacement hierarchy. The bishop became the new judge of society. Through his new place in society, he influenced the entire culture,

Paul Johnson, the renowned historian and author of what has now become the legendary, has also written an excellent church history. In his insightful chapter, "Mitred Lords and Crowned Icons," he describes the situation in Rome around the time of "its demise. 'The West as a whole became an area of tribal settlement, in which semi-barbarous kingdoms existed behind fluctuating frontiers. In these circumstances, the western Church found itself the residual legatee of Roman culture and civilization, and the only channel by which it could be transmitted to the new societies and institutions of Europe. It thus faced a greater challenge and opportunity than at the time of Constantine's conversion. It had the chance to recreate the secular framework of society *ab initio*, and in its own Christian image. It was the only organized international body left with ideas, theories, a sophisticated hierarchy and advanced cultural technologies, in an empty world which possessed little but tribalism. Moreover, the Church, in the writings of St. Augustine, possessed an outline - albeit a pessimistic one - of how a Christianized, earthly society should work.'" [Paul Johnson, of York: Atheneum, 1977], p. 177.]

The episcopate played a major role in the new Christianized society. Johnson believes that, "The great merit of the Latin Church - the chief reason for its success - was that it was not anchored in any particular racial, geographical, social or political context" [Ibid., p. 177.] The legal, representative theology of Augustine was critical to the Church's ability to transcend cultures. But this theology needs a judge, a person who can also rise above ethnic distinctive. This individual was the bishop.

"By means of the episcopate, the Roman world projected into its barbarian successor elements of administrative continuity, and a rallying force which kept part of the city-civilization together. In some cases, the bishops organized 'civilized' resistance against invaders. Far more often, 'however, they negotiated with them; and in time came to act as their advisers. The Arians, at any rate among the Goths and Vandals, were never able to develop an episcopate of comparable prestige and resolution. This was one reason why orthodox Christianity in the West was eventually able to de-Arianize the tribes, a process which began in the fifth century and continued for the next two hundred years. Almost simultaneously, orthodox Christianity began to penetrate the wholly pagan tribes further north - the Franks in north France, the Burgundians in eastern France. The Christianization of the Franks dates from the opening decades of the sixth century, at a time when the Goths were still largely Arian. The monarchical bishop, loosely tied to an international system which gave authority, but able to act with decision and flexibility within the clearly defined area of his jurisdiction, an impressive, quasi-imperial official who conducted himself with much pomp and who spanned the spiritual and secular worlds, was the ideal institution for this transition of cultures and societies.

"Thus the Church saved the cities - or, rather, those which remained or became bishoprics. . . . Over a huge area of western Europe, the functioning of the episcopate ensured urban continuity. Often the change in the siting of the episco-

a town, or its decline or eclipse. . . . The bishop was the first and almost always the most influential, magistrate of the city" [Ibid., p. 129.]

No doubt, abuses emerged as the bishops were given more and more authority, Biblically speaking, too much authority. For this, there was a Protestant Reformation. But we should not overlook the fact that the essentially same verbal paradigm that produced the highly structured episcopacy also provoked evangelical reformation. Organization structure grew from the theology of Augustine, but so did other verbal emphases such as the Word and Law.

The Word and Law

"C.S. Lewis once characterized medieval culture as overwhelmingly bookish and clerly. Manuscripts were treasured, studied, illuminated, laboriously copied. They were accorded absolute authority and it was the task of scholars to enter into the mind of an author and to interpret his insights to their contemporary world" [Ibid., p. 50.] Even natural revelation was considered a book, one of two books, the other being Scripture itself. Yet, by the time of the Reformation, the great verbal theme of the West was developed by the lucid and brilliant John Calvin of Geneva.

"Calvin's greatest achievement, Principal TM. Lindsay once wrote, was 'to make the unseen government and authority of God to which all must bow, as visible to the intellectual eye as the mechanism of the medieval Church had been to the eye of sense.' The book which, since the invention of printing, could be seen and handled and read by all in their own tongue was itself the supreme symbol of the God Who speaks; its words were all sacred symbols waiting to be interpreted and applied to the ordering of every aspect of human life." [Ibid., p. 58.]

Calvin reversed the two books of the Middle ages, the book of nature and the book of Revelation. "Whereas, however, the first was open to all men's eyes, the second could only be read by a few: its substance could be transmitted to the many only through the aid of pictures, stories and dramatic actions. For Calvin the situation was entirely reversed. The Book of Nature, he believed, had been constantly misinterpreted and distorted and had ultimately been used as the excuse for unlimited falsehood and superstition. This being the case, man's situation is hopeless unless there be some better help to direct him aright, some light to illuminate his darkness. Indeed there is" [Ibid., p. 59.] Consider what Calvin says in his *Institutes*, "Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly." [John Calvin,

Calvin called for the application of the Word of God to all of life. He joined other reformers who "were seized with a compelling ambition and constraint it was to restore church and nation to the pattern once for all set forth in the Word of God. In this pattern certain leading symbolic forms were readily discernible. The king, the covenant, the law, the sabbath, the house of God, the sacred meal - these were not just minor elements in the Biblical record: they obviously played an essential part in the organization of common life" [Dillistone, p. 54.]

The Covenant

Perhaps in Scripture no concept more than the covenant played such a 'major role in shaping Western Civilization after the Reformation. "Once the book which bore witness to the nature of God's covenant with men had become available to all, an ordinary citizen could stand before rulers or kings with the assurance that he and they were equal within the terms of the divine economy and that no greater safeguard of liberty could be devised than a mutual bond expressed in words"

Western man, "that it can scarcely be over-emphasized. Here was a symbol, authorized by the history of God's people, which the Bible provided, assuring men that God was to be known not as some far-off divine autocrat but rather as one who bound Himself to men by covenants of command and promise and who thereby provided them with the foundation pattern of their own communal life" [Ibid., p. 78.] This concept of covenant was so extensively worked out, especially in this culture, that as late as 1965, in his presidential inaugural address Lyndon Johnson could speak of the "Founding Fathers having made a covenant with this land. Conceived in justice, written in liberty, bound in union, it was meant one day to inspire the hopes of all mankind." [Ibid., p. 79.]

And thus, words, the verbal, produced a post reformational world of trade, commerce, exchange, banking, within a context of civil law. "In this context bonds, securities, agreements, contracts, were of paramount importance. In general these were established by spoken or written words but periodically they would be confirmed by the solemnity of sealing or the exchange of documents. . . . Out of the Reformation have come confessions, constitutions, formulae of concord, books of common order, codes of ethics." [Ibid., p. 61.] Words, books, documents, in short, the verbal and legal became the structure of society. It started in the early church, moved through the Middle ages, and progressed out of the Reformation to give us the Western world.

Evaluation

Our post Christian world will continue to force Christians to understand their worldview. No longer can the Church afford to live off borrowed capital; there is not much left. No longer can the Church be naive about who it is or is supposed to be. The benefit of this ecclesiastical worldview study can be to help us become self conscious about what is good, and, what are weaknesses of the verbal paradigm.

The great strength of the verbal worldview has been the Word of God, all positive benefits aside. Scripture has provided the Church with a Word that transcends all other cultures. Any person can have access to the mysteries of God. This anti-elitism has made it possible for Christianity to touch all peoples at all times. At the same time, Scripture has provided the Church with a means to reason and to develop a sense of the unity of truth. Out of this has emerged the concept of the great university. This is indeed what has happened. The great univer-

sities of the world have proliferated the Western world and those places where its worldview has touched.

The great weakness of the verbal worldview has been its tendencies toward separation from the visual. The West has produced great cultures, but they have all essentially been secularized. Advocates would say that this has happened precisely because of the collapse of the verbal paradigm. In all objectivity, however, a couple of flaws should be considered.

The emphasis on the verbal has tended to elevate reason to the point of secularization. It has pushed in the direction of the Greek model, where reason becomes a vicious goddess. This has hurt the Church. In the Middle Ages, the university was separated from the Church, which created a safety zone for many good and bad things to happen. One of the positive results was the Reformation. Yet, in the post-reformation world the universities moved away from Scripture and have steadily become secularized. The danger and one of the weaknesses of the Reformation was that in some of the Protestant movements, Scripture was severed from the Church. This leads to a second criticism.

The verbal paradigm has often neglected the importance of the relationship between Scripture and the doctrine of the Church. Scripture has been so elevated that it becomes removed from and antagonistic to the Church. As my advisor at Oxford says, "It is central that Scripture can only be properly interpreted inside the living community. There has to be continuity – this long history of wrestling with the text, living with the text, venerating it. It means that the Church is like the living community which feeds on the Word of God and is nourished by it and interprets it in that setting. That's why I think it is improper for those outside the Christian faith to say, 'Well, this is what Scripture really means.' They don't have this organic connection with it" [Touchstone, Fall, 1992, Volume 5, Number 4, p. 32.] The Western emphasis on the verbal must be careful not to lose the vital connection between the Word and the community of the Word. When it does, the visibility of Christianity is lost.

The Eastern Church can be of great help at this point. It has been known for its visible paradigm. The community of the faithful has surrounded the Word and its interpretation. Scripture has been preserved from the higher critical sharks of western rationalism. And the Church has remained the community of the Living Word. It is to this model of ecclesiastical worldview that we will turn in our next study.



SINCE 1887

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April 10, 1993

Dear Friends at I. C. E.:

My responsibilities at Philadelphia Theological Seminary and my doctoral studies at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, bring me to the point where I simply cannot continue Covenant Renewal. As you may know, I became Dean and President of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Episcopal Church in fall of 1991. Shortly thereafter I began work toward a Ph.D. at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, in Theology, which actually took me to England for over two months.

At Philadelphia Theological Seminary, I am involved in relocating the campus to a suburban area in Philadelphia. On top of my other teaching and administrative responsibilities, I will be quite busy with the move. We hope to complete it some time in the middle of the summer. But like all moves, it will take us the following year to settle. After the move, however, I hope to begin a publication from the seminary where I will regularly publish articles.

Also, there are other developments that will take up much time over the next couple of years. I will probably be helping to establish seminaries for the Reformed Episcopal Church in Germany and in St. Petersburg, Russia. This will involve travel and some initial oversight.

I will continue, Lord willing, my dissertation at Oxford. I am writing on my first love, the sacraments. The rough draft of the dissertation is due in 1994, which means that I have much to do to meet the deadline. After I complete the Ph. D., I will continue writing on the covenant.

It is my hope that others will become interested in the study of God's covenant. My prayer is that in some way I have sparked additional interest in this important area. There are so many other covenantal subjects on which to write. Here are just a few areas:

The Covenant Structure of the Pauline Epistles: Very little has been done on the structure of the epistles. Meredith Kline has already made some interesting observations about traces of suzerainty treaties in the epistles.

The Covenant and Christian Counseling: A Christian counselor once wrote to me and explained that there are basically five approaches to counseling. Each one fits one of the aspects of the covenant.

The Covenant and the Arts: I believe that each point of the covenant provides a guide for art in general and Christian art in particular. This premise could be applied to each area of the arts, music, literature, drama and so forth.

The Covenant and Systematic Theology: Theology needs to be restructured according to the Biblical model and not the traditional six loci. I believe that the loci can be reorganized in terms of the elements of the covenant. And, each point of theology could be developed covenantally as well.

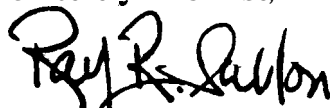
I wish to take this opportunity to thank Dr. North for all of his kind support and friendship. He has been a great source of encouragement to my work. Little did any of us know where that first manuscript on the covenant would lead, a Th.D., a position at a seminary and a second doctorate at Oxford. But I am glad we didn't know. These developments were truly of the Lord God.

I also thank all of the staff at I. C.E., especially Lynn and Barbara. They have had to work with all of those tedious details that make it possible to publish newsletters, like editing my silly mistakes every month. More than that, I thank them for their kind friendship and great patience.

Finally, I thank my readers who have read and been so encouraging over the years. It has been an honor and privilege to write on the Biblical covenant. For almost seven years I have written Covenant Renewal. This comes out to be over a thousand pages of manuscript, a lot of reading. I am humbled that people would take time to read something that I have written. Thank all of you at I.C.E.

If any of you are ever in the "Philly" area, come by the seminary and say hello. If you ever want to write or ask questions, I will do my best to respond. Until that time, may the peace of the Lord be with you always!

Sincerely in Christ,



Ray R. Sutton